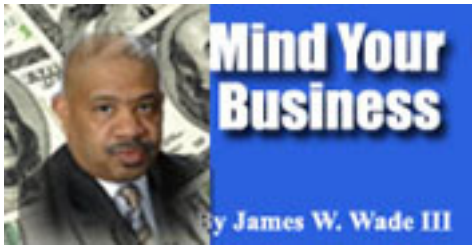

Despite the ugliness of segregation all around us, some people within the neighborhoods still worked cooperatively to ensure their own self-sufficiency. I clearly believe the entrepreneurial and cooperative spirit that is an integral part of the African American legacy.

Bring back Black businesses

Remember while growing up, you could get everything you needed in your neighborhood? The corner store and dry cleaners were Black owned and not one other ethnic proprietor was around.

I even grew up with one store owner named Ed, a person of the other color who stayed upstairs over the store he owned. He did not come in the area make the money and drive off to a rich suburb, living off our money.

Every area had a Mr. James who had a popular corner store or Woody's in the community. It was expected I think. We even had Lawson's where we went to get most of the deli items needed.

Lawson Milk Company had the very best orange juice jingle, showing two blurry eyed truck drivers fighting the rain and snow through the night to deliver their fresh squeezed orange juice to greater Cleveland for us to enjoy. Roll on Big O was the jingle.

As a young man, my mother would send me to Hank's, the neighborhood barber, who talked more trash then any barber I have ran across (excluding the barbers in Carl's on Lee Rd.).

Let's just take time to shout out some of those Black owners who made it possible for a community to thrive. Kings Mens, The Fly Shop, DK Marshalls, Boot n Shoe, Rhett's, Browns Tire Shop, and one of my favorite's West Fish Market in the Lee Harvard Plaza.

While JW Wills and E.F Boyd and Son's were two of the largest funeral homes, I found out Pernel Jones was down on Cedar taking care of people also.

Now, I am wondering what happen to all these business?

Was it we didn't support them? Did they close due to us spending our dollars in other ethnic neighborhoods? The problem is that, if we don't make a conscientious effort to support Black owned and independent businesses in our community, they are not going to make it and will most likely be replaced by a chain.

Now, if you don't have that problem and you spend all your dollars or most of your dollars with Black businesses, you are helping them keep the doors open. We as Blacks don't give each other the chance to succeed. Most believe we cannot deliver good customer service based on a bad experience with a Black business so some people immediately write them off.

It is safe to stick with the "tried and true" method by taking our service to Asians, Whites or Indians. What they don't realize is, if we own majority of these same businesses, our community will prosper and give children and adults the chance to see with their own two eyes that we can have our own too which in turn give Blacks the confidence to become more ambitious and determined to succeed in anything.

I understand there are a lot of successful Black businesses in Black communities but not in the majority. Other factors include lack of resources and planning. Persistence is a downfall too but the biggest issue is Black consumers subconsciously believe the business won't go far.

The times have changed and, with the violence in our neighborhoods, some Black owned corner stores have been targeted by crime from other Blacks. It's funny how I could see a Black owned store on one corner, an Asian store on the other, and the Blacks spray paint bad words and destroy the Black owned store and never touch the Asian one.

Every area had their own little Mecca… East 105th was known as The Gold Coast… more businesses were up and down this street as well as churches. Slowly over the years, they closed and disappeared from site.

Most of those businesses where great places for people to patronize at the time. Do you have any idea how many quarters you need to put in washing machines to make a profit? The price of liquor and cigarettes are based on high taxes.

I am old enough to remember pulling in a gas station and having an attendant check your oil, pump your gas, and clean your windshields. These position even created jobs for Blacks in the community.

We didn't have many options when I was growing up. You either bought from merchants in your neighborhood or you didn't get what you needed. I believe segregation hurt us because, in the 70's, we began moving out of all Black neighborhoods and into other ones for many reasons. Over the years, we have even stopped going to historically Black colleges and universities in mass, because we now could.

I do not fault parents for trying to send their children to a better school system but it hurt. Remember back in the day how pretty and nice East Cleveland used to be? Over the years, vacant houses and crime gave the area a bad name.

Despite the ugliness of segregation all around us, some people within the neighborhoods still worked cooperatively to ensure their own self-sufficiency. I clearly believe the entrepreneurial and cooperative spirit that is an integral part of the African American legacy.

Listening to Maggie Anderson who said, “This economic problem is something that should be of concern for all Americans, but the problem is our problem. And it happened, I daresay, mostly because we abandoned our businesses. But I think all Americans should feel ashamed to know that there used to be 6,400 Black-owned grocery stores, representing that melting pot or patchwork that is America, and now there are only three.”

Come on Black America we must do better!