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**We May Not Be Able to Stop Them From Moving In,
But Together We Can Stop Our Businesses From Moving Out
Unapologetically Young, Black and Female**

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Long before I saw her walking her dog that morning or the guy who was jogging, or that couple move in down the street, I concluded that one way or another, my neighborhood was going to change. I just wasn't expecting it so soon or for Black people to play such an active roll in it.

In the past month, "mom and pop" businesses in Los Angeles, in particular Black businesses, have been dropping faster than the Mayor's approval ratings - and that's fast. Restaurants, cleaners, specialty stores - you name it, they're all taking a beating from the economy and our continued belief that the grass is greener on the other side. You know that mentality that "theirs" is somehow better than ours. Yeah, I said it.

One of the reasons that I made West Adams and the Crenshaw District my home was because of the sense of community (minus the gang violence), I feel here. Everywhere I go, I see someone I know. I frequent certain business regularly in my neighborhood to the point where I know the owners by name. I love my hair salon on Pico and my nail salon in Baldwin Hills. I love the community of walkers and joggers at Rancho Cienega Park on Rodeo and of course my tennis playing brothers and sisters across the way. It's not unusual to find me at Earle's Grille, Sky's Tacos, or Lucy Florence Coffee House, and more recently Vegi-Soul on Jefferson. In fact, I make it a point to search out "mom and pop" business in my neighborhood that I can support these days. Why? Because I am trying to do my part to make sure that after the recession, they're still in business because they are an integral part of my sense of community.

Gentrification is happening daily in our neighborhoods as we are being priced out of the market in rent and mortgages. Those of us, like me, that are managing to hang in there are watching our neighborhoods transform before our very eyes. There's nothing we can do about that. It is what it is and the worse the recession gets, the 10-freeway divider doesn't look so bad after all to young, affluent, whites, who think living in historic Black neighborhoods is "cool" and shows how "diverse" they are.

But it isn't just the architecture of the homes or the color of the skin of the people who live in neighborhoods like mine that make them "historic." It's also the local businesses, many of which have been there for decades but are not weathering today's economic climate so well, due to a lack of participation in recycling Black dollars with "mom and pop" businesses.

Some years back, the community banded together to say no to changing the name of Crenshaw Blvd., which was named after developer George L. Crenshaw who built a series of upscale residential tracts in mid-city Los Angeles in the early 1900s. The only probably is, what many people didn't know was that this is also the same guy who didn't want "Negroes" and "Asians" on said property for more than 24 hours. But when there was a push to rename Crenshaw after L.A.'s first Black mayor Tom Bradley, the community said "hell to the no" because they loved riding down what is known as "The Shaw."

In a few years, if we don't get it together "The Shaw" will hardly be recognizable to those same people who love to ride down it. Those of you reading this from L.A. who are older than I, remember what "The Shaw" looked like before I was born. Look at it today. And the few independent businesses that have managed to maintain their position on said "Shaw" aren't going to be around much longer if we keep passing them up to go to their competitors, i.e. "the chains."

So what am I saying?

If you feel like a taco, consider the fact that Taco Bell isn't going to go under if you stop eating there, but that "mom and pop" taco stand around the corner from your house will. And even though we don't need to eat at McDonald's period, when you have to have it, why not try and eat at a local independent fast food restaurant that serves the exact same menu. You may to wait a little longer, but the food is probably healthier in the long run. Choose to put your clothes in a Black owned cleaners, take your vision and dental care to someone local because healthcare benefits can benefit more than just you. Remember that you don't have to buy your oranges from the grocery store when our brown brothers and sisters are right there at the off ramp waiting on you - and to tell you the truth, I'd rather give them my money where I know it counts and makes a difference. Got a sweet tooth? Hit up the brothers on Crenshaw or in front of the Slauson Swapmeet for a bean pie.

What I'm talking about isn't specific to Los Angeles. It's part of a national epidemic that finds traditionally Black neighborhoods being gentrified due to the economy and Black businesses under attack.

We cannot claim to advocate for Black businesses and then not do our part to support them. Chances are, for everything you need, there's a Black owned business near you

that can provide you with it. So what if it costs you a little bit more? I don't recall the Black community speaking out over the recent California sales tax increase - and if one were going to complain about the price of something that would have been the time to. Simply put, everything costs an arm and a leg today.

The bottom line 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 a problem with anything I've laid out here, than carry on as business as usual. However, if you do, rethink where you are spending your dollars and how you can help Black people with every dollar recycled.

We may not be able to stop them from moving into our neighborhoods, but we can definitely stop our businesses from moving out if we support them.

That's all I'm saying - well that and first time kudos to Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas who I spotted at Xtreme Klean Laundry & Cleaners on 65th and Crenshaw, a Black owned business. Now that's what I am talking about.

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BlackCommentator.com Columnist, Jasmyne Cannick, is a critic and commentator based in Los Angeles who writes about the worlds of pop culture, race, class, and politics as it relates to the African-American community. A regular contributor to NPR's 'News and Notes,' she was chosen as one Essence Magazine's 25 Women Shaping the World. Click [here](#) to contact Ms. Cannick.

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