Consumer activism

Progressive era – 1906 Food and Drug Act

The Montgomery ([Alabama](http://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/alabama)) [Bus Boycott of 1955-1956](http://www.blackpast.org/aah/montgomery-bus-boycott-1955-56) remains the model instance of organized black consumer activism. One cannot overemphasize the resolve demonstrated by Montgomery’s black community during this action. The widespread publicity given black Montgomery’s ultimately successful campaign for respect and dignity subsequently emboldened blacks throughout the South to follow New York [Congressman](http://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/politicians) [Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.](http://www.blackpast.org/aah/powell-adam-clayton-jr-1908-1972)’s advice to “withhold the dollar to make the white man holler."

By the mid-1960s, African American consumer activism contributed to the passage of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primary/civil-rights-act-1964). Among other things, this landmark legislation prohibited racial discrimination in the realm of public accommodations (including hotels, restaurants, theaters, [sport](http://www.blackpast.org/entries-categories/athletes) arenas, etc.). Ironically, succeeding decades would illustrate the ability of white-owned businesses, rather than unfettered black consumers, to benefit from the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In 1969, black marketing research expert D. Parke Gibson wrote *The $30 Billion Negro*, whose title reflected collective African American annual spending power at that moment in time. Since then, aggregate black net income has dramatically increased crossing the *$1 trillion dollar* threshold in 2013.

- See more at: http://www.blackpast.org/perspectives/trillion-dollar-african-american-consumer-market-economic-empowerment-or-economic-depen#sthash.EANzRWo7.dpuf

On the surface, the significant increase in African American buying power since the 1960s announced that blacks have made significant economic “progress.” Yet a closer look at the nuances of African American consumerism since the 1960s suggests that African American spending *power*might be better characterized as spending *weakness*. For instance, although blacks have acquired more money to spend since the 1960s, there has been a simultaneous decline and disappearance of historic black-owned enterprises.
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