Black Pioneers In Business

EDWARD C. BERRY

Born in Oberlin, Ohio in 1855. In 1878 he opened a restaurant in a small building where he later built his hotel. He was encouraged by the traveling men who patronized his restaurant to open a hotel.

In 1892 he purchased the adjoining building and erected a twenty-room hotel. In 1894 he added four more sleeping rooms.

Finally in 1889 he enlarged his hotel to forty rooms with a reading room, public bath rooms on each floor and several rooms with private bath. His hotel was valued at $60,000.00 and known as "Hotel Berry."

(Sketches by Bruce Cheeks)

STANSBURY BOYCE

In 1890 he owned and operated a department store in Jacksonville, Florida. The store was patterned after major department stores with a black salesgirl heading each department.

His millinery department attracted the most affluent white ladies in Jacksonville.

By Kenneth E. Spann

Contrary to general belief, the period before 1900 produced many black pioneers in business although history books record little about their early achievements.

The period before 1900 was an era in which little continuity has been historically constructed concerning black business. Much data is documented after 1900 concerning all people because of improved communications, systematic methods of reporting, and preservation of memorabilia.

There is the period before the Civil War where there were few, if any, records to be found by historians as to the businesses engaged in by blacks from 1619 to 1762.

Where it could be found, information of a general nature is given regarding the conditions prevailing at that time concerning the black business man.

An unpublished thesis by Tinsely Spraggins, Howard University, 1932, entitled: "Negro Business Before 1860" is about the most thorough work on this subject. In many cases Spraggins was actually able to interview some of the families of these early businessmen. With the advent of Black Studies there were many books published.

The period after the Civil War is better documented because of better means of communication and preservation of media. My idea has been to isolate as many individual entrepreneurs as possible, and give whatever information I could find such as address, starting capital, worth at a noted time, how he got into business, philosophy of business, and words of encouragement to others of his race.

In some cases I was able to find and reproduce a picture of the individual, with a short caption or biography.

I hope that in this way a black man or woman might recognize someone, or something about one of these black men who under untold hardship, segregation, lack of education, lack of capital, and dehumanizing conditions, succeeded or at least tried to succeed in business before 1900.

And, in this recognition would have a greater respect for blacks of yesteryear and encouragement to take an active part in black business as either a participant or a patron.

If you, as a black man, do not take one of these related positions you will be a "spectator at your own funeral." The prophets of doom were there then, just as they are 77 years later.

There is an appendix of black inventors before 1900, which is designed to show black creative ability, without monetary control, because less than ten per cent were able to exploit their own inventions.

This section is also designed to endear that appreciation and respect needed to eliminate racial self-hate based on a slave mentality that blacks were not capable in fields that required the use of brains.

Before the Civil War

The black men brought to America from Africa were not without many of the talents learned from the trading in the market place. Their hiatus in business involvement was created by their enslavement in America from 1619 to about the early 1760's.

The earliest record is that of Cyrus Bustil who retired from the Continental Army and opened a bakery at 54 Arch St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, retired from business in 1791 leaving his stock to the church.

A more renowned and established business was Fraunces' Tavern of New York City owned by Samuel Fraunces known as "Black Sam." He was born in the West Indies and later came to America as an innkeeper. On Jan. 15, 1762, he purchased the

(Continued on Page 8)

The Writer

KENNETH E. SPANN

Kenneth E. Spann is associate provost for academic administration at Federal City College in Washington which is being merged into the new University of the District of Columbia. He has been in this position since 1972.

After studying at Howard and American Universities, Dr. Spann received a master of arts degree from Federal City College and later studied at Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

He has served as research assistant, Federal National Mortage Association, manager of a major Washington furniture store and professor of business management at Washington Technical Institute, prior to assuming his present post at FCC.

He also has been consultant at numerous trade organizations and business development firms.

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