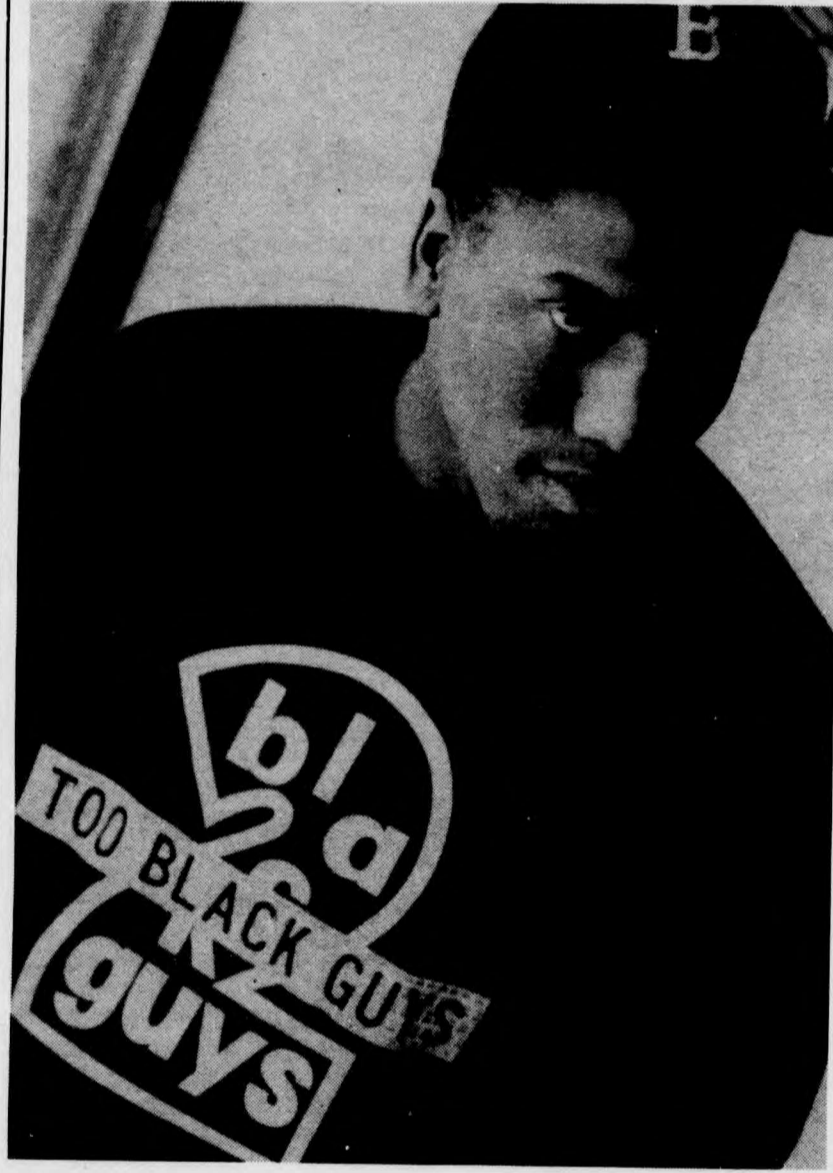


BUSINESS

"At the bottom of education, at the bottom of politics, even at the bottom of religion, there must be for our race economic independence."
— Booker Washington

Making Dollars with Conscious Style



by Toussaint Farrell

Check this out: A t-shirt with the words "Coming to America," and a picture of a galley full of kidnapped Africans, soon to be slaves in the new world. Or this: An eerie portrait of Leonardo's Jesus, staring out to you, with sharp, deep blue eyes. On the back, "Hell No" in bold letters. Or try this on for size: On the front a Black man naked from the waist up, and on the back the ""and they counted our teeth...and they felt our testicles and they tested the luster or dullness of our skin and they sold us like slaves."

Definitely not your average t-shirts. A love for cultural relevance and a touch of irony is what makes **Too Black Guys** clothing line so unique. Basic t-shirts with conscious and thought provoking messages. Too black guys is more than a fad. The clear message in their clothing has earned them a large cult following among Black youth.

