

Education

Requiem For A Master Mentor

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

We are all so much the better for it, that this scholar and learned man, William (Bill) - McClendon, has passed our way.

When he died last August 5, 1996 I was forcibly and reluctantly compelled to accept the fact that I had lost a mentor and adviser who had looked 'straight ahead' for the fifty years I had known him.

It was a bit longer than that, in fact, for the first newspaper article I ever wrote was for McClendon's "The Peoples Observer" in 1944. I remember quite well that it was a proud piece detailing the progress of the "All-Negro 99th Pursuit Squadron". I remember as well, Bill, the patient and indulgent editor, politely but firmly correcting my amateurish excursion into the world of journalism. The man demanded competence.

Our next round of mentorism occurred at his jazz club, "McClendon's". Bill had just purchased one of the 'new' wire recorders that had recently come on the market (tapes came later).

Though the idea was to preserve the music of the jazz greats who were booked at the club--Ellington, Basie, Oscar Peterson, et al--there was, of course, a great deal of playing around and ad-libbing over the mike.

Again, a young McKinley Burt who thought that he was the most articulate, clear-speaking spokesman around was brought to rein by

the master mentor.

Bill played back some of my best effort; he didn't say anything, just looked at me while I sought a rock to crawl under.

I heard almost unintelligible gibberish with a deep southern accent, flat and a little whiny, and no final "g" ever added to a participle.

Well, you get the general idea of what Bill McClendon did for so many of us, one-on-one. But it was an aggressive and consummate polemicist in matters of racial discrimination as well as the more subtle hypocrisies of American culture that he set a standard for courageous and insightful reporting. And, then, he could turn essayist and deliver a measured, intellectual commentary on the establishment, on the body politic or just on the lives of black people in general.

There was never any sophistry about Bill; he would have none of it, no evasive reasoning, no special pleading. With this man it was always "Straight Ahead".

Believe me, the dilettante who sought to engage him in some ill-prepared or off-the-wall argument was soon put to flight. Bill never had 'space' for time wasters. He had so much to tell us, to teach us -- and in one lifetime.

While some of his prodigious output over a 60 year span is collected in his 1995 book, "Straight Ahead: Essays on the Struggle of Blacks in America, (1934-1994) much more may be enjoyably and profitably pe-

rused at the public library -- in older copies of "The People's Observer" (1943-1945), and "The Observer" (1945-1950), or in issues of "The Black Scholar."

This piece cannot begin to describe the contributions that William H. McClendon made to this community, to this state, and to this nation.

Early on he set his mark, standing with those who provided courageous and clear sighted leadership in the struggle of blacks to gain equal employment in war time industry, attacking discrimination in housing and in public service, and castigating Uncle Toms, Aunt Jeminas and inept or 'bought' leader. And never, never, ceased.

Decades ago, McClendon deplored a racist school system, racist curriculum and racist history. And it was due, in great part, to his prescience and intellectual vigor that "Black Studies Programs" were instituted in this area.

And those of us who benefitted from his wisdom in our formative years shall be ever grateful to the man who first revealed to us in depth just how political and how dangerous this scheme of things can be.

I am inspired to invert a well known phrase and it may in part describe this "prophetic and influential intellect" we have lost. Bill "looked at the rose through world-colored glasses." And his clear perceptions have helped us all.

Show them we really care

BY RICHARD W. RILEY

Now that kids are going back to school, it's good time to ask: Where do you have to live to find good schools?

Do you have to live in a wealthy suburb? Do you have to head for the big cities? Should you go to a university town?

The answer is: Good schools can be found anywhere in America. You can find them in the inner-city, in the suburbs, and in rural towns.

That's what *Money* magazine discovered when it went looking for America's 100 best school districts. The results of the search can be found in the January 1996 issue of the magazine, and it's an article that every parent, educator, and citizen who cares about education should read.

"Money isn't everything," declared *Money*. The districts that made the list enjoyed widespread community support and a high degree of

parental involvement, and many were in areas where the average home cost less than the U.S. median.

The fact that good schools can be found anywhere--so long as parents and communities are willing to work for them--is good news for every citizen.

We all have stake in quality education, even those of us who don't have children in school. Strong schools build strong communities, and we all want that.

