

# African American Economic Leaders

*Who is an Economic leader?* A person who makes choices that lead to changes in the kinds of opportunities people have.

- This person could open a new business, creating more jobs.
- This person could start an agency to improve a community.
- This person could start a block club.
- This person could work in a job that helps a business or agency succeed.

A school's principal can be an economic leader.  
So can a teacher. So can a parent. So can you.

During February, Americans celebrate Black History month.

Many African Americans have been economic leaders.

This guide celebrates just a few of these leaders.

It includes profiles of some of the many African-American Economic Leaders who have lived and worked in Chicago.

For each leader, you answer questions about the choices and changes this leader makes.

You can write your answers by yourself or work with a partner or a team.

This guide is just a beginning.

You can expand it by:

- > researching more information about the leaders in the guide
- > profiling other leaders
- > planning for the future--making a plan for ways an African-American economic leader can help Chicago in the next century
- > making an exhibit or book about African-American economic leaders

## Enabling People to Trade

Who: Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable

When: In the late 1700's and early 1800's

What: DuSable opened a trading post in Chicago

Choices:

DuSable had to choose where to locate that post.  
He built it along the river.

He had to decide what to trade.  
At that time in this area, trade was done by barter, which means the exchange of one thing for another.  
Native persons and travelers and settlers would be able to get things they needed at the post.

Changes:

DuSable changed the economy.  
He brought goods from other places to this place.  
He enabled persons to use things they had to get things they wanted.

DuSable sold his trading post to John Kinzie in 1803.  
This way, John Kinzie did not have to build his own trading post. The trading post was important to the growth of the community.

THINK:

1. Why would DuSable have located the post along the river?
2. How would he choose things to trade?
3. What kinds of opportunities did DuSable bring about here?

CHART PROJECT

When people barter, they figure out the value of one good in terms of another.  
Make a chart showing what people could barter in Chicago today.  
Then list the kinds of skills that DuSable needed to use to succeed when he started his trading post.  
What other abilities did he need to be a Chicago economic leader?

## **Restoring a Meeting Place/Eating Place**

Who: Dolores Reynolds, Floyd Beverly, and Fletcher Smith

When: 1992

What: Reopened a historic restaurant: Army and Lou's

Choices:

In 1992, Army & Lou's restaurant closed. This restaurant had served high quality food and been a special meeting place for members of the African American community since 1945. Dolores Reynolds, Floyd Beverly, and Fletcher Smith decided to use their money and their skills to re-open this historic business on the south side.

They had to decide: what to sell, how to set prices, how to keep the restaurant full of customers.

Changes:

Re-opening the restaurant meant more jobs for workers.

The restaurant is a part of Chicago history that now has a future.

**THINK:**

1. Why would these economic leaders have chosen to buy the restaurant?
2. What kinds of things would they have thought about when they planned for its future?
3. Why is one business important to an economy?
4. These three leaders work as partners. What kinds of skills do people need to work as a team?

**MATH PROJECT**

Imagine that you buy a restaurant.

Make a menu for the restaurant.

How will you calculate the prices for the foods your restaurant will sell?

Make a list of all the costs you will have to pay to get that food to the customers.

Then figure out your prices so you meet all the costs and also make a profit.

## Expanding Horizons

Who: Sokoni Karanja

When: 1971 through today

What: Founded Center for New Horizons in 1971 to develop a “self-reliant community--one family at a time”--in Grand Boulevard

Choices:

How to assist community residents to make lasting progress.

The Center helps low income families to buy homes, provides day care while parents learn job skills. These are just two ways that the Center helps individuals and families to develop self-reliance.

Changes:

Over 1,500 children and families make progress each day through the Center and its programs:

- > 6 Early Learning Centers for pre-school children whose parents are working or preparing for employment.
- > Head Start program for children ages 3 and 4
- > Foster Care services
- > After-school and Saturday learning programs
- > Drop-out prevention and youth crime intervention programs for fourth, fifth, and sixth graders

THINK:

1. Sokoni Karanja named his organization Center for New Horizons. An economic leader enables people to get more opportunities. Why is this a good name for an economic leader's center?
2. The Center for New Horizons takes the Seven Principles as its values: unity, self determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. What do you think you would learn if you went to the Center? (Seven principles or Nguzo Saba.)
3. What kinds of opportunities does the Center bring to the community?
4. What kinds of skills does Sokoni Karanja need to be a leader?

TIME-LINE PROJECT

Make a time-line that shows how one family can make progress, beginning when one member of the family learns more job skills.

## Many Jobs from One Business

Who: John H. Johnson

When: 1942 through today

What: Established Johnson Publishing Company, Inc. in Chicago.

Choices:

In 1942, John Johnson started a publishing company with a loan of \$500.

He expanded the company to publish three national magazines, including Ebony, a monthly general magazine, and Jet, a weekly news magazine.

Mr. Johnson has added cosmetics, television and radio, and a book division to the company.

John Johnson has contributed money and given his own time to help African-American improvement, including the United Negro College Fund.

Changes:

Today, Johnson Publishing Company employs more than 1,800 persons.

Johnson Publishing sells almost 1.9 million copies of just one of the publications, Ebony.

THINK:

1. John Johnson said that “failure is a word I don’t accept.” What would happen if more people had that attitude?
2. In addition to attitude, a successful economic leader needs knowledge. What kinds of things does the owner of a publishing company need to know?
3. How has Johnson Publications helped the Chicago economy?

DIAGRAM PROJECT

Make a diagram to show how Johnson Publications helps the Chicago economy. Show the connections that just one job has to the rest of the economy. For example, show how one employee could use his or her salary to pay for the work of many other persons, including the taxes that worker would pay.

## **Saving and Lending for Progress**

**Who:** Thelma J. Smith, President and CEO of Illinois Service Federal Savings and Loan Association, the only African-American savings and loan association in Illinois.

**When:** Since 1984

**What:** Mrs. Smith started as a secretary to the executive director and served in many other jobs until she became the president in 1984

**Choices:**

Mrs. Smith decided to work in banking and to gain more skills and knowledge so she could make professional progress.

As President of the savings and loan, she makes many decisions every day.

**Changes:**

The Affordable Housing Program of the Savings and Loan has helped many families buy their first homes.

Financial seminars have helped community residents learn how to manage money and credit.

**THINK:**

1. Why is it important that families have help when they want to buy a home? Before you answer, look at the prices of homes in the newspaper ads.
2. How else does a savings and loan help a community?
3. Thelma Smith has had a very successful career. What kinds of skills and knowledge do you think she has needed to succeed?

**MAP PROJECT:**

Make a map of your community. Use a color to show the places where families could use the help of a savings and loan to buy a home or build a home. Use another color to show the places where businesses could use the help of a savings and loan to buy a business or to start one. Call your map: How savings and loans can help a community economy.