"I think people have been thinking about (these issues) all along, but its the first time their seeing it on a t-shirt, something that they are able to wear every day, something that can show other people how they feel," explained Linda, one of three young Black owners.

Catch phrases such as "Black owned and run", reflect an attitude

towards change. The owners of too black guys are acutely aware of their role and responsibility as part of the Black community.

Linda argues "I think that once you reach a certain level, it is your responsibility to give back. In turn the community should support (black business)."

Co-owner Adrian agrees, "The community is our base. This is more than just a business to us, its a way of uplifting ourselves. We're trying to gain the respect of the [Black] community. That has to be an objective for a lot of Black businesses."

Despite a recession and the wave of closures of retail chains, **Too Black guys** has managed to stay afloat.

"People think we're making money, but good management has pulled us through this recession. That and support from part of the com-

munity, people who believe in what we are doing," explained Adrian.

Many people feel that by putting these controversial statements on t-shirts, Too Black Guys are highlighting a voice of resistance to the conditions faced by Black people globally, and very definitely locally.

"There are people who come on down and say well yeah, you guys are doing some really great stuff and I really appreciate what you're doing for the community.... You could look at it from an altruistic point of view, but if you look at it from a cold, hard business point of view, what were doing can be seen as making good business decisions and gaining the respect of the community."

Their store, with its steel flooring and funky music is located at three blocks north of Bloor on the side entrance of 968 Bathurst.



Kevin David: Programmed for Success

By Robert Loudon

Kevin David is the owner of Kilroy Systems and software, a Computer consultation and sales business which he started when he was 16. I interviewed him about his experiences as a young African-Canadian entrepreneur.

excalibur: So, tell me a little about yourself.

Kevin David (KD): I am a 21 year old computer science student and owner of Kilroy Systems and Software.

excalibur: How long have you been running your business?

KD: For over 5 years. I started in 1986 when I was 16. Basically I was doing odd computer jobs like

writing DBase programs, training people in Wordperfect, Lotus etc.

excalibur: How have you expanded since then?

KD: I now sell personal computers, install Local Area Networks (LANs), provide training and support for inexperienced users and consulting, in all aspects of the computer industry, to major businesses.

excalibur: As a Black teenager how difficult was it for you to start your business?

KD: It wasn't difficult to start. But it was difficult to gain acceptance from some members of society. Some white people were really surprised that a Black person was running such a business and some of the prejudices came through in the way they reacted to my business card. My business card has what looks like a Black

person climbing over a keyboard but white people kept asking me "Why is this Black guy stealing the keyboard?" (He Laughs). Also, Black people assumed that since I was reasonably successful I must be some sort of sell-out.

excalibur: How did you finance your company?

KD: All I had to do was come up with the 52 dollars to register my business initially and since I wasn't selling anything at the time there was little financing to be done. As I started to expand I invested the money that I made into buying equipment, getting stock etc. Whenever I make money I invest it back in to the business.

excalibur: Have you found that over time you have been able to overcome negative perceptions and prejudice or is it still a major

problem?

KD: I always come across negative perceptions from at least half of the people I deal with. Usually it's just in the initial contact with the person that I see such a reaction. But once they clue-in that I'm not there to steal their car stereo (He Laughs) they realize that I'm just like everybody else.

excalibur: What would be your advice to other Blacks who are thinking of starting businesses?

KD: My advice would be to find an area of expertise that they feel comfortable in and see if they can make a business out of it. The most successful businesses come from people who do something they already like.

excalibur: As a Black businessman do you think you have a special responsibility to the community and how have you been received?

KD: I used to think I had a special responsibility to the Black community, I went through the steps of advertising in community newspapers and I expected that there would be a positive response since I was the only Black computer dealer in the city but the response wasn't there. This has forced me to re-evaluate whether it is worth my while to be soliciting business from the Black community. It seems that my white clients are the ones keeping me in business when I would prefer that the Black community support its own.

excalibur: Thanks for speaking to us. Do you have any last words?

KD: The Chinese community has its money circulate six or seven times within the community before it leaves. Blacks have to start spending more money within the community if we are to uplift ourselves as a race.