

Perspectives

by Professor McKinley Burt



"The Play is the Thing" or Back to the Future

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When Shakespeare has his character say, "The play is the thing," there is hardly a degree of distinction between that insight and Marshall McLuan's famed statement, "The medium is the message." Here, a playwright and a linguist, respectively, are each telling us what must be perceived about life by a person who hopes to become truly educated. And that is, never mind the rhetoric or confusing verbiage that flows from the mouth of the politician, philosopher or scientist--or textbook--but, seek the meaning from the "action" or role of the actor (even if it is an electron).

The phrase "Back to the future" speaks of a relevant direction for the education of African American youth if it would meet the stringent demands of a technical society moving into the 21st century. And it has direct relevance to the forward-looking (futuristic), "classical" education mode which was developed by Blacks over a hundred years ago--dismantled, unfortunately by those whom I like to refer to as "the intruders" (more about them later). I gave an example on page 6 of the Portland Observer for December 9, 1987, when I described the school opened in 1829 in Charleston, South Carolina by Daniel A. Payne, a "free Negro"; small Black children and a classical curriculum.

Having been told that the difference between a master and a slave was SUPERIOR KNOWLEDGE, the new teacher began with English grammar, arithmetic and geography...to this I added Playfair's Euclid (Geometry), biology and natural philosophy...in the meantime I furthered MY OWN LEARNING that I might better teach (he was mostly self-taught, having only three years of formal education), buying a Greek grammar and lexicon with which I mastered the Greek alphabet...my soul rejoiced as I proceeded on to French and Latin." Before his students reached the age of twelve Mr. Payne had introduced them to zoology and the standard classifications of flora and fauna--lacking funds to purchase materials, our

"classical" went into the woods himself to gather plants and small creatures to preserve and stuff for his classroom. (These are excerpts from a fascinating account found in the libraries of some southern Black colleges: Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne, "Recollections of Seventy Years"; Nashville 1888, pp. 19-25.)

Now, that is my meaning when I use the phrase "Back to the future". And in order to assess the validity of this observation in the current era, we need proceed no farther than an examination of the successful "classical curriculum" of the all-Black Chicago high school operated by the famed "Father Clements"--or of similarly nationally-acclaimed counterparts in New York and Washington, D.C. Like the future-looking Daniel Payne, the academic all-stars who run these institutions know that language, literature and mathematics are the key equipment a child must have to "break the code of knowledge". And again, like Payne our historical mentor, these masters of learning demonstrate daily that "The play is the thing."

That is, almost all knowledge is about the "performance" of some thing or another: an individual, organization, or a nation as in history--or in the field of science where considerations are about the role of particles or energy levels in the initiation or participation in a process--or about events as they unfold upon our "stage" of experience, and we seek to assess the values displayed by such "populations" (statistical characteristics or parameters).

The other half of the equation that facilitates "classical learning" is connected with the recognition that a great deal of what we pass off as "knowledge" is not any such thing at all; it is simply a collection of exercises in "classifying and naming" things. A list of Latin names for family groups of plants or animals tells you absolutely nothing about any member--unless you are already in possession of an extensive data base which would permit you

to make inferences or logical deductions about any individual. From the name alone you cannot determine if you might be poisoned, chased or bitten. "There is a Horribilis Rex in my backyard!" So?

Then it follows that one of the biggest reasons for the success of the schools of excellence I've described is their "classical curriculum" of literature and languages that enables the students to "break the code of knowledge" with an expansive data base of cultural literacy--and which permits their disciplined minds to draw upon all the chronicles of the historical bases of each area of human knowledge. That is why 85 percent of the "graduating" student body (90%) not only goes to college, but remains there, succeeding in every hard discipline from math and science to the rigidly structured humanities--among the highest achieving scholars of any race.

No, the blind cannot lead the blind, nor can the incompetent and uncommitted teach unmotivated youth. "Pay well for the best and dismiss the rest" said the long-suffering parents of the other schools in Chicago's degenerating educational system. As I reported here several weeks ago, they have finally been able to place themselves in a position to do just that.

They have demonstrated no appetite for the cop-outs presented by "intruders"--alleged experts who offer such panaceas as vouchers and "schools-of-choice", both of which come with even more bussing. For these Black parents there is but one choice, "We want our schools to become the same kind of urban educational institutions that Father Clements has proved possible." They have a point! Three thousand years ago the Greeks came to the African Temple Schools for a superior education in the "classic tradition". Today the very least that African Americans can do is insist that their children come to innercity schools for a "classic education".

ESSENCE PUBLISHER NAMED TO TRANSAFRICA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Edward Lewis, publisher of ESSENCE Magazine and Chief Executive of Essence Communications, Inc. has just been named to the TransAfrica Board of Directors. It was announced at the Annual TransAfrica Dinner held in Washington, D.C. this past weekend.

