

## Giving Back: An Examination of the Philanthropic Motivations, Orientations and Activities of Large Black-Owned Businesses

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**ABSTRACT.** This study of philanthropy among large Black-owned businesses provides insights into a sector of business giving which has not been studied. Results indicate that philanthropy and ethical justifications play a more important role in minority business enterprises than in non-minority firms studied previously.

Though charitable giving by U.S. firms in the mid-1990s has been flat (*Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 1995), corporate philanthropy and community relations have been an integral component of businesses' corporate social performance for decades. Indeed, it could well be argued that philanthropic efforts were among the first, and, perhaps most altruistic, indicators of businesses' belief that it had a responsibility to society that extended beyond producing and distributing goods and services and making a profit.

In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, corporate philanthropy has continued though it has been uneven in its growth pattern. Though corporate philanthropy has been researched

extensively in the past two decades, there remains a sector or category of business giving which has not been studied – that of Black-owned businesses in the United States. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has a long history in the Black community. A poll commissioned by the *Wall Street Journal* found that 86% of the Black business owners surveyed stated that they have a special responsibility to contribute (give back) to the Black community (Carlson, 1992). However, the efforts of these individuals and their firms to enhance their communities and, in particular, the Black community have not been carefully studied and documented. It is against this backdrop that the current study was undertaken.

It is expected that this study will provide initial answers to a number of important questions about philanthropy in the African-American community: What *activities* characterize community giving? What is the *impact* on the Black community of this giving? What are the *reasons*, or *motivations*, for undertaking contributions and community involvement? What are the basic *social responsibility orientations* of Black business owners?

### Introduction to Black-owned businesses

While the number of Black-owned businesses grew 46% from 1987 to 1992 (Gupta, 1995) and continues to grow, Black entrepreneurs continue to struggle with the limitations of small size. The majority of Black-owned businesses are categorized as small businesses based on criteria used

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by the United States Small Business Administration. These criteria state that companies with less than 500 employees are small businesses. Although some of the largest Black-owned companies have more than 2000 employees, most Black-owned businesses have far fewer than 500 employees. In fact, most have less than 100 employees. The average Black-owned business had revenues of \$51 000 in the early 1990's, far below the \$192 000 figure for businesses in general (Gupta, 1995).

Black-Americans have a significant stake in the success of Black-owned businesses because of the impact they have in the Black community. In Black-owned businesses, at least four of the five stakeholder groups identified by Carroll (1995) that are affected by the philanthropic component of CSR would most likely consist of Black-Americans. Those groups affected would include (1) the Black community, (2) employees – most of whom are Blacks, (3) owners – who are Blacks, (4) consumers – who are often Blacks and (5) other – who may or may not be Blacks.

Perhaps one of the most prevalent ways that Black-owned businesses give back to their communities and help those that are less fortunate than they is by hiring minorities. An example of a Black-owned business making strides in this type of activity is Colby Care Nurses, Inc., a home health care service in Los Angeles County. Like the employees of most Black-owned firms, about three-fourths of Colby Care's 250 nurses are Black or Hispanic and they live in or near the neighborhoods where they work (Mehta, 1995).

Many Black-owned businesses are privately-owned which prohibits the generation of funds through the sales of company stock and similar financing alternatives. Much of their resources are reinvested in the business. In order to make contributions of financial resources, firms, whether Black-owned or not, must have discretionary income that is not needed for firm survival or growth. Moreover, even the largest Black-owned companies do not have unlimited resources or access to funding that would afford them the opportunity to give back at the same level as major corporations that provide corporate sponsorships or establish grants and foundations for social and community causes. Likewise,

due to the demands of owning or operating a small business, owners of small firms are rarely able to personally participate in community events. Because of the added responsibility that successful Black business people have as role models for youth in the community, they are often besieged with proposals by community-based leaders to provide free services and attend speaking engagements.

The next section describes and summarizes the results of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) study, with a particular emphasis on the philanthropic component, in the U.S.'s largest Black-owned companies. A major shortcoming of much of the research on CSR has been that previous researchers have not attempted to identify what the firm actually does. In addition to determining which philanthropic activities the firms engage in, the study seeks to assess the means by which the firms participate in these activities and the perceived impact they have on the community. In addition, an attempt is made to identify the business owner's motivations for giving back and their CSR orientations.

## The Study

### *Goals of the study*

As previously suggested, there were four major goals of the study. The first goal was to identify those community or philanthropic activities in which the respondents, their firms, or organization to which the respondents belonged participated. Respondents were presented with a list of eighteen different community/philanthropic activities (adopt-a school, apprenticeships, gifts to colleges, gifts to charities, art and cultural events, etc.) Then, they were asked to identify the means of their participation: (a) personally, (b) through their firm, or (c) through an organization of which they were a member. The respondents were asked to identify any additional activities that were not listed.

