

EDITORIAL

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perspectives

Well, That Will Teach Me To Open My Mouth, Won't It!

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT
Last week, I said such rash things as, "I'm quite seriously considering starting my own school, and have a very interested potential clientele... my modus operandi included what so many students are not getting today; a thorough understanding of the 'Binary System', coding and language."

I graciously accept the challenges, but of course I will have to assess the underlying offers of support and promised commitment within my usual frame of reference -- experience-based reality. I, too, have looked at buildings, conversed with potential staff and have had extended conversations with several human resource managers who, to say the least, are unhappy with the performance level of the recent additions to their firm's workforce.

And last week I got several calls to check out the "Governor's Education Summit" on CNN. I tuned in just in time to hear the CEO of IBM paraphrasing the very same "Basic Skills-Deficiencies" that I have cited time and again in this column. He underscored my position, that so-called "computer literacy" has no meaning if the reference is only to a flashy ability to manipulate the hardware and a facility at quoting from a cyberspace lexicon. You can bet I got off a communication in his direction, "...have been at work on this for 30 years".

I thought of several school principals and even a superintendent who have looked at me with big blue or brown eyes, then, with an expansive, condescending gesture, directed me to their "computer lab" to view the 21st century wonders they have wrought.

And I have stood there thinking, "here are thirty examples of my neighbor's glib, fast-talking kid who can program my VCR faster than I can turn it on -- but with whom I am having a terrible time explaining some

very basic concepts necessary to become the computer programmer he wants to be."

I explained to his angry parents that if he is to be more than a little robot, sitting at a little machine retrieving and reiterating "information" he may not really understand (but is nevertheless employable), then he first has to acquire a good grasp of basic language and computational skills.

"It's not being at the mall playing electronic games. It's about learning Boolean Algebra, binary mathematics, truth and decision tables and operators." Where, in addition to innumerable contemporary manuals and texts, I had kept some "ancient" manuals from IBM and digital Equipment Corporation (1950's, 1960's). One little handbook begins, "The Computer revolution is here in the sciences and engineering. No discipline will remain the same. Computer open up to many new ways of knowing and doing... Small general purpose computers have become an important part of this revolution."

And the text and instructions of this handbook proceeded in just as serious a vein. "That was the approach back then when we were learning computers", I explained to the parents. "Understanding programming and the basic logic was part and parcel of the approach to computers. It was like that credit card company advertises, "Don't leave home without it."

I led them through my best model for making my case, Digital Equipment's 1967, "Small Computer Primer". Section by section my position on the discipline became understandable: "Patterns in switches; flow diagrams, binary counting; octal representation; symbolic machine language; etc."

The parents left understanding what their little darling was going to have to learn to be a computer programmer -- not a robot, hypnotized by interactive hypes and the market pace of electronic consumerism. Like I have always said (and the IBM CEO), you gotta read, write and count. Real good!



By Professor McKinley Burt

NATIONAL RAINBOW COALITION

What's Wrong With This Picture?

We thought the Chicago Sun-Times headlined it best: "Thumbs Up for Jesse In Hollywood Crusade." But since so many others seemed to go out of their way to ignore the true intent of Monday night's protests, let's go through it one more time. We did not protest the Oscar ceremony itself; we used the occasion of the Oscars to illuminate the institutional biases of the film industry. When the lights turn inward, it's not such a pretty picture.

The bias reveals itself in four major ways: (1) racial exclusion and gender inequality; (2) cultural distortion; (3) lack of employment opportunities; and (4) lack of positions of authority.

Quincy Jones got it--that's why he wore the ribbon. Even the Wall Street Journal, in an otherwise diversionary essay about "quotas" (their word, not ours!), accidentally made our points for us. We quote: "Indeed, there aren't enough African-Americans in behind-the-scenes positions in Hollywood or in senior executive positions at the major studios, or who are members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. And black buffoonery has long been a stock-in-trade of the film and television industry...Hispanics and Asian-American are even more invisible than blacks in Hollywood, and to his credit Mr. Jackson did note this."

Reverend Jackson also noted a few other truths. Native American are excluded from behind the scenes, and almost always negatively exploited on the screens. And when the best

way for young actresses to compete for the Oscar is to play prostitutes and call girls (3 of this year's 5 nominees!), something is very, very wrong.

