EARL G. GRAVES:
Superstar In The Business World

By Mary Richardson

Black Americans represent eleven per cent of the U.S. population. Their aggregate income has been estimated at more than seventy-seven billion dollars per year. And while black Americans as a group are major consumers of all types of products and services, they do not have the proportionate economic power that their buying power entitles them to.

The dynamic young man who has chronicled this paradox is the phenomenon of the publishing world: Earl G. Graves. As the founder and head of Black Enterprise Magazine, Graves has, in a short time, made his publication the number one source of information on black business development.

At age forty-two he has had several careers and now runs a multi-million dollar business as well as five other smaller corporations — all bearing his name.

Recently, DAWN Magazine decided to take a closer look at how Earl Graves and Black Enterprise got to where they are today.

The guard at the lobby of 295 Madison Ave. asked me to sign the building's register because it was after five p.m. He was not surprised that I was headed for Black Enterprise because he said working late for the staff was "routine."

The elevator opens to the entire floor which is occupied by Black Enterprise and other Graves companies. An attractive secretary led me through several rooms to an alcove outside the inner sanctum. I could hear the sound of a far-off typewriter and a ringing phone, but otherwise there was silence. I sank into one of a pair of masculine-looking suede covered chairs.

Filling almost all the wall space were dozens of plaques and awards to Earl Graves. Even the matchbooks on the table beside me bore the company symbol of the publisher's overlapping initials, E.G." I was beginning to feel slightly intimidated.

However, when Graves walked out of his office and graciously aplogized for keeping me waiting, my fears began to lessen. He ushered me into his immense, panneled office and I was offered a couch with a low table on which to put my papers and tape recorder.

Graves sat facing me in a large stuffed chair, clearly one he liked. Opposite me on the wall near the door was a row of tiny wall television monitors which constantly scanned the now empty offices of the Black Enterprise suite of rooms. Beside me the telephone lights blinked and were quietly answered by others outside. After some pleasant small talk, the businessman in Earl Graves took over. He said quietly, "let's get to your questions."

And despite a cold he had determined to get rid of, he answered our questions, quickly and briefly. Black Enterprise is clearly a subject he warms to. When we asked more personal questions, he seemed to hesitate, somewhat puzzled. "No one's ever asked that before," he said to one.

He separates his family from his work. Without my prompting, he smoothly returned to talk about business.

How did Black Enterprise begin? Graves replied that he researched the need for the publication, sought his target market and began the company. He readily admits that he had little prior publishing experience. He did have the gumption to go out and find some. When he needed business advice, he made his first contact by simply calling a top black businessman on the telephone.

It never occurred to him to make contact any other way. That call was to Henry G. Parks, head of Parks Sausage Company in Baltimore. And since there were relatively few visible black businessmen to call on, that phase of the magazine's start was brief. The lack of black businessmen to encourage young people is understandably one of the things that Graves is trying to change.

How did Earl Graves get started? He began his direct assault on the world from Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto. He always worked harder than most to succeed. He received a bachelor's degree in economics from Morgan State College in Baltimore and polished his leadership ability as a Green Beret in the Army where he rose to captain. Honorary doctorates have followed his career.

An early interest in politics led him to Senator Robert Kennedy's office in 1965. He served on the Kennedy staff in the New York office until Kennedy's assassination in 1968. Meanwhile, for two years he had run his own consulting firm on black business. And from this base, he launched Black Enterprise.

This base has been strengthened by his membership on such organizations as the board of the Liggett Group, the Magazine Publishers Association, the National Minority Purchasing Council, Inc., the board of trustees of Tuskegee Institute, the National Board and executive Committee of

Publisher encourages young people to get into business

the ICBO, Young President's Organization, the Economic Development Board of New York State, Commission of the Greater New York Council of Boys Scouts of America and others. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity named Graves its 1974 "Outstanding Citizen of The Year."

Asked what his goals were for starting Black Enterprise, Graves responded: 1) to survive, 2) to make money, 3) to better society, 4) never to be satisfied with achievements, and 5) to offer people a product they need.

