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BLACK
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Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
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July 30, 2009 - Issue 335

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Ode to John Holoman:

Corporate Man,

Businessman,

Newspaper Man

A Man's Man

Between The Lines

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One of the significant influences of my adult life passed away last week, and this column is dedicated to him - not just because of the impact he had on me, but due to the impact he had on everybody. John Holoman was the publisher of the *Herald Dispatch*, a national paper known for its radical commentary and on point community news.

The paper's commentary legacy includes the likes of Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael to name just a few. It is also where this weekly commentary started almost 19 years ago. I owe a lot to John for helping me find my voice as a thought and opinion leader. I'm sure there are many other people who benefited from a well-planted seed from the mind of John Holoman. John Holoman wasn't just a man. He was *the* man. A man's man, for whom many a man came to love and respect for his tough love demeanor.

John Holoman was a 20th Century Renaissance Man in every sense of the word. John was a corporate man, an entrepreneur, a thought leader, a business leader, a conservative and a radical - all at once. He was a senior vice president of a bank, while owning multiple chicken franchises. He owed a newspaper while owning the property that housed it. He held conservative views (one of the first black Republicans I can recall meeting) but was a deep and radical thinker when it came to how we, as a community, remedy social ills and economic injustice.

I remember a many deep conversations with John, and he didn't indulge many people. You had to be a deep thinker to get in his space. If you weren't, you didn't stay in his space very long. If you jumped into a mental "pool" with John, you'd get the swim test

pretty quick. His line of questioning was direct and concise, and you'd know pretty fast that you were in deep water. John didn't have a problem taking you into the deep end of the pool and drowning you. He called it "a teaching moment." John Holoman had "swagger" before swagger became popular. Whether it was at a corporate event, community event or hanging with his "Rat Pack" after work at an exclusive "happy hour" spot, you took notice of him and he took notice of you. John liked who he liked, but not for the reasons most people liked them. And who he didn't like - you'd know pretty quickly.

John Holoman liked me for my brashness as a young NAACP President, which many people liked - but just as many people didn't (and still don't) like. He once told me, "With a little guidance, you'd be dangerous." A prediction I came to rue but a reality I've learned to live with.

John understood that extremely independent thinkers are always dangerous. However, John saw it as an asset at a time when our community was timid and voiceless in the midst of police abuse and massive economic subjugation. Nobody was saying anything and our community was sinking. John was mentoring change activists in the boardrooms, in the backrooms and in the community rooms. He knew our community can't do anything without money, social activism and political will. So he perfected how to access all three.

John helped corporate America understand black America and that its social and economic circumstances were not "just excuses." He also helped young brothers on the corner understand that every black man in a suit was not a sellout and implored them to stop making excuses. John hated excuses. Take a position but defend it - don't give him any excuses. He was hard like that, and he didn't apologize for it. Real men are what they are, and John Holoman was who he was. The activist in him came about as a newspaper publisher.

John wasn't one to let things go unaddressed. Conscious of his corporate role, it is where John exercised his voice. He understood controversy moves papers and the popularity of a paper is in the bite of its writers.

Battled and bruised from my NAACP experience, during a low moment in my life, John came to me and said, "Sometimes when we think we've lost, we've actually won. The outcome is not always indicative of the battle, particularly when more people were with you than against you. You don't have an office, but you do have a voice. That makes you a free man, and I know you have something to say. I have the venue anytime you feel like expressing yourself." He made me that offer on three separate occasions. I took it up on the third offer, and have been expressing myself weekly every since.

John Holoman understood that there was more than just preachers, politicians and civil rights leaders in community leadership and that all of them respond to thought leaders. In putting down the civil rights sword for the writer's pen, I can attest that "the pen is mightier than the sword." That was the enduring lesson John Holoman taught me and I know John was right. I had won and I'm still winning by God's grace. Because of John's wisdom, I write to this day about injustice in the world, our community and our trials and struggles with each other.

Thank you John for the difference you made in our world, in my world, and for being a man's man. A living example that we can be all that we desire to be. We will miss you dearly.

God bless the Holoman family.

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