



The Reverend Sun Myung Moon & Blacks

William Reed
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The Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Korean-born founder of the Unification Church and builder of a worldwide business empire has died. In life, Moon proved to be a savvy church leader and a shrewd businessman. Born in a village in what is now North Korea, Moon's legacy of reconciliation lives on in his support of "peace with North Korea." In the face of sanctions against North Korea, Moon's Unification Church has several businesses, including a hotel and an automaker in North Korea.

To throngs of followers around the world Moon is viewed as the benevolent "True Father" who was asked by Jesus to complete his unfinished mission on earth. But, Moon's life and legend in America is tainted by racism and religious bigotry. Mainstream media's portrayals of Moon are the problem. The media often mentions Moon's tax evasion conviction and imprisonment in 1984, but little is written regarding the legal controversies surrounding this case. Also, little is known about broad cross sections of religious and civic organizations that have, and continue, to speak on Moon's behalf.

As the government and their agents moved to put him in the dock, Moon famously said: "I would not be standing here today if my skin [was] White and my religion was Presbyterian." While Moon was serving his sentence in Danbury Prison, American Unification Church members launched a campaign claiming that the charges against him were unjust and politically motivated. African-American ministers such as the Rev. Joseph Lowery, of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were among the religious leaders who spoke out on Moon's behalf.

Moon was persecuted for his promotion of interracial and intercultural marriages. Many compare Moon to Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. During the decades that Moon led his movement in

America, he maintained contacts among African-American leaders. From Lowery to Al Sharpton and Louis Farrakhan, Moon maintained relationships with Black American church and political leaders.

In 1997, Moon and his wife, Hak Ja Han presided over a Blessing Ceremony in Washington, D.C. in which Baptist minister and civil rights advocate Sharpton participated. Such weddings were in keeping with a central tenet of Moon's theology. That same year, Farrakhan served as a "co-officiator" at a Blessing Ceremony presided over by Moon. Three years later, the Unification Church co-sponsored the Million Family March in Washington, D.C. with the Nation of Islam to celebrate family unity and racial and religious harmony.

Many Blacks subscribe to the "American Mainstream View" of Moon. Called "True Parents" Moon and his wife have gained worldwide adulation in their travels. In 2001, the couple embarked on a 50-state tour for racial reconciliation. The interdenominational tour entitled: "We Will Stand!" was sponsored by the American Clergy Leadership Conference with many of the sites being African-American churches. At each site on the tour, Moon and local Unification Church members assembled ministers and lay leaders from Pentecostal, Baha'i, Nation of Islam and Black Baptist congregations to support his visit.

Moon exemplifies the fact that the best way to combat racism is to be rich. Moon's worldwide holdings are estimated in the billions of dollars. The Moon family is said to have a personal net worth in the millions. In its early years in the U.S., the Unification Church's well-scrubbed members sold flowers and trinkets on street corners and married in mass weddings.

In the U.S., Moon had interests in commercial fishing, jewelry, fur products, construction and real estate. He bought many properties in the New York area, including the New Yorker Hotel and the Manhattan Center. At one time or another he controlled newspapers including Noticias del Mundo and The New York City Tribune; four publications in South Korea; a newspaper in Japan, The Sekai Nippo; The Middle East Times in Greece; Tiempos del Mundo in Argentina; Últimas Noticias in Uruguay and the Washington Times. A church affiliate bought United Press International in 2000.

Call him "Father", or not, Moon was a man who deserved to be recognized.

(William Reed is head of the Business Exchange Network and available for projects via the www.baileygroup.org)