A second, and related goal of the study was to ascertain the respondents' assessment of the activities' impact on the Black community. The respondents were asked to assess the activities'

impacts according to the following categories: no impact, some impact, minor impact, or major impact. The study's third goal was to ascertain the respondents' *reasons* or *motivations* for undertaking their philanthropic and community involvement. The respondents were presented with a list of nine reasons (which were culled from the philanthropy literature) and asked to rank order them from most to least significant. They also were asked to specify any reason that was not included on the list.

The fourth goal of the study was to ascertain the respondents' *corporate social responsibility orientations*. This segment of the questionnaire contained 15 items developed by Aupperle (1984) in which the respondents were to allocate up to 10 points to each set of four statements which reflected the four components of CSR (economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic) as articulated by Carroll (1979). This set of questions developed by Aupperle to test Carroll's four-part construct of CSR has been used successfully numerous times in the literature and found to be valid. In this particular application, the researchers were interested especially in the respondents' assessment of the philanthropic category. The researchers also sought demographic information about the respondents and their businesses.

### *Sample*

A commercial mailing list from *Black Enterprise* magazine was used as the data source. This list of 503 of the nation's largest Black-owned businesses and organizations included top financial companies (banks, savings and loans, and insurance firms), law firms, executive recruiters, franchises, investment bankers, *Black Enterprise's* list of top 100 industrial/service companies, and *Black Enterprise's* list of top 100 automotive dealers. Eligibility for inclusion on the *Black Enterprise* lists of top companies requires that a company must have been fully operational in the previous calendar year and be at least 51% Black-owned. The *Black Enterprise's* list of top 100 industrial/service companies did not include brokerages, real estate firms and firms that

provide professional services (accountants, lawyers, etc.). Owners who were listed on the database twice only received one questionnaire thus reducing the number of firms in the sample to 498.

### *Data collection and response*

A four-page questionnaire, accompanied by a cover letter stating the purpose of the survey, asking for their participation, and informing the respondents that they could receive a copy of the results, was used as the data gathering instrument. The survey and cover letter were sent to the CEOs or owners, and a postcard reminder was sent two weeks later. Responses were received in the following months. Of the 498 firms sampled, three were returned as undeliverable and 5 were returned with a note or letter that said the company was not a Black-owned business or that they regretfully could not participate in the survey. Seventy-four useable responses were received (15.1% response rate). While this response rate is below the median (33%) response rate for samples for small firms reported by Alpar and Spitzer (1989), it was within the acceptable response rate (8 to 26.5%) also reported by Alpar and Spitzer. Also, in research of this kind it is important to address the issue of relying on a single respondent. Typically in small business research the owner/operator is allowed to speak on behalf of the firm.

### *Characteristics of respondents*

Only 93% of the respondents provided personal and firm information. First, in regards to personal information (of those who provided this information), the average respondent was 46.7 years old. The youngest respondent was 24 years old and the oldest was 63. More than seventy-eight percent of the respondents had either college or advanced degrees. While most of them were men, 20.3% of the respondents were women. In regards to firm information, there were respondents from each of the firm categories listed on the database and they represented publicly and privately owned firms. More than 84% of the

respondents were CEOs or owners. The other respondents were senior line and staff officers. The youngest firm was 2 years old and the oldest was 91. There were respondents with various organizational characteristics from each of the types of firms included on the database.

### Findings of the study

Presented below is a discussion of the activities, impacts, motivations and CSR orientations identified in the study.

*Activities.* Eighteen community activities were compiled from previous literature on corporate philanthropy and Black-owned businesses that identify the kinds of activities which typify corporate philanthropy in the Black community. These activities ranged from financial contributions, to helping to improve the situations of Black youth, to helping individuals to develop a skill or trade. Whereas some of the activities required either time or money, many of them required both time and money.

In an attempt to determine which activities the nation's largest Black-owned businesses were currently engaged in, frequencies were calculated for each of the eighteen activities. One other activity was identified by the respondents – civic participation. However, this addition was only listed by one respondent and, therefore, was not included in the results. Table I presents the frequencies stated in percentages for the top twelve of the eighteen activities, their means of participating, and the perceived impact on the Black community. However, it should be noted that the respondents were currently engaged in all of the eighteen activities under investigation.<sup>1</sup>

The top three activities in which the respondents indicated some degree of participation were (1) support of youth activities (90.5%), (2) gifts to charities supporting the Black community (87.8%) and (3) management advice to minority-owned firms (77%). These percentages are indicated in the % column of Table I and reflect the percent of respondents who indicated any participation in the listed activity.