Because parental and community involvement are so important to education, the U.S. Department of Education and the national Partnership for Family Involvement in Education are launching an important initiative to coincide with back-to-school time.

It's called "America Goes Back to School: Get Involved!" This is the second year for this initiative, and I would like to invite you and every

citizen to participate.

"America Goes Back to School: Get Involved!" asks parents, grandparents, neighbors, educators, students, and all community members to work together to achieve these goals: Making school safer, more disciplined, and all community members to work together to achieve these goals: Making schools safer, more disciplined, and drug-free; putting computers into classrooms; improving reading making sure academic standards are high; preparing young people for careers; and making college more accessible.

A free kit is available that offers lots of good ideas for achieving these goals in your community. Many of these ideas have succeeded in helping communities like yours to improve their schools. Just call the U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN and ask for the "America Goes Back to School" activities kit.

Howard among best college buys

Money Magazine has ranked Howard University among the top 25 schools in the nation in its annual "Best College Buy" ranking issue.

The just-released September issue ranks the top colleges in the nation for value on the basis of cost and academic quality.

Howard earned a rank of 19th on the list, moving up from a 38th ranking spot last year.

Other schools in the top 25 included California Institute of Technology in the first spot, along with institutions such as Rice University, St. Mary's College of Maryland, and the University of North Carolina--Chapel Hill.

"This top ranking is a recognition of the quality of the faculty and students at Howard University, as well as the excellence of its academic programs," says H. Patrick Swygert, president of Howard. "We are delighted to receive this national honor, which only recognizes what we

here at Howard have know all along--that this university continues to be one of the premier institutions for higher education in the country."

The special 43-page college guide in Money Magazine's September issue is the product of an analysis of more than 1,000 colleges and universities nationwide.

The analysis considered 16 measures of educational quality, including entrance exam results, faculty resources and deployment, library resources, instructional and student services budgets, four -as well as five- or six-year graduation rates, and default ratios on graduates' student loans.

Then the magazine compared those data with tuition and fees at each of more than 1,000 institutions to arrive at a value rating.

Howard University is the only comprehensive research university in the country that has a predominantly African-American student

body.

It is a private institution with some 11,000 students enrolled in programs that encompass approximately 167 areas of academic concentration leading to bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees, as well as professional degrees in law, medicine and dentistry. The university is ranked a Level I research institution by the Carnegie Foundation, one of only 88 such institutions in the county to be so designated.

The Howard University freshman class for this year, the "Class of 2000," will number about 1,392 students, which is 313 more than last year, and they will have an average SAT score of 939, a significant increase over last year's 900 average.

The class will also include an increased number of National Achievement Scholars -- 96 compared to last year's 44, which will probably make Howard the number one institution in the country in attracting the much sought-after National Achievement Scholars.

Brand and style conscious

According to the American Express Retail Index, which monitors consumer spending trends in retail and is based on a survey of 1,000 consumers nationwide, parents will spend an average of \$363 per child for back-to-school items this year.

This is an increase of 12 percent as compared to the 1995 survey. The survey also revealed that nearly one in five parents (18 percent) say they plan to spend \$500 or more.

Parents say their children will also contribute to the budget, pitching in an average of 19 percent from their own savings.

According to the second annual American Express Retail Index on back-to-school shopping, parents say their children are style- and brand-conscious about their back-to-school wardrobe.

"Back to school sales are strong in both apparel and shoes this year," according to Sherrie Curtain, merchandise manager of apparel and footwear of GI Joes, which has 14 stores throughout Oregon and Washington.

"Soccer clothing, wool sweaters and fleece vests and jackets are very popular items so far this season," she added.

Surprisingly, and contrary to last year's back-to-school survey, the American Express Retail Index found that college boys are dramatically more style-conscious than college girls (57 percent vs. 28 percent).

The survey also found that nearly half of all students are considered style-conscious by their parents. On a scale of 1 to 10, with "10" being extremely style-conscious, and "1" being not at all style-conscious, 45 percent of parents gave their kids an 8 or higher.

The top brand names among all three groups of students were Levi's (45 percent), followed by Nike (39 percent), The Gap (17 percent), Reebok (16 percent) and Guess (13 percent).

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