TransAfrica, America's only African-American lobby that monitors United States foreign policy toward Africa and the Caribbean, is currently working with the Congressional black Caucus to spearhead an effort to increase foreign aid authorizations for Africa and the Caribbean.

Lewis has been a supporter of TransAfrica since its inception. His company plans to honor Winnie Mandela with its prestigious ESSENCE AWARD at a 20th Anniversary celebration on October 19 at Radio City Music Hall in New York City.

This year, ESSENCE celebrates its Twentieth Anniversary. One of the fastest-growing magazines in the United States, ESSENCE has a guaranteed monthly circulation of 850,000 and a readership of more than 4 million. Its parent company, Essence Communications, Inc. (ECI), includes Essence Direct Mail, which distributes ESSENCE by mail, a catalog marketed to Black consumers, and Essence Art Reproductions, Essence Licensing, another division of ECI, includes the Essence Eyewear line and the ESSENCE Collection by Butterick, a sewing-pattern wardrobe.

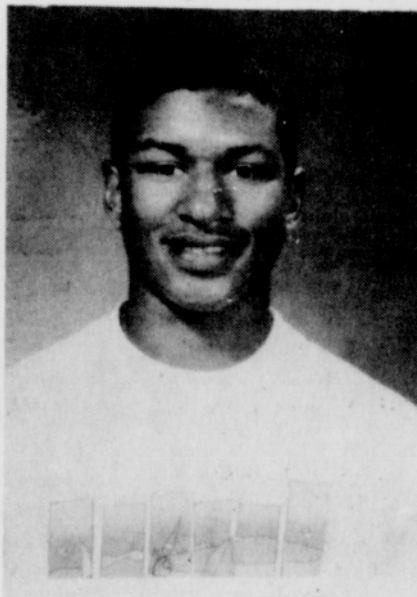
Contest sponsored by Local McDonald's Owner

Mr. Howard Hayashi is the local owner/operator of McDonald's. He sponsored and gave out "Congratulations" certificates to all the 3rd graders who participated in the "When I Grow Up" contest. However, as with any contest there are winners and Michelle Joseph, Michael Cormack, Beatrice Kelly, and Orthea Storey were those ambitious youngsters who claimed the honors.

The 3rd grade teachers at King Elementary encouraged and judged the essays at the local level.

The winning essays will now be entered in a statewide contest, where their essays will be judged against other winning essays. Though hundreds of 3rd graders participated in the "When I Grow Up" program, and were applauded for their thought and effort, only 18 of the essays made it to the final round of competition. Of the 18 essays 3 will emerge as winners. The first, second, and third prize winners will receive savings bonds.

BOSCO "ABIL" KANTE AWARDED



Bosco "Abil" Kante was awarded the rank of Eagle Scout at a Court of Honor at the Fremont United Methodist Church, 2620 N.E. Fremont Street, on June 4th.

Bosco graduated from Grant High School last year. He has completed his first year at University of Southern California where he is majoring in Mechanical Engineering. He was selected for the Dean's List and was recently elected as Treasurer for the National Society of Black Engineers Student Chapter.



AT&E UNVEILS WORLD'S FIRST WRISTWATCH PAGER;



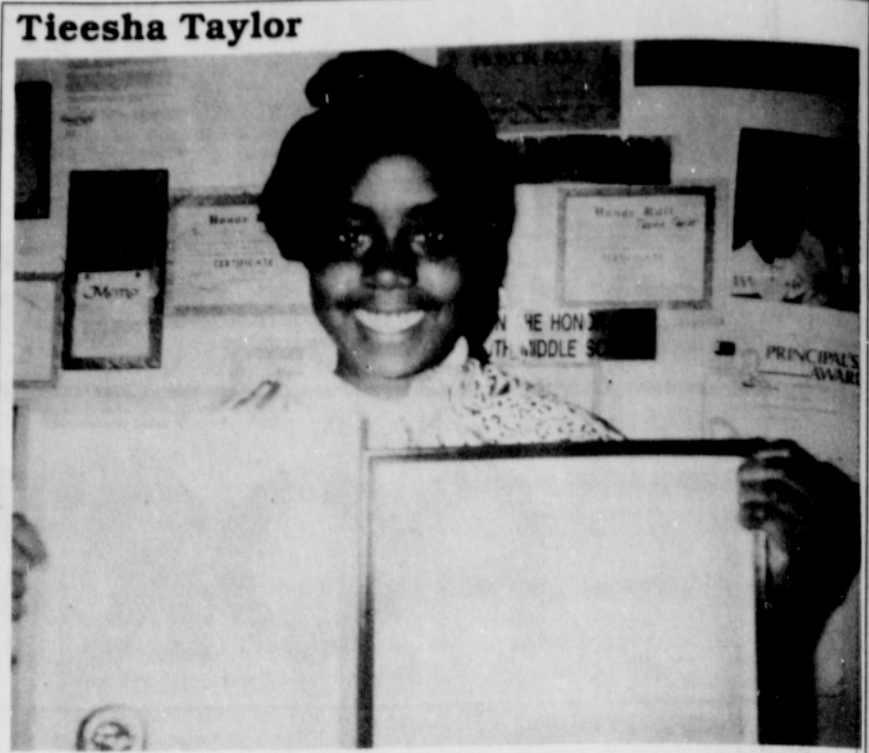
Ron Foerster, Ph.D.

