the most part, and they need technical assistance programs to enable them to hit the ground running. To that end, we have a partnership with the Snohemish County Private Industry Council to participate in an inner-city entrepreneurial training. What we do is training people to be entrepreneurs. We have graduated about 35 people, who then become eligible for a five thousand dollar grant from a government program to help get a business going. They have opened about 20 businesses by this point.

We need to create businesses. We need to marry technical assistance to creation of new businesses and also marry loan pools and loan leveraging money to the creation of new businesses. So that's the second principle, that we have to marry the money to the technical assistance and to the development of new entreprenurial ideas and development of new businesses.

So, the second thing is to try to wed these three realities together and to begin the process of getting money into the hands of people who are present business owners and people who want to be business owners.

What is the third principle?

The third principle around which the Black Dollar Days Task Force operates is around the principle of reinvestment. We believe that corporate America has historically been negligent in its responsibilities in North America — and not just to the African-American community. However, the place that has been devastated by the absence of reinvestment has been the African-American community. For that reason, we believe that corporate America should be pressed and pressured to make that kind of reinvestment.

The reinvestment that we are talking about has three levels. The first has to do with hiring representative numbers of management and top-level executives in each firm. That number should be in proportion to the numbers of African-Americans that are located in proximity to their corporate offices. This is one way in which the money can go back to the African-American community.

The second level is that their charitable gifts should reflect percentage-wise the number of African-Americans that are located in inner cities that are located near the corporations.

Finally, we believe that the business sub-contracts should reflect on a percentage basis the African-Americans that live in proximity to the corporations, and that they should put their money in the banks that are located in the inner city.

What percentage of Seattle's population is African-American?

Between ten and eleven percent.

Do you have research showing that corporate investment falls far below that percentage in terms of the reinvestment that you are talking about?

Our figures show that, for example, the corporation that we are targeting now — Nordstrom — their national reinvestment level for all minorities is 0.8%. The level for African-Americans is less than that.

The corporation you are targeting is the clothing retailer Nordstrom. You say they have a terrible record on reinvestment, while they reply that the Black Dollar Days Task Force is simply misinformed. Have you seen any significant changes in Nordstrom's policies since you have targeted them in your campaign?

We don't consider the changes they have made to be significant.

Our understanding of significant changes has to do with our notion of reinvestment, and our notion of what we are talking about. We are talking about parity, and about corporate responsibility and diversity, real diversity that takes seriously the cultural autonomy of each minority group and doesn't just lump all minorities together.

When Nordstrom lumps all minorities together, for us it takes on a racist assumption that all minorities have the same needs and thus get assessed the same way. For example, especially in the retail clothing industry, African-Americans spend per individual much more money on clothes than do, for example, Asians or Hispanics.

I'm not prepared to give figures on this, but it is something we are working on. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that African-Americans use clothes as a means by which to achieve self-esteem.

Therefore, they should not be lumped into a larger group, they should be considered in relation to how much they spend themselves in the store. And if Nordstrom doesn't want to do that kind of research we'll do it for them.

Our research shows that the African-American community provides about 35 percent of the retail gross earnings of the downtown store. Just recently, Nordstrom called a meeting of African-Americans that it thinks it can work with — nobody from our coalition went to the meeting — and one of

the things that came out in the meeting was that they are thinking of closing the downtown store. The reason they are thinking of closing it is that no retail store can afford to lose 35 percent of their earnings and keep it open. And we know they are hurting.

Because of the boycott Black Dollar Days has organized?

We think that has something to do with it.

What about this meeting that Nordstrom called? I understand that this is not the first time that the corporation has invited African-American leaders not affiliated with Black Dollar Days to meetings. What are they trying to accomplish by doing this?

What has happened repeatedly — and again just yesterday — is that Nordstrom has tried to get out of a new understanding of community reinvestment by inviting in people it had previously talked to about other notions of reinvestment. They are trying to divide the community.

What they are trying to do is get the community into a debate on what notion of reinvestment is possible.

What the leadership of the community has repeatedly told us is that they accept our understanding of reinvestment. Nordstrom refuses to believe this, and so they continue to get people in to disagree with the notions we have set forth. So to that end, they have invited some people to meetings, people that they had previously had some discussions with, but most of these people declined to go because they didn't want to get into a debate with Nordstrom about what notion of reinvestment was going to be accepted by the African-American community.

We believe that by the act of declining those leaders are telling us and telling Nordstrom that they have bought in to our idea of what reinvestment really meant. Yesterday, Nordstrom sent out about 20 invitations to African-American leaders. We understand that only about five people went and they represented no African-American civil rights organization or community group.

Let me ask you about your tactics and how they fit into your overall strategy for economic development. You have developed a relatively confrontational campaign against Nordstrom, much more confrontational than is usually the case for groups in the U.S. that do work around reinvestment and economic development. What led you to decide on this type of campaign?

First of all, the first two principles of reinvestment — the self-help and the Black Dollar Days — are important. But the notion that we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps when we have no boots is a notion that we think is misguided.

The fact is that corporate America has gotten a leg up consistently with the assistance of the government and courts. This whole notion of Horatio Alger is a myth and we are not going to buy into it. We believe that when you look at the figures that 35% of the wealth in this country is in the hands of 1% of the people that there is a real serious problem in this country with the unequal distribution of wealth. It's not only a problem for African-Americans, it's a problem for the inner cities because the rich have no vested interest in reinvesting in America, in the cities of America.

We believe that in order to get these people to the point where they can understand their civic responsibility to the cities of America and the people that live in them, we are going to have to confront them. We have to confront them with their responsibilities to reinvest.

What we call [what they do] is economic strip-mining of the cities. It's like clear-cutting a forest. You cut down all the trees, and what you have left is a barren wasteland. The corporations come in and they take out all the money, especially in the retail industry. They build the stores in the suburbs, where the tax base is, and then they advertise in the inner city. They get people to come out to the stores and spend their money, but they don't put any money back into the inner city.

Nordstrom says that they have helped raise about $600,000 nationwide for reinvestment in minority communities in inner cites all across America. Compare that to the $5 million they spent in one suburb of Washington to resurface the tennis courts!

We have got to stop depending on the federal government to save the cities. Corporate America is the real villain.

I'm not saying the government doesn't have a role, but we can't depend on the government to lead corporate America because they are controlled by corporate America. So there has to be a grassroots effort, the same way that it took a grassroots effort to get corporate America to see its responsibilities to the environment. It's now our job to get corporate America to see its responsibility to put back some of the money it's taking out of the inner city — just the money it's taking out.

If they are not taking the money out, then they have no responsibili-