In conjunction with Latino, Asian-American, and Native American groups, the Rainbow Action Network organized protests and picket lines in 30 cities across the country, using the oscar broadcast to send our message to millions and millions of people around the world. This is the same message, Reverend Jackson raised nearly 2 years ago, when he formed the Rainbow Coalition Commission for Fairness in the Media, in reaction to the cancellations of "Arsenio Hall," "Sinbad," and "Rock Star Central" television shows.

The Rainbow message is the same--racial exclusion is wrong, whether it's in Hollywood, housing, or hotels. Last week, the message got through worldwide.

After a very successful meeting with officials from the Screen Actors Guild, the Directors Guild, and the

Writers Guild of America West, Rev. Jackson launched the Hollywood Rainbow covenant, to focus "upstream" in the movie industry, where the process begins. The participants noted that Rev. Jackson "brings an enormous credibility and an enormous presence to our efforts," pledged to "tell all of America's stories," (and use all of America's storytellers), and vowed to work "to see crews, executive suites and distribution offices that look like all of America's rainbow."

(1) Our thanks go out to the Rainbow Action Network in Albany, Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Louisville, Nashville, New Haven, San Francisco, Tallahassee, D.C., and all our other activists in cities across the country, for helping to make this year's Oscars a night to remember. (And our special thanks go out to Quincy Jones, for always keeping the faith.)

(2) Join us! If you would like to help launch a Rainbow Action Network in your city, call Leslie Watson-

Davis, at 202.728.1180. If you would like to help with the Rainbow Coalition Commission for Fairness in the Media, call Eddie Wong at 510.465.0120, ext. 421.

(3) The movie industry is not the only prominent institution whose failure to fully integrate we are highlighting this week. As it has for the past two years, the Rainbow Commission for Fairness in Athletics (RCFA) continues our ongoing battle to make the executive suites of American sports look more like the playing fields. According to profiles compiled by the RCFA, the statistics for the four teams in this year's NCAA basketball Final Four show a clear pattern of racial exclusion. The numbers in Kentucky don't look much different from those in Hollywood!

On the floor, the Final Four are 64% Black or Latino; in the athletic offices, almost 90% of the administrative positions, 83% of the coaching and training jobs, and 100% of the TV and radio jobs. Each of the four teams stands to reap more than \$1 million; and the NCAA has a \$1 billion contract with CBS-TV to televise the tournament--money literally being made on the blood, sweat, and tears of the athletes--the only ones left out in the cold! Call Charles Farrell for more info on the RCFA, at 202.728.1180.

One special note--Frank Watkins, for 28 years the "angry white male" of NRC, Breadbasket, PUSH has moved over to serve as Director of Communications for Cong. Jesse Jackson, Jr. We'll miss his Bulls' updates, but he's still in the family!

Civil Rights Journal Human Rights And Kenya

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON
Those of us old enough to remember Pan Africanism, the dream of one, free Africa which was voiced by those early leaders of newly-liberated African nations, will recall Jomo Kenyatta, the impressive and majestic first President of Kenya.

Along with Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Leopold Senghor of Senegal, these leaders represented the best of the Motherland. They helped many young African Americans to dream of a new post-colonial Africa of which we would all be proud.

The Kenya of today is very different from that dream. A recent report by Amnesty International provides evidence of torture, deaths, ill-treatment and the denial of medical care to prisoners, especially political prisoners, in Kenya. In addition, it found that human rights abuses against women reflect a pattern of repression

in Kenya and it has received reports that refugees from Uganda, Somalia and Rwanda are being harassed and tortured by Kenyan security forces.

The Amnesty International report found that investigations into torture by the police are rare and that many prisoners are tortured and then denied medical attention for many days. Kenyan police and security forces often beat prisoners with sticks, fists, handles of hoes and guns butts. Some political detainees have had their fingernails and toenails pulled out. Both men and women have been subjected to sexual humiliation.

Women, Amnesty has found, have been harassed, raped, tortured and killed.

Those women who are government critics, opposition activists, members of the human rights movement and relative of government opponents especially have been targeted. Several women political prisoners have been sexually abused while imprisoned. Meetings of women's groups have been violently broken up, including a June, 1994 meeting in which 100 women were beaten by police.

Kenyan police and security forces seem to have focussed on political activists and opponents of President Daniel Arap Moi's government. For example Geoffrey Ndungu Gichuki, one of 67 arrested on Kenya's Independence Day in 1994 on suspicion of holding an illegal meeting, was found to have developed gangrene after being tied to a tree and beaten. He later lost his arm.

