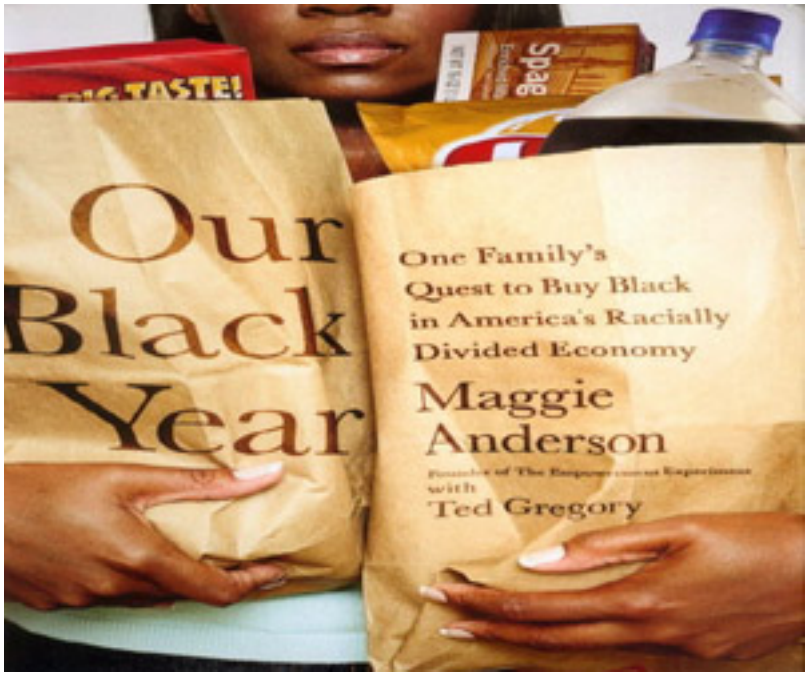

Anderson wonders why Blacks don’t support more Black businesses like ComPro tax.

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

In 2009, Maggie Anderson and her family pledged that they would patronize Black-owned companies whenever possible, so she scoured the Chicago area for Black-owned supermarkets, dry cleaners, gas stations, pharmacies, and clothing stores.

The idea for “Our Black Year” was dreamed up in a five-star Chicago restaurant as Maggie and John Anderson toasted their fifth anniversary.

“We had other conversations, but it seemed to return back to this problem,” she said.

“ *Our Black Year: One Family’s Quest to Buy Black in America’s Racially Divided Economy* ” is the story of their experiment in conscious consumerism.
Anderson
discovered that Black businesses lag behind businesses of all other racial and ethnic groups in every measure of success.

In the Asian community, a dollar circulates among local shop owners, banks, and business professionals for up to 28 days. In the Jewish community, a dollar circulates for 19 days. In the African-American community, a dollar is gone within six hours.

Maggie and John Anderson of Chicago vowed that for one year, they would try to patronize only Black-owned businesses . The “ Empowerment Experiment ” is the reason John had to suffer for hours with a stomach ache and Maggie no longer gets that brand-name lather when she washes her hair.

Anderson shared with the Call & Post her struggle with how we need more Black businesses. Her family experiment resulted in a national movement that inspired business owners, consumers, and academics, professional and activist organizations.

Only 5.1 percent of Blacks own their own businesses, half the rate of whites. Maggie places part of the blame on slavery’s legacy of generational poverty and a lack of access to bank loans. Fixing this gap could help fix the Black unemployment rate, she argued, because, after the government, Black businesses are by far the biggest employer of African-Americans.

“We kind of enjoy the sacrifice because we get to make the point... but I am going without stuff and I am frustrated on a daily basis,” Maggie Anderson said. “It’s like, my people have been here 400 years and we don’t even have a Walgreens to show for it.”

Since she started the Empowerment Experiment in 2009, she has become the leader of a self-help economics movement that supports quality Black businesses and urges consumers,

especially other middle and upper class African Americans, to support them. She has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, Fox News and CBS Morning News, among many other national television and radio shows.

Anderson drove 14 miles to buy groceries, which might seem curious given that she lives in bustling Oak Park, Ill. She and her husband, John, traveled 18 miles to a health food store in Chicago for vitamins, supplements and personal care products.

They also had to drive some distance for gasoline too.

During her 1832 speech in Boston’s Franklin Hall, Maria W. Miller Stewart said, “It is of no use for us to sit with our hands folded, hanging our heads. Let us make a mighty effort and arise and let us raise a fund ourselves. Do you ask, what can we do? Unite and build a store of your own. Fill one side with dry-goods and the other with groceries. Do you ask where is the money? We have spent more than enough for nonsense to do what building we should want.”

Today, Maggie Anderson, CEO of the Empowerment Experiment Foundation, uses the words of Stewart as a basis for her work.

Anderson said she was inspired by Stewart’s words as well as by her encouraging family. The daughter of Cuban immigrants, Anderson was born and raised in a drug and gang-infested Miami
neighborhood called
Liberty City
. Although her family wasn’t the wealthiest,
Anderson
said it was rich with love.

“My mother was strict, strong, but loving and fun at the same time,” Anderson said. “My dad spoiled me, adored, and coddled me.”

“The Empowerment Experiment proves a real-life example that strategically and proactively

supporting Black businesses enables increased entrepreneurship, improves the success of existing quality businesses, raises standards of ethics, quality and the overall delivery of goods and services by increasing consumer demand and thus industry-wide competition, infuses wealth into economically depressed areas, mitigates unemployment and leads to more role models for Black youth,” Anderson said. “Basically, instead of waiting on the government to do something, or for big business to feel sorry for us, I make sure I buy Black everyday to do my part in creating more jobs for the people who suffer disproportionately in these tough times.”

Anderson wonders why Blacks don’t support more Black businesses like ComPro tax.

“I just love the burning desire Garland Ferris has. I am glad to have people like Garland who has support my mission and Cleveland visit,” said Maggie.

The visit to Cleveland is to her promote her vision of supporting of Black business.

Despite everything that comes with buying Black, Anderson continues to promote this method. “I continue to support Black businesses, not 100 percent these days, we are at about 50 to 60 percent, but the hate-mail persists,”
Anderson
said. “EE is getting stronger and stronger.”