

Perspectives



Innovators: Then and Now

by Prof. McKinley Burt

In keeping with the theme of Black History Month, I will devote several articles to African-American innovators and inventors who have made significant contributions to the professions and technology of the world. The first two contributors are from another day and time—when it is almost unbelievable that a Black could persevere against the odds which confronted people of color.

First Woman Physician in State of Alabama, a Black: "Dr. Hallie Turner Johnson, educated at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia, became resident physician at Tuskegee Institute after successfully standing for the Alabama State Board of Examiners. She died in 1900 at her home in Nashville, Tennessee."

Burkins Modernizes the Gatling Gun: "Eugene Burkins, inventor of the Burkin's Automatic Machine Gun was at one time a Chicago shoe shine boy... barely able to read or write... never a soldier and no experience with a gun, he made his first model with a pen knife after examining pictures of the Battleship Maine... Leading colored people financed a production model and Admiral Dewey said it was 'by far the best machine gun ever made - seven times faster than the Gatling Gun.' Several foreign countries offered large sums for the right to manufacture, but Mr. Burkins and his partners proposed to control the invention."

The following scientists and engineer are today's senior African-American practitioners of the technical arts. Many younger men and women have risen to swell these ranks of the best America has to offer. All are in addition to the notables I have frequently cited in my lectures and on television - and in my now internationally-distributed book, *Black Inventors of America*.

Katherine Johnson: former Aerospace Technologist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Langley Research Center. This is the mathematician and physicist whose development of analytic techniques for examining data on space navigation and lunar orbital missions led to a successful landing on the moon. It was her work, primarily, which led to the Group Achievement Award presented to NASA's Lunar Spacecraft and Operations Team.

O.S. Williams: Black aeronautical engineer. A specialist in small rocket engine design (at Thiokol Chemical Corporation), he later at Grumman International produced the control rocketed systems that guided lunar modules during the moon landing. William, a vice president of the firm is now in charge of trade and industrial relations with African nations. His work includes the applications of solar and wind energy.

Rufus Stokes: Early environment-concerned scientist. Mr. Stokes who began as a machinist for an incinerator company, A very important and pioneering patent was granted to him on an air-purification device to reduce to a safe level the gas and ash from furnace and powerplant smoke. His "clean air machine" technology has not only advanced ecology, but has greatly alleviated the problems of people with respiratory ailments.

J. Ernest Wilkins Jr.: Mathematician and Physicist who received his doctorate from the University of Chicago at age 19. His major talents have been in the field of nuclear power, becoming part owner of a company which designed and developed reactors for power generation. Researchers in space and nuclear projects are in space and nuclear projects are indebted to him for development of shields against Gamma Rays. He is a former president of the American Nuclear Society.

1990 Proclaimed as the Year of Malcolm X

The National Malcolm X Commemoration Commission has proclaimed 1990 as The Year of Malcolm X in honor of the great African-American leader who was assassinated 25 years ago on February 21, 1965.

"In honoring Malcolm X," declared Dr. James Turner, national coordinator of the Commission, "we are paying tribute to the memory of a master teacher who was one of the most formidable intellectual, spiritual, and ideological leaders of the 20th Century—a resolute champion of the liberation of African people around the world. His truth was powerful. It dignified our spirit; it educated and corrected our self-image; it revolutionized our political consciousness. By studying his life, we draw lessons that will aid in the survival and progress of our people."

Appropriately, then, the theme for this year's activities is "MALCOLM X: The Life, The Legacy, The Lessons". On February 21, 1990, the 25th anniversary of Malcolm X's assassination:

- We Remember Malcolm Day observances will be held at a number of Black college campuses around the country.

- We Remember Malcolm Day will be observed in New York City with a memorial service at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.

- A national signature drive will be launched to encourage a broad cross-section of African-Americans to endorse the idea of observing May 19—Malcolm X's birthday—as an African-American Day of Commemoration in 1990 and beyond.

The overall goals of the Year of Malcolm X are:

- To increase awareness among African-Americans about the contributions of Malcolm X to the progress and development of African People in the United States and abroad.

- To sponsor activities that provide a national opportunity for people of African descent to honor his memory through concrete actions and programs.