*Personally,* most of the respondents gave tithes

TABLE I  
Activities, means of participating, and impact on the Black Community

Activity	%*	Means of participating (Percentage)			Impact on the community (Percentage)			
		You	Firm	Org.	Major	Some	Minor	No.
1. Support youth activities	90.5	58.1	68.9	21.6	61.4	33.3	3.5	1.8
2. Gifts to charities supporting Black Community	87.8	63.5	66.2	13.5	42.4	47.5	8.5	1.7
3. Management advice to minority-owned Firms	77.0	60.8	39.2	12.2	50.0	41.1	7.1	1.8
4. Community development programs	75.7	45.9	54.1	27.0	59.3	38.9	1.9	0.0
5. Gifts to United Negro College Fund	75.7	45.9	64.9	16.2	44.6	42.9	7.1	5.4
6. Tithes and offerings to church	74.3	70.3	6.8	2.7	37.3	39.2	17.6	5.9
7. Gifts to Organizations like the NAACP	71.6	44.6	58.1	16.2	30.6	57.1	6.1	6.1
8. Support art and cultural events	71.6	50.0	59.5	24.3	23.9	41.3	28.3	6.5
9. Gifts to nonminority based charities	68.9	45.9	56.8	9.5	16.7	50.0	31.3	2.1
10. Church activities to benefit community	66.2	59.5	35.1	12.2	56.9	33.3	5.9	3.9
11. Student Internships	66.2	12.2	58.1	8.1	34.8	45.7	17.4	2.2
12. Gifts directly to Black Colleges	66.2	33.8	43.2	10.8	30.6	61.2	8.2	0.0

\* Percent of respondents who were engaged in this activity.

and offerings to church (70.3%), gifts to charities supporting the Black community (63.5%), and management advice to minority-owned firms (60.8%). On *behalf of their firms*, most of them supported youth activities (68.9%), gave to charities supporting the Black community (66.2%) and gave to the United Negro College Fund (64.9%). While the percentage of CEO's and owners giving back *through organizations* were considerably lower than the other means of participating for these respondents, those who participated in this way were involved in community development programs (27%), supporting art and cultural events (24.3%), and supporting youth activities (21.6%). The other means of participating may be seen by reviewing the percentages in Table I.

*Impact on Black Community.* All of the activities were perceived as having a major impact on the Black community by some of the respondents. The activities perceived as having the most impact (Major plus Some columns in Table I) were community development programs (98.2%), supporting youth activities (94.7%), gifts directly to Black colleges (91.8%), management advice to

minority-owned firms (91.1%) and church activities to benefit the community (90.2%).

Those activities that were perceived as having minor or no impact were adopting children (46.1%), supporting art and cultural events (34.8%), gifts to nonminority based charities (33.4%), and sponsoring a family (25.7%). The adopting children and sponsoring a family activities were among the items lowest ranked and were omitted from Table I.

*Motivations.* In an examination of the CEOs' and owners' motivations for giving back, frequencies were used to determine which motivations were ranked as "most significant" more often than the others. As shown in Table II, the top three reasons given by the respondents for giving back to the community were to: (1) protect and improve the environment in which to live, work, and do business (39.2%), (2) practice good corporate citizenship (35.1%), and (3) give back with little or no direct or indirect company interest (32.4%). The one reason for giving that appeared irrelevant was giving back because of pressure from peers, customers, and/or suppliers (2.7%). Some respondents gave identical rankings to

TABLE II  
Motivations for giving back

Possible motivations for giving back	Ranked most significant (Percentages)	Ranked in top 3 choices (Percentages)
Protect and improve environment in which to live, work, and do business	39.2	68.9
Practice good corporate citizenship	35.1	71.62
Give back with little or no direct or indirect company self-interest	32.4	63.5
Realize good public relations value	27	59.52
Commitment of directors or senior officers to particular causes, involvement	23	50
Realize benefits for company employees (normally in areas where company operates)	18.9	47.3
Increase the pool of trained manpower or untrained manpower	18.9	43.2
Preserve a society that enables citizens to choose between government and private-sector alternatives	10.8	37.8
Pressure from business peers, customers, and/or suppliers	2.7	16.2

several items; therefore, the percentages add to more than 100%. However, analyzing those responses revealed that the respondents perceived several items as "most significant".

*Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Orientations.* Carroll (1979) set forth a comprehensive definition of CSR which had as one of its goals to primarily reconcile the business firm's economic orientation with its social orientation. In doing so, he identified four components of CSR, that in equation form, may be depicted as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Total Corporate Social Responsibility} = & \\ & \text{Economic Responsibility} \\ & + \text{Legal Responsibility} \\ & + \text{Ethical Responsibility} \\ & + \text{Philanthropic Responsibility.} \end{aligned}$$

In this definition, we see included both the firm's economic responsibility and its social (legal, ethical and philanthropic) responsibility being construed as its total CSR.

Brief descriptions of each of the four components follow: the *economic* responsibilities of business arise from the fact that business has an obligation to be productive and profitable and to meet the consuming needs of society. *Legal* responsibilities of business suggest a need for economic responsibilities to be fulfilled within the confines of written laws and regulations. The *ethical* responsibilities of business reflect the unwritten codes, norms, and values implicitly derived from society and as such, go beyond the mere legal frameworks. This is the responsibility to do what is right, fair or just and to avoid

harm. The *philanthropic* responsibilities of business are volitional in nature and as such are also difficult to judge and to ascertain. These philanthropic responsibilities constitute the "giving back" which is the subject of the study.

Carroll (1979) suggested relative nonnumerical weights to each of the components which suggested that the most dominant component was economic, followed by legal, followed by ethical, followed by philanthropic. These weights were given numerical values by Aupperle in his 1984 research. His research findings confirmed Carroll's ordering of the components. The ordering of the orientations has also been confirmed among international corporations by Pinkston and Carroll (1995). Based on the respondents' allocation of up to ten points on each of the statements on the Aupperle instrument, mean scores for each of the four CSR components were computed to determine if the philanthropic component was weighted more heavily in Black-owned businesses than in businesses that have been studied in the past. As shown in Table III (This Sample column), the economic component (3.16) remained the most important, but the priorities reversed for legal and ethical, wherein ethical (2.19) was assessed to have a higher priority than legal (2.12). Also the philanthropic component (2.04) carried more weight for this sample than in previous studies. As in previous studies, there was a residual because some of the respondents chose not to allocate all 10 points.

Furthermore, in six paired comparison t-tests, previous researchers (Aupperle, Pinkston and

TABLE III  
Comparison of the means

	Aupperle (1984)	Pinkston and Carroll (1995)	This sample (1996)	t-value P&C/ this sample
Economic	3.5	3.28	3.16	0.90
Legal	2.54	3.07	2.12	10.32*
Ethical	2.22	2.45	2.19	2.54**
Philanthropic	1.3	1.15	2.04	7.22*
Residual	0.44	0.05	0.49	

\*  $p = 0.0000$ ; \*\*  $p = 0.0198$ .

Carroll) found that the overall means (i.e., economic and legal, economic and ethical, legal and ethical) differed significantly for each of the components. Aupperle's *t*-values ranged from 6.37 to 25.30, thus revealing significant differences among the means ( $p = 0.001$ ). Pinkston and Carroll's *t*-tests also revealed significant differences among the means with the exception of the strongest orientations, economic and legal. The current study only revealed significant differences for the economic component with *t*-values ranging from 6.56 to 11.18 ( $p = 0.000$ ). The *t*-values for the three other components ranged from 0.53 to 1.03, again revealing no significant differences.

Although it was not possible to statistically test for differences between the calculated mean scores of Aupperle's study due to inability to access his original data, it was possible to perform four two-sample *t*-tests on each of the components for the current sample and the Pinkston and Carroll sample. The *t*-values for the economic component did not reveal significant differences, however the *t*-values for the other three components revealed significant differences in the calculated mean scores. The findings of this analysis are also presented in Table III.

### Summary, conclusions, and interpretations

This study of the philanthropic motivations, orientations, and activities of large Black-owned business provides initial answers to important questions about philanthropy in the Black community. First, in terms of *activities* supported, it appeared that the respondents gave fairly straightforward and not-too-surprising responses. Acting on behalf of their firms, respondents favored the support of youth activities (68.9%), gifts to charities supporting the Black Community (66.2%) and gifts to education – primarily to the United Negro College fund (64.9%) and some directly to Black colleges (43.2%).

In terms of *major impact*, the activities most frequently mentioned included youth activities, community development programs and church activities to benefit the community. By visually examining the percentages, it appeared that Black

business owners primarily gave back to those causes that they felt would have the most impact on the community. Moreover, many Black business owners team up with other Black business owners to give back to their community because contributions made by groups of Black business owners and professionals enable many of them to give back more generously than if they gave back individually. One example of Blacks working together to improve their community is illustrated by the activities of the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church (Suburban Atlanta, Georgia), a church that has grown from 300 members to more than 15 000 in just eight years. Each Sunday morning, members who are mostly business owners, managers, and professionals, repeat the tither's creed:

Thank you Lord for helping me to see that my  
time, my talents,  
and my tenth belong to thee. I am standing on  
the promises of God.

