

Oh, it seems like yesterday. I was ending my military duty (drafted #4) and returning back to corporate America. My employer, Procter & Gamble, kept its promise of accepting all military draftees back into its workforce. They assigned me to Detroit, MI as a sales representative in the Packaged Soap and Detergent Division (Tide, Ivory, Cheer, etc.). It was cool to go to Detroit as it was a big Black city with a strong Black mayor, the Honorable Coleman Young. Little did I know that Motown was about to go through a blistering “white flight” that would leave the remaining people in the middle of an economic collapse. It was 1974 and Black Power and the Sexual Revolution were about to crash head on into each other.

In my role, the grocery stores were the lifeblood of our growth and development. With the marketing support of the major grocery entities; couple that with TV and radio advertising plus couponing sales were bound to increase provided you managed shelf and display space within the grocery stores. Detroit was having a major ground level drug war which also encouraged much robbery of the grocery stores. Three of the four major chains announced that they had enough – Kroger, Great Scott and A&P announced they were leaving the inner city and they began their departure. Only Farmer Jack would stay. This brought major changes to the Detroit demographic and to my industry. All the Black church and social organizations extremely protested but what could they do? Here was Black Detroit without grocery stores and no Blacks were about to fill that void. There were only two Black owned grocery stores in the city and the future was bleak. The only option was to travel to the suburbs to do your grocery shopping. So everyone thought.

What makes a culture or people great are four main ingredients: 1. Faith – devout and strong faith. 2. Education. 3. Entrepreneurship and 4. Communication. The Black populace of Detroit did not have this at all. About the same time there was a big migration happening. Arabs from the Middle East were moving into the Detroit area like I-94 going west. One segment of this migration was the Chaldeans. Chaldeans are of Arab blood but are Christians as opposed to Muslim. In fact, the religion was started in 31 AD by Jesus Christ himself. Most of these new Chaldeans were from Iraq and Syria. All things related to their culture were based at the Chaldean Church. When they noticed that all of the major grocery stores pulled out of inner city Detroit and Blacks wouldn't do anything about it they exclaimed “Let's get into the grocery business; people will still have to eat!”. So it began. Empty grocery store buildings started becoming Chaldean grocery stores.

Unlike the white owners before them, the nuevo Chaldean owners dealt with any adversity head on. One of the main reasons the major chains left were robbery and the murdering of their managers. You went into a Chaldean store you would quickly notice that the managers and stock clerks were carrying pistols on their hips. What was even more startling was an erected

“crow’s nest” over the meat section or check outs. In the nest would be one individual and one clearly seen rifle (usually a 30 odd 6 deer rifle). You can come to rob but you will leave dead was the clear message.

Each store was a clan operation. The men were stock clerks, butchers and managers. The ladies were the cashiers. Any outside help would exclusively come from the neighboring Black community and that was a good thing. Before long they were formidable. I had to understand them for they were critical to my sales numbers. I inquired of some of the owners and they referred me to their church, The Chaldean Church of Michigan. The minister at the church referred me to their Business Director who published the Chaldean Business Directory. This was most fascinating. He annually printed the Chaldean Business Directory which listed every Chaldean owned business within the United States. The Chaldean members would religiously (not a pun) use this directory to do their daily business.

By this time I had left Procter & Gamble and started working, on a fast developmental track, with Johnson & Johnson Disposable Diapers Division. I bought a full page ad in the Chaldean Business Directory and our sales started to soar. Their store owners were so grateful that I had the vision and insight to befriend them. After all, they were providing a service to the Black community of Detroit which, for whatever reason, couldn’t do it for itself. Their promotion of my products soon got me a promotion and I was off to Chicago.

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