- To promote and support existing observances in honor of Malcolm X in African-American and African communities throughout the United States and the world.

- To encourage and support efforts to have appropriate monuments and memorials developed in Malcolm X's memory, i.e., parks, libraries, murals, etc.

The proclamation of 1990 as The Year of Malcolm X is a project of the African American Progressive Action Network.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

'Education That Works'

Let me state at the outset that I'm one of those who think the last thing we need is another education report. And then let me make an exception. *Education That Works: An Action Plan for the Education of Minorities* addresses an issue of vital importance to all of us concerned about our nation's schools, our nation's children, and our nation's future.

The report, funded by the Carnegie Corporation, is the result of nearly two years of work by a group of educators and social scientists at MIT. They analyzed programs that are successfully educating minority youth and came up with a plan to make all schools work for minority students.

The recommendations of *Education That Works* will be familiar to regular readers of this column. As the authors point out, quality schooling for minority children means quality schooling for all children—regardless of race, ethnic group, or gender. What makes this report so important is its focus on a critical issue at a crucial time.

In the next few weeks, the White House and the National Governors' Association will issue the national goals for education mandated by last fall's education summit. As we discuss ways to reach these goals, we must not for one moment forget the 13 million minority students in our nation's schools.

Providing quality education for these students remains America's unfulfilled obligation. In just ten years, one-third of America's public school students will be members of racial and ethnic minorities. If our schools

America's Obligation To Minority Children

the heart of improving education in America.

The first is that providing quality education for minority students requires a fundamental restructuring of our schools. The report defines restructuring as moving educational decision making to the local level so that teachers and principals can redesign their schools to meet their students' individual needs.

The authors of the report have little patience with the argument that simply allowing parents to choose the schools their children attend is the path to improving education: "We believe this to be unlikely because this proposal puts the cart before the horse. Schools must be restructured before students can have a choice."

The second critical guideline is that we must intervene early if we want all America's children to arrive at school ready to learn. There's no shortage of research documenting the importance of adequate pre-natal and infant nutrition—and the success of programs like Head Start that provide appropriate learning experiences for toddlers and pre-school children. But as the report points out, "We seem to lack the national will to do what is clearly in the children's or the country's best interest."

Education That Works urges us to recognize the power of education: "The door to the future for every child is first and foremost the door to the schoolhouse."

We owe it to ourselves—and to our children—to open that door wide for every youngster. To do any less would be a betrayal of America's children, America's future, and America's ideals.



KEITH GEIGER
President, NEA

continue to fail these children, we are writing off one-third of our future leaders, our future workforce, our future citizens.

Education That Works lays out 10 principles to guide us in averting this national tragedy. These guidelines stress the need to build real bridges between communities, work, and schools in ways that are respectful of the diverse cultures that comprise our nation. All 10 guidelines are important, but I'd like to focus on just two that I believe go to

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This Way For Black Empowerment

by Dr. Lenora Fulani

High Expectations

On New Year's Day 1990 the cops of 69th Precinct in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn, New York stomped 27 year old Dane Kemp, Jr. to death right on the floor of the station house. Lately the cops have moved on to younger targets; they shot down 13 year old Robbie Cole on the streets of East Harlem because, they say, he had a gun (eyewitnesses say he lay the unloaded and broken weapon in the street and pleaded for his life before he was shot). A few days before that it was 14 year old Jose Luis Lebron, a Puerto Rican youngster, who was shot to death in Brooklyn by cops who say he was reaching for a gun—which he didn't have. That was four days after they killed Louis Liranso, 17.

In the 60's, when many of us believed that we would overcome someday soon, college seemed to offer one way out of the terror of racial violence. In 1990 we know that the terror of the streets follows our kids everywhere.

