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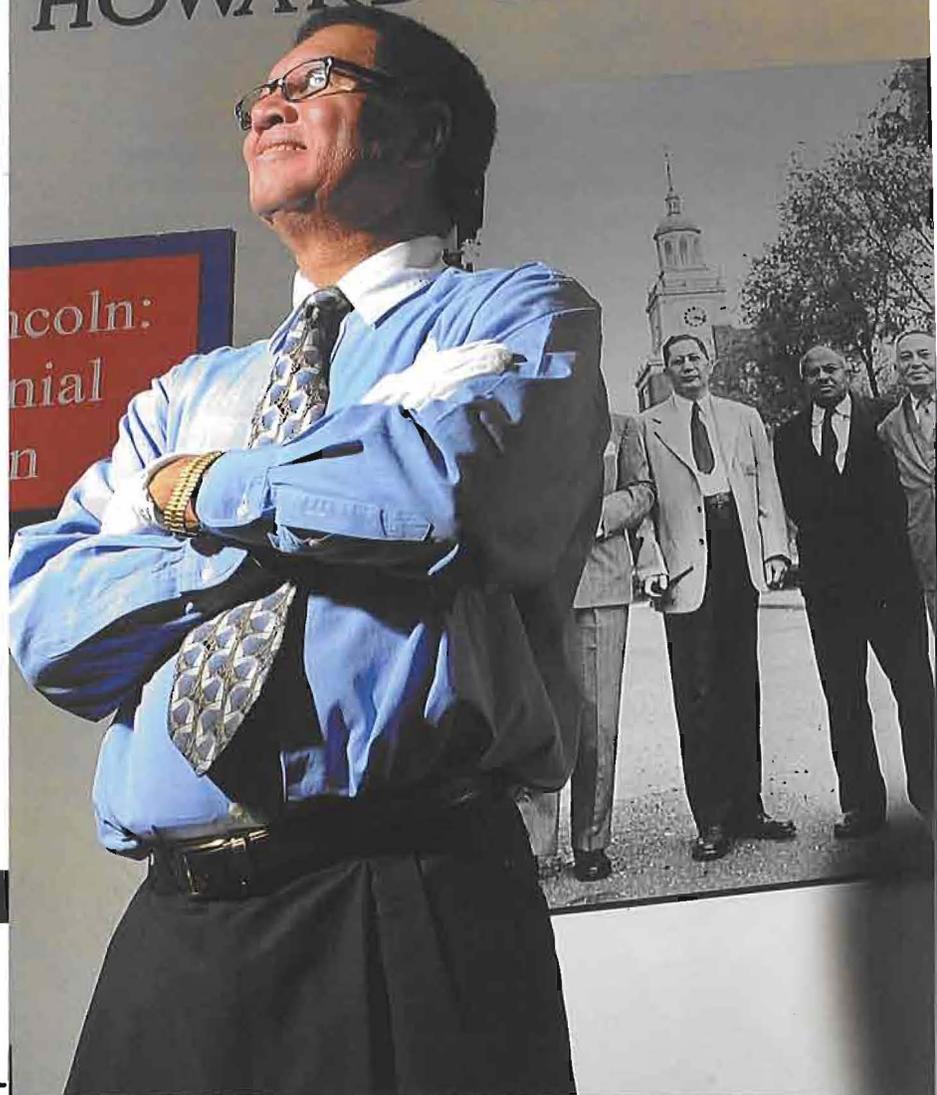
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HOWARD UNIVERSITY



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W. Sherman Rogers

By Otesa Middleton Miles (B.A. '94)

W. Sherman Rogers (J.D. '76), professor at the Howard University School of Law, believes the key to economic success for African Americans is entrepreneurship, which equals independence.

"I've always believed that Black people should do more to rely upon their own efforts as opposed to expecting good things to happen and develop at the hands of other people," says Rogers. "If you can't find a job, create a job and employ yourself."

Rogers focuses much of his teaching and writings on encouraging self-sufficiency through self-employment. He created the course "Entrepreneurship Law & Policy" at the School of Law in 2008 to educate his students on how to form successful businesses.

