

Black Owned Clothing

Written by Robert ID343

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At Howard University students may have spotted brand names such as H.O.B.O., Universal Madness, Shooters and a list of other apparel across campus. These local brands have thrived throughout the D.C. metropolitan area for years, some even gaining recognition from celebrity figures.

Located on Georgia Avenue not far from Howard's campus, Universal Madness was started originally as a line of embroidered T-shirts during the mid 1980s, and has evolved into a popular store that offers a wide range of urban/sports apparel for men and women. Founded by D.C. native Eddie Van, Universal Madness has served the community for years. Van's brother, Ricky Van, says the store has come across many people who have gone on to success.

"When Karl Kani was at Howard, my brother gave him a spot in the store. He never looked back... Puff used to post flyers for parties he was throwing around '93, '94."

According to Van, his store prides itself on helping loyal customers from the local community.

"People in Georgetown don't look out for you. Here, if we know you, I'll look out for you. We'll help you out if you're short. I know how it is."

Motivated by the success of Universal Madness, D.C. native Kanney Westray started We R One Clothing. Like "Madness," We R One started as simple T-shirts, and expanded when it opened a store on Florida Avenue. Today, it is supported and co-owned by NBA point guard and Maryland native Sam Cassell, whose financial backing, combined with local support, enables the company to persevere.

Other stores have similar reputations as being community-oriented. The H.O.B.O. shop, as described by Van as "our version of FUBU," stands for "Helping Our Brothers Out" and offers men's sportswear designed to combat the high cost of designer labels.

Shooters Store, located in Southeast D.C., was founded in Washington D.C. by "Shooter-Rob" and expanded to Baltimore in 2001. Shooters' success is apparent in its celebrity clientele. Entertainers such as Allen Iverson, Jadakiss, Big Tigger and Irv Gotti, among others, have all been spotted wearing Shooters apparel.

These stores, among several other Black-owned and operated clothing shops in D.C., maintain mutual respect and support for one another. The entrepreneurial mindset of these founders has been rewarded by the continuous support of their devoted patrons. Sophomore philosophy major Kofi Adease says, "From what I get, Universal Madness basically describes our

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area-what people don't see. It's crazy out here." However, Adease finds fault with the price range for such brands. "They make a killing. [A] shirt was \$45, but in actuality, it should be 15."

Other D.C. residents simply choose not to shop at these stores because of the prices. Junior Marion Stewart says she would rather spend her money on more accredited brands.

"For one, it costs too much and it's not name brand for real. I could get more for my money and it will be recognized." As a native of Washington D.C., however, Stewart does acknowledge the importance of local support.

"I think maybe I should support them because I'm from D.C., but at the same time, some if it is corny."

Despite some criticism, local name brands continue to be embraced by community members and outsiders alike. For more information on Black-owned businesses, go to www.blackrefer.com.