DEMONSTRATES FIRST COAST-TO-COAST MESSAGE TRANSMISSION USING NEW TECHNOLOGY

A new era in personal communications began today with the official unveiling of the world's first paging system that uses a wristwatch as the receiver. During a four-city satellite conference, AT&E company officials successfully demonstrated the first coast-to-coast message transmission using its Personal Communications System (PCS) and SEIKO* RECEPTOR MessageWatch** receiver.

At the conference, Charles Skibo, president and chief operating officer of San Francisco-based AT&E Corporation, announced that the company has successfully completed the second and final field test phase for the RECEPTOR TM PCS in Portland, Ore. AT&E will now begin marketing the low-cost, easy-to-use service to consumers in Portland.

*SEIKO is a registered trademark of HATTORI SEIKO CO., LTD.
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TIEESHA TAYLOR A NATURAL RESOURCE

By Tony Washington

Tiesha Taylor graduated from Portsmouth Middle School with an exceptional grade point average of 4.0. Tiesha expressed great thanks to Jesus for making her strong, and to her Mom for giving her comfort in her time of need. Very shy but expressive, Tiesha feels strongly about her future success. At this time she is not certain about what she wants to be in life. I suppose it's natural for someone who wants to broaden her educational perspectives. By being herself, she is a definite role model for our future. After all, she is one of our natural resources. Congratulations to Tiesha!

Mentioned in Portland Public Schools. Black Academic All-Stars

Jefferson High School
Class of 1970 is holding their 20 year reunion August 10, 11, 12. Pre-registration by June 30, 1990 Any questions contact 282-8144

I'm not Deaf,

I just can't understand some words.

- I have difficulty hearing in noisy situations
- I hear people speak but have difficulty understanding the words.
- I have difficulty understanding on the phone.
- I have to turn up the radio or television to where it's uncomfortably loud for others.
- I haven't had my hearing tested in more a year.

If you said yes to any of the above, it's time to get your hearing tested at an authorized Miracle-Ear Center.

Call Today for Free Hearing Test. 253-0289, ask for Sheila

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

Special note: if you are unfamiliar with the Alabama merchant boycott, please see my column in May that explained it, or refer to the library's annals of newspapers on microfilm from that era. It's definitely worth knowing about, in that it can be very incredible what white folk have sometimes done to remain in the power seat.

June 21, 1958-An Alabama judge okays Blacks' rights to continue the Alabama merchant boycott, stating that every American has the right to purchase what and where he/she chooses.

The boycott started when Tuskegee, Alabama gained a law that took away Black Americans' right to vote. Through rearranging Tuskegee's city boundaries, the city managed to exclude nearly all of the four hundred African American voters, while retaining the voting status of the 600 white voters.

Additionally, the legislature okayed an amendment that allowed the abolition of Macon county to keep Blacks from having equal access to political power.

June 20, 1968-The University of Washington announces it stepped up plans to recruit African American, Mexican Americans, and American Indians. "Although a grade point average of 2.5 has usually been taken as a reliable criterion or probable success, other evidence is considered," stated director of new student services, Robert Long. "In the case of students subjected to adverse social and economic circumstances, grade point average is less likely to be a valid indicator of academic success."

June 20, 1970-The only woman in England's "Conservative Cabinet" (name for their ruling body) is selected--Margaret Thatcher starts her reign of power. Prior to being appointed to the cabinet, Thatcher first was a lawyer, then served as a junior minister for the government.

June 23, 1970-Black physician Claud Stephens, when running for sixth Congressional district, salvages his campaign: officials from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference find marked ballots against Stephens in his opponent's home. The ballots were given to the F.B.I. for further investigation.

Recommended reading: The May issue of *Ebony* has a great feature on Nelson Mandela, entitled "A Special Message To Black Americans", as well as Isiah Thomas' mother telling how she believes we can save children from gang entrance. Also, the June 1990 issue of *Mother Jones* has a good article on Mandela: it talks about Mandela's skill at negotiation with a group that is known for being non-negotiable. It also includes a question-and-answer session between Mandela and the author. Finally, if you can manage to get ahold of the September 1989 issue of *Mother Jones* (the downtown library should have it), it includes an insightful section on Black filmmaker Spike Lee, as well as a look at the Black street scene in New York.

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