"Entrepreneurship as an academic study hasn't historically been taught in law schools. It has mostly been taught in business schools, even though lawyers are involved in every part of entrepreneurship," says Rogers, a licensed stockbroker, licensed insurance agent and legal consultant. "I let my students know how involved we are to help launch new businesses, create forms, handle tax issues, protect intellectual property and deal with copyright matters."

Rogers has taken his expertise and wrapped it in the book, *The African American Entrepreneur: Then and Now*, released in 2010. The book grew from his knowledge that Americans who achieve wealth are more likely to do so independently than by working for others. "The self-employed are typically the wealthy class in America," he says.

The book traces the history of Black entrepreneurship in America, beginning in the 1600s. Rogers addresses the impact of slavery, the Civil War and Jim Crow laws and provides insight from African-American leaders, including President Barack Obama. The book also serves as a textbook for those seeking to start a business, and includes chapters on idea development, legal issues, business plans and estate planning.

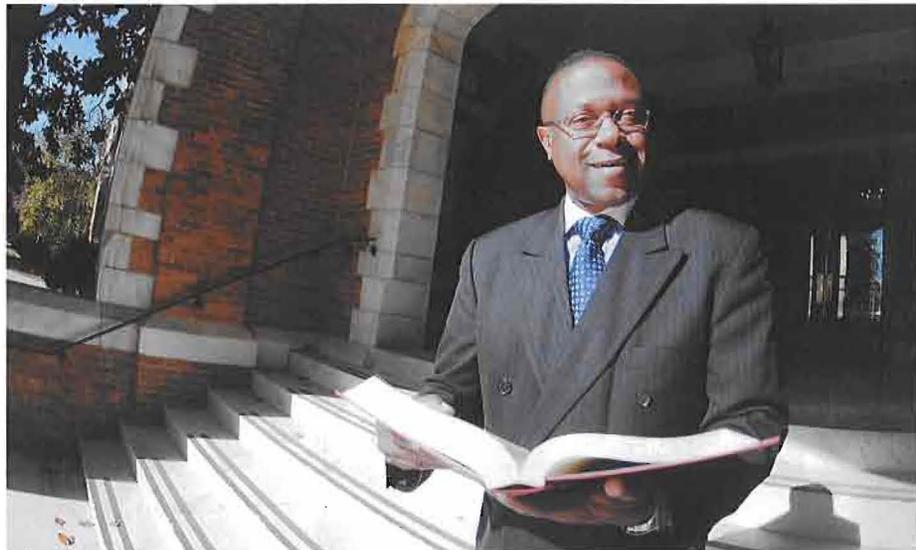
Rogers says one of the major challenges for aspiring entrepreneurs is a lack of follow-through. "The definition of entrepreneurship is to pursue an opportunity without regard for whether you have all of the resources in place," he explains. "A lot of people never get beyond the dreaming stage; I call that analysis paralysis. It is necessary to get a design down on paper and imperative that you pick up the proverbial hammer and not just dream about the house you want to build."

The pursuit of independent endeavors, he adds, helps individuals and communities, as well as the country as a whole: "Entrepreneurship is good for the economy."

In fact, half of all employees in the United States work for small

businesses. The problem, according to Rogers, is that Black businesses are underrepresented. The Small Business Administration estimates that 7.1 percent of entrepreneurs are African Americans, while African Americans make up more than 13 percent of the U.S. population. Creating new companies, Rogers says, will combat poverty and reduce unemployment in certain communities.

The School of Law's Professor of the Year in 2009, Rogers was born in Washington, D.C., and grew up in Huntsville, Ala., where his father taught at the historically Black college now known as Oakwood University. Although the civil rights movement had just gotten under way while Rogers was in elementary school, he felt somewhat protected despite being in the Deep



South. "I grew up in that era, but I grew up in a Black professional family cloistered in the protective walls of an HBCU," he says. "I was sheltered from some of the harsh realities."

With a mother who was also an educator, he found himself drawn to teaching others. He has been a full-time professor at his *alma mater* since 1986. Licensed to practice law in state and federal courts, he is highly regarded in legal circles as a consultant for attorneys hoping to be heard before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Rogers says he will maintain his focus on economic independence in a book he is currently writing, *A Primer for Understanding the American Economic System: Winners and Losers Under the American Style of Capitalism*. He will also continue to encourage his students to become the entrepreneurs of the future. ■■

Middleton Miles is a writer based in Virginia.