

Leroy Crayton--Pioneer

In general the Negro in business operates small service establishments which cater to basic needs--grocery stores, barber shops, cleaning, pressing, and tailoring establishments, drug stores, auto service stations, beauty shops and the like. With some rare exceptions, the Negro business community in Cleveland follows this pattern. But there are significant exceptions.

Leroy Crayton was one of them. He scorned the description, "Negro business" in favor of use of the phrase "the Negro in business", and turned his ideal and boundless energies to the manufacture of sausage and sausage products. At the time of his death, the Crayton Southern Sausage Company which he began modestly in the rear of a grocery store he operated on Cedar Avenue, had grown into a substantial industry serving many states. His special sage-flavored sausage, based on an old Southern recipe once used by his mother, found increasing favor among Ohioans year after year, and the estimate that he became one of Cleveland's wealthiest Negroes is not far off target.

Even more significant, however, than his personal financial success were the contributions he made to his community. He was a life member of the NAACP, and one of the pioneer organizers of the Cleveland

Business League which through the years provided inspiration and guidance to hundreds of Negroes to venture into the world of business. He worked long and ardently to develop the Cleveland YMCA and his quiet leadership had much to do with the complete elimination of racial discrimination in all aspects of YMCA activity in this community.

Leroy Crayton had one firm belief...that Negro business need not be the same as Jim-Crow business. What tends to equate the two is that Negro enterprises usually employ only Negroes and usually cater only to Negro trade. Leroy Crayton's enterprises pioneered in leading the movement away from this trend. He believed that Negro-operated enterprises should be unlimited in scope and the standards put on as competitive a basis as financing permitted. He felt that there was every reason to expect that white customers would react in the same way as Negro customers. His success proved the accuracy of his theory.

It is to be hoped that his associates, in whom he tried ceaselessly to instil his ideals and vision, will preserve and expand the business monument he established.

The community in which he lived and served is poorer indeed because of his passing.