Students at the State University of New York in New Paltz have experienced it firsthand: "Officer Calandria lifted me off the ground and placed me in a chokehold, and I could not breathe. I thought maybe this was normal procedure. I'm standing on my toes, and I'm thinking, 'I can't breathe, but he'll let me breathe in a little while.'" Then they handcuffed me, held me in the chokehold, my feet, by toes, are barely on the floor and I'm thinking he's going to let me go soon. But he didn't. I hear Michelle and Lisa crying, and witnesses who had come around the back yelling and screaming. It was Pandemonium everywhere. Then he slams me face first into the police car; I'm still not resisting arrest, and I'm still in a chokehold, and I'm thinking, he's going to kill me, and I didn't resist, and I'm going to die right here on the hood of his car. I had no reservations at all at this point that I was going to die. All I could think was "Ross, what's your brother going to think?" That's all I could think."

It all started when the white manager of a cafeteria on campus pulled the TV out after deciding that the Black students didn't know how to act right. The next day a group of students came in with a portable tape player, and began playing Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" and a tape of Minister Farrakhan."

The campus police were soon on the scene, followed by town and county police officers. Eight students—seven young Black men and a young white woman (who refused the cops' offer to let her escape arrest)—were arrested and charged with re-

sisting arrest, obstruction of governmental administration and playing the radio too loud. Given the chance to plea bargain, they refused.

The county district attorney is out for blood. "We've put it to them that if you want a trial, we're more than happy to accommodate," he told a reporter, adding that punishment was "absolutely necessary."

After seeing their court appointed lawyers laughing it up with the judge, the young people decided to take their case to Governor Mario Cuomo, Mr. Democratic Party liberal himself. Sorry, they were told by an aide—the district attorney down there runs the show.

In desperation, one of the students called me. "Dr. Fulani is in an ideal position really to help us out in our fight against them because she's independent. She's not working for Governor Cuomo, so she has no restrictions on what she can do for us and what she can't," is how a student supporter of the eight explains it. "She's just here to make sure that justice is done. And that's important, because there's a lot of people out there who want to help us, but we know that their help has to be limited to a certain point, because you're talking about jobs, you're talking about a political thing."

Not all of the students were willing to go with me. But a number of them are down for the fight. Our children need adults who will go all the way with them and for them, because the cops are going all the way.

So many young people are not integrated or integrateable into this society, and they know it. They know exactly what's going on; they came out by the thousands to protest the murder of Yusuf Hawkins—the young black man who was beaten to death by a mob of white youth last summer in Bensonhurst. They support the Nation of Islam. They come out radical. They know who Reverend Al Sharpton is and who I am. The issue is to channel that energy into a war against reaction. People want to eat, to walk on the streets and not get their brains blown out, not have their kids recruited to sell drugs. The reformers think these are "high expectations." High expectations? Look at what people are doing in Eastern Europe to those who stand in the way of democracy.

Dr. Lenora Fulani is the chairperson of the New Alliance Party and a practicing social therapist in Harlem. She can be contacted at the New Alliance Party, 2032 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10035 and at (212) 996-4700.

Letter to the Editor

Let's imagine, for a moment, that Martin Luther King, Jr. is with us today. What would he be thinking? What would he say? Knowing what he stood for... a world where people judge one another on the basis of individual worth, not on the color of their skin... the message he would share with us is clear:

Do the right thing... the fair thing... the just thing.

He might go on to talk about how Oregon's tradition of independence is embodied in the Union Avenue petition.

He might point out that Oregon was the first state to enact initiative, referendum and recall laws... to give the people the final say on issues of importance.

He would certainly applaud the petitioners for working peacefully to achieve their aims.

He would then use all his God-given powers to oppose those aims... because a higher principle is at issue. It is the principle of equity. Dr. King lived... and died... for that principle.

More than anyone in American history, he made that principle an inspiration for oppressed people everywhere.

More than anyone in American history, he symbolized... and continues to symbolize... the on-going struggle to achieve equity for millions of individuals... people who are denied full participation in society for all the wrong reasons.

I believe the City Council was right in recognizing Dr. King's accomplishments. I believe we were right in naming a street in his honor... because his life's work was cut short, and the struggle is far from over.

I hope and pray the people of Portland will open their minds, and their hearts, before deciding this issue at the ballot box.

Whatever the outcome, the initiative process has worked.

Personally, I will do everything in my power to convince the people of Portland... prior to election day... that Martin Luther King Boulevard means more to our future than Union Avenue means to our past.

Commissioner Dick Bogle

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