A main ingredient in his success to date has been a result of getting financially in the black in the first year that Black Enterprise was published. "We only had to borrow money once and that loan was, by publishing standards, modest," Graves said. He was asked what alternative plan he had if the magazine had failed? "I never entertained the idea of failing," he said quietly.

Among those ideas he has entertained, are what young people should do to get ahead. "Get a good foundation in writing and be able to communicate; get a good background in math and science; and . . . if I had it to do over . . . I'd follow my business experience . . . with a law degree," Graves responded.

What makes Black Enterprise unique? In the first place, it has a carefully selected subscribers list of black professionals, black associations, small companies and major corporations he wants to reach. This is an elite list. Graves identified the majority of these readers as home owners, college graduates and most important, "the twenty per cent of America's blacks who spend nearly fifty per cent of black income."

This last item is the primary reason why corporations buy ads in Black Enterprise and why it is carried on major airlines. The total readership today is estimated at over one million. Moreover, Graves' formula handily sidesteps a major stumbling block for most black publications : street circulation and distribution. You cannot buy Black Enterprise on the newstands. Top officials and corporate executive get it free.

A further thrust of Black Enterprise success is that corporations pay for annual business seminars run by Graves. At these sessions, businessmen join to hear Graves put down misconceptions about black income and spending. He tells them how prolific black consumers have failed to unite and get the greatest return on their investment. They lack "clout" to demand better jobs and promotions for companies whose products black buy.

Black athletes were once singled out by Graves for making product endorsements without checking on how blacks were employed and promoted by sporting goods companies. "Clout" and how to get it filled the recent March Black Enterprise issue. He says they must use their "clout" to demand.

At the same time, Graves points out those major companies who do recognize their social obligations to blacks. He cites as progressive companies like Equitable Assurance Co. IBM and General Motors. It is no accident therefore that these companies have been reviewed by Black Enterprise. Major interviews have included talks with board chairmen such as Thomas A. Murphy of General Motors and Frank T. Cary of IBM.

And so it goes. His own determination and resourcefulness have made Earl Graves a successful businessman. His wife and three sons are supportive; Mrs. Graves works for Black Enterprise. The sons are Earl Jr., 15; John C., 14, and Michael A., 10.

What makes Earl Graves run? He says it is the daily challenge of something new and different he finds in business. He likes to run things. He has broad interests.

Some feel that with only fifty employees working in all six of his companies he could hire more. There are still others who feel Black Enterprise is a slick, well-marketed publication with little of substance in the middle.

But whether this criticism is valid or merely antagonism which visible superstars always attract, all those who know him feel he will grow to greater heights.

Earl Graves is a publishing phenomenon. Whether you like him or not, the key to the success of his empire is the man himself.

CHARLES (TARZAN) COOPER
In 1942 Washington Bruins uniform

'Tarzan' In Hall Of Fame

Basketball lovers all around the United States, especially those roundball followers of yesteryears of New York City and the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., are loud in praise for the 1977 Basketball Hall of Fame Selection Committee.

The committee selected among those inducted this year Robert L. (Bob) Douglass, famed owner of the New York "Rens" and his outstanding center-pivotman, Charles "Tarzan" Cooper.

"Bob" Douglass, through his uncanny foresight, put together the "Rens" when pro basketball, like all other top attractions, failed to present any all-black super attraction in competition for national recognition in league or tournament play.

"Tarzan" Cooper, the first big center to successfully "palm" the basketball for the great "give and go" offense, a "Rens" trademark, joined Bob Douglass' "Rens" during the 1927-27 sason. His massive frame and strength earned him the nickname "Tarzan," a title the big man resented at first.

In selecting "Tarzan" the Hall of Fame committee has at last answered the cry of many to see the first black player from the game's early days inducted for his individual basketball abilities. The only black individual having been inducted before Cooper and Douglass from the early day teams was Dr. Charles W. Turner, an outstanding trainer for the "Rens."

Dr. Turner was selected for his trainer skills.