

Successful Black Entrepreneurs in Columbia, Missouri  
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ABSTRACT

The focus this research is on the aspects of success for African American entrepreneurs in Columbia, Missouri that could be emulated to grow more sustainable black businesses thereby increasing the economy of the community. This ethnography will explore central phenomena of the sociology of entrepreneurship and group characteristics that aid in the development of successful business activity. These aspects may include positive community networks, family support, work ethic, and risk-taking behaviors. The research includes an analysis of entrepreneurial success based on education and experience, work ethic and passion, to help identify trends. These trends could assist in the growth and sustainability of Black business, increased economic and political power, and a greater socio-economic status in the community at large. Understanding the trends will maximize the potential for increasing African American businesses resulting in greater self-sufficiency, economic stability, and strengthen the overall economy. The ultimate objective is to add to the limited body of science on successful African American entrepreneurship and to promote the social and behavioral sciences and ensure an environment where equal opportunity, equity, and diversity are a priority.

My research accepts the John Sibley Butler theory that states “this area of sociology differs from traditional race theory which espouses the necessity for separate Black economic development to sustain a successful business. Rather, Butler asserts that to the extent to which an ethnic group is assimilated into a society the higher the probability for economic success for that group. Instead, the sociology of entrepreneurship concentrates on the process by which groups develop, maintain, and expand business enterprises within the economic structure increase economic success,” (Butler, Page 1). Gone are the days of exclusive Black-on-Black trade—today’s African American entrepreneur must tap into mainstream or white markets to successfully compete.

The data in this study was collected through a sample of 24 Black business owners who have a physical location, and personal experience with business success in Columbia, Missouri. These respondents represent 20% of all Blacks doing business as individual proprietorships, partnerships, or any type of corporation in Columbia. These respondents were willing voluntary informants selected based on their knowledge and availability. Nearly 29% operated in the retail trade industry, 25% in the beauty industry, 46% professional services which includes legal services, health and fitness, education, social assistance, and other services, construction, and repair and maintenance.

This study of growing sustainable Black business in Columbia, Missouri is grounded in classical Race Theory as the conceptual basis with economic uplift as the framework. This study suggests that a separate Black economy is no longer a viable option. The important question to ask moving forward is: how does the majority population gain awareness, and then how do they move beyond the traditional consumer practices to a more consumer-cultural-consciousness approach? White consumers may have to become more proactive in much the same way as they have embraced environmentalism. Black business owners may have to assimilate more into the dominate group in order to maximize the probability of economic success.