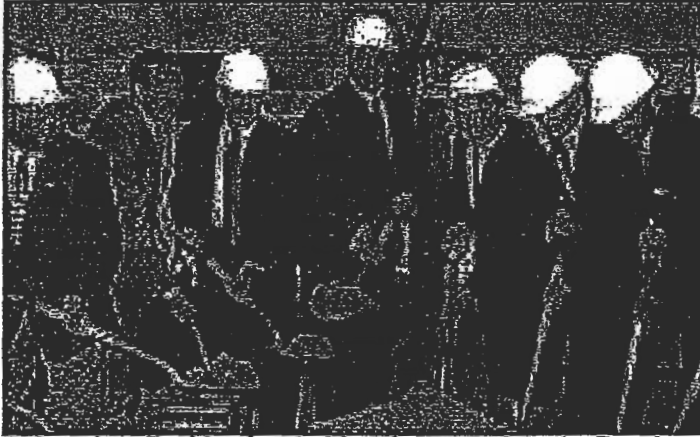


Powerful Black Real Estate Developer Starts Hotel Construction

Peebles: Trumping History

“His grandfather used to be a doorman, and today he is building hotels and opening up higher doors for African-Americans.”

— **Andrew Ingraham,**
President of
Horizons
Marketing
Group



R. Donahue Peebles (center) breaks ground on the Royal Crowne Plaza Resort, the nation's first African-American owned luxury hotel.

By **Anna Robertson**
ABCNEWS.com

Aug. 4 — Two years ago, R. Donahue Peebles became the first black to join the tony Miami Beach Bath Club.

Last June he set out to buy it.

Peebles, one of America's most successful black real estate developers, does not view race in America in black and white—but green.

“Anything's possible in this country,” he says. “Everybody is capable of doing wonderful things, if you're willing to make the sacrifices.”

With a portfolio of over \$250 million, Peebles Atlantic Development Corporation is the largest black-owned hotel and real estate company in the country.

The company broke ground this week on the \$64 million Royal Crowne Plaza Hotel in Miami Beach, which will be the first four-star, majority black-owned hotel in the nation.

'A Symbol of Hope'

Peebles' colleagues unanimously describe him as “sophisticated,” “professional” and “a gentleman.”

“He is really shown as a symbol of hope in our community,” says Andrew Ingraham, president of

- ▶ home
- ▶ summary
- ▶ U.S.
- ▶ world
- ▶ business
- ▶ technology
- ▶ science
- ▶ health&living
- ▶ travel
- ▶ espn sports
- ▶ mr.showbiz
- ▶ dispatches
- ▶ abcnews shows
- ▶ gallery
- ▶ weather
- ▶ local
- ▶ search

- ▶ [mail to ABCNEWS.com](#)
- ▶ [send this page to a friend](#)
- ▶ [toolbox](#)

“I liked the symbolism of being the first minority member. It was a nice statement.”

— **R. Donahue Peebles**

Horizons Marketing Group, a national tourism advisory committee. "His grandfather used to be a doorman, and today he is building hotels and opening up higher doors for African-Americans."

While Peebles—who was raised by a single mother—didn't come from money, he did have connections.

His mother's friendship with a California congressman led to a job as a congressional page. President Carter handed him his high school diploma in the White House Rose Garden.

By 19, Peebles had his own real estate appraisal business and had worked his way into Washington, D.C., Mayor Marion Barry's inner circle. When he was 24, Barry appointed him as the youngest chairman of D.C.'s Board of Review, the powerful civic council that reviews property tax assessments.

By 1994, Peebles was firmly established as a successful real estate developer in the Washington area. While on vacation in Florida, he read in *The Miami Herald* that Miami Beach was looking for a black hotel developer.

The city wanted to end a three-year black tourism boycott that had started in 1990 after Miami politicians snubbed South African President Nelson Mandela.

Peebles made his move. His deal to build the Royal Palm Crowne Plaza Resort ended the boycott, which had cost southern Florida about \$30 million.

Peebles then won a competitive battle to build the Fort Lauderdale Convention Center Hotel, which will be the city's first minority-owned hotel and the nation's first minority-owned national convention center when it opens in early 2000.

Important Black Role Model

Today at age 38, Peebles has clearly positioned himself as a role model in the African-American community.

"I like to think that the role I have is as a symbol," he says. "Young African-Americans are faced with almost entirely athletic or entertainment role model—you have to be born with natural talent. What the business world offers is the ability to develop skills."

He has promised that up to 50 percent of the Royal Crowne Plaza's economic impact will flow into minority communities, at least 50 percent of the over 200 employees will be minorities, and African-Americans will hold 25 percent of the resort's senior management positions.

"My responsibility is that as we're building these symbols, if I'm the only beneficiary, then I've failed," he says. "In my case who I am and what I am and how I got there needs to be the guiding force for how I operate."