(New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, 1996)

Time and talent can be directed toward any of New Birth's many ministries, however the church's involvement in Project Impact, a program based in Compton, California that takes first-time nonviolent youth offenders and provides counseling, tutoring, and parental training, is one its most successful activities. More than 300 young people have been helped through this program. Moreover, New Birth's Christian Men's Network has 500 men who go into local schools to talk to young African-American males about sexual promiscuity, the probability of AIDS resulting from such behavior, and the dangers of being motivated by economics rather than morals (Proclaimer, 1995). Additionally, New Birth is one of several mega-churches, that have banded together to facilitate business ownership for Christians (Proclaimer, 1995). This group was very influential in stopping a business that they deemed would have a negative impact on it and its youth from coming into the community.

The short-term beneficiaries of this giving are mainly Black youths who, if given proper attention and guidance, may be able to help remedy some of the social and economic ills within Black communities by starting businesses or finding

employment in traditional corporate settings and mentoring other Blacks along the way.

Regarding *motivations* for giving, respondents were most concerned with (1) protecting and improving the environment in which they live, work, and do business, (2) practicing good citizenship, and (3) giving back with nothing expected in return. When considering the motivations ranked in the top three choices, it is important to note their desire to realize good public relations value and to support particular causes embraced by directors and top managers. From this it readily can be seen why many nonprofit and community organizations seek business people to be on their boards – they support causes with which they are affiliated. Perhaps this finding will result in the appointment of more Black directors to boards of major corporations and nonprofit organizations, especially those that have a high number of Black employees or other stakeholders who are Black.

One of the most interesting findings of the study was the respondents' ranking of the legal, ethical, and philanthropic components of CSR. While the current study did not reveal significant differences among the legal, ethical, and philanthropic components, the Black-business owners assessed the legal and ethical components to be less important than in previous studies, and regarded philanthropy as more important than in previous studies. These priorities were sufficiently different as to cause one to speculate why these differences occurred.

First, one cannot help but wonder why the sample of Black business owners ranked the legal responsibility significantly lower than in the 1995 study. One possible explanation is that since Black-owned businesses in the past thirty years have been less the focus of government regulators and law enforcement agencies, they do not regard or perceive the legal motivation as an important reason as to why they do what they do. For example, most government regulation initiatives against firms for race discrimination or affirmative action have been directed towards White-owned firms not Black-owned firms. Therefore, the Black-owned firms have not been as much the target of law enforcement actions.

Second, one wonders if this same phenom-

enon explains the Black-owned businesses' higher ranking of the ethical component of CSR. Because many Black businesses are rooted in religious faith, perhaps the Black business owners have more firmly internalized ethical reasons rather than legal reasons for their actions. Undoubtedly, the Black church has played an important role in the Black community as seen in the example of the activities of the New Birth Missionary Baptist church. The Black church is determined to assist the community through its traditional value system coupled with a contemporary agenda that has sparked fire and enthusiasm in the African-American community (Woodson, 1987). This enthusiasm was evident in the 1995 Million Man March held in Washington D.C. in which Black men of all economic statuses demonstrated their support of the Black community. If Black business owners have internalized these values and beliefs, this would provide a reasonable explanation for the higher ethical ranking.

Finally, how does one explain the Black-owned businesses' higher ranking of the philanthropy component of CSR. One possible interpretation is that they more often have been the recipients or benefactors of philanthropic giving and, thus, have a higher perception of its importance or worth relative to the other components. It is also important to note that due to the close ties that many successful Black business owners have to their community, a community in which they were raised, often educated, attended church, etc., when they do participate in activities designed to aid the community, they do not view their participation as a business philanthropic activity, nor do members of their community. Instead, it is perceived as genuine concern about the development and preservation of the community. The congregation of the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church gave \$20 000, the money raised during one Sunday's special offerings, to a local high school football team in honor of their success as the first African-American high school state champion in their particular division. As more churches and Black businesses adopt schools and other institutions in their communities, we should find Black businesses continuing to "give back."



These possible interpretations of the data are speculative, but perhaps they will generate additional creative explanations for the findings. Further research seeking explanations of these findings are clearly warranted as next steps for future research.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> For a complete list of the activities, means of participating, and impact on the community, please contact the authors.

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