Similarly, Koigi wa Wamwere, human rights activist and former member of the Kenyan Parliament; his brother, Charles Kuria Wamwere, and G.G. Mjunguna Ngengi, a local councillor--all critics of the Moi government--faced the death penalty on charges of robbery after they were alleged to have raided a police station in 1993. After much international pressure, the death penalty charge was dropped, but all three were sentenced to four years in jail and six strokes of the cane after a 16-month trial.

Early last year two human rights organizations and one opposition paper in Nairobi were fire-bombed. The printing press of the paper was immobilized and two other human rights groups have been banned. Opposition members of parliament have been arrested and detained for up to three months.

The rights of assembly, association, conscience and free expression are guaranteed in the Kenyan constitution. But the promises are hollow and the dreams of Jomo Kenyatta are meaningless as long as the government of Daniel Arap Moi violates the rights of its citizens.

(Contact your U.S. Representative about HR135 which addresses the current human rights violations in Kenya and calls for a commitment by the Kenyan government to the principles it has pledged to uphold.)

It is unfair for the prison system to compete with private industry in manufacturing products using low cost labor. Yet, landfills around every city are filling up with mostly recyclable materials before their time because of labor costs. If it stands to reason the cost of labor is keeping private industry from recycling the large percentage of valuable materials going into landfills, ...then the lack of competition best positions the prison system to adopt this stepchild that has become so important in stabilizing the resource of this country.

Combining recycling with the prison system is a win-win scenario. Everyone benefits. Prisons benefit from badly needed extra income. Idle prisoners benefit from the self-worth a daily job provides. Their victims could receive increased restitution from convict's wages. There would be a nationwide increase of manufacturing jobs to supply existing prisons with the extensive amount equipment needed for industrial recycling. Newly designed commercial recycling prisons would be built in very state. Penal institutions could network their computers to exchange problems and solutions, research and development. Recycled materials could be sold directly to industry or traded via the commodities market. According to a study of 12 manufacturers released by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) Washington, D.C., the construction industry alone could save million of tons of virgin timber being cut by using cellulose waste construction materials.

The many different directions the waste management industry could take using the unlimited manpower of prisons combined with the fast growing technology of recycling is vital to the generations to come. Every piece of the puzzle to make the idea a reality exists in society today except legislative direction and incentives for venture capital.

Should Prisons Recycle America's Trash? A Nation Wide Poll

BY MICHAEL WAYNE BOYD
Try this "Reality Check": Before you throw away your next bag of trash, look in it.

You will probably find several different grades of paper and paperboard, styrofoam, glass, cans, plastics, and other things. With today's technology, most of what's in your trash can be recycled, however the reality is, it will all probably end up in a landfill. Why? The sorting process. Dump your bag of trash onto the floor and sort it into piles of everything you think can be recycled. Now picture in your mind sorting every bag of trash discarded in one day across this country. The cost to employ the number of people needed to sort trash in facilities like mixed waste processing plants, around the clock, in thousands of locations throughout every state, is more than can be recouped by privately owned businesses.

Since it appears the cost of labor is the one major obstacle to be overcome before recycling can reach its maximum potential, then doesn't common sense dictate that society turn to the one institution where this manpower lies dormant, the penal system?

America warehouses its convicts under the umbrella of the Constitution. They have 100% medical coverage, three meals a day, television in their cells, gymnasium facilities in the prison yards, and legal recourse against the system if they feel their rights are being violated. Everything provided to the convicts is at the expense of you, the American public. Do you feel convicts should help pay to house and care for them by utilizing the technology of recycling to recover the millions of dollars of materials going into landfills daily?

Could a joint venture between the waste management industry and the prison systems operate at a profit if labor were provided at below minimum wage?

Can prison labor be provided at below minimum wage? Yes, in fact this issue has been argued in the courts several times. In *Gilbreath v. Cutter Biological, Inc.*, 931 F.2d 1320, Judge Trott's opinion stated: "that it is highly implausible that Congress intended the Fair Labor Standards Act's minimum wage protection, to be extended to felons serv-

ing time in prison". Also, the Ashurst-Summers Act, 18 U.S.C. 1761(c)(2), allows prisons to recoup expenses for room and board and requires prisoners to make payments for support and restitution when they are earning wages. Legal instruments for using prison labor exist in Arizona, Alabama, Texas, and most other states. The real problem is the availability of enough work for all the convicts the system now houses.

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