

EDITORIAL

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perspectives

What Could Be More Interesting Than "A History Of Reading?"

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

And how is it, you may ask, that a "history" may effortlessly involve the past, present and future? We do not usually see these states of time as coexistent-doesn't time flow like a river?

Oh, but when you immerse yourself in the intriguing work of the writers art, "A History of Reading" by Alberto Manguel, it will all become understandable-also rewarding for years to come (Viking, 1996-paper or cloth).

It is a different perspective entirely that Manguel brings to the 'art' of reading, and reading 'is' an art; something the author makes clear, both directly and indirectly. More than that he sets new parameters for either pure enjoyment or for extracting some utilitarian relevancy.

And we are distracted for precious moments by our exasperation with an educational system whose gross failures shall have deprived millions of sufficient literacy to enjoy 'any' book-let alone, a 'good' book. Again, our Dr. Silber: "A telling indictment of American education."

But let us move on to the revealing passages of Manguel's beautiful

work. If you number among those of us who have belatedly discovered just how fortunate those of us who have belatedly discovered just how fortunate we are to be literate in this communications citadel of the world, you will smile and savor many a nuance.

While at one of several underlying themes, commonly termed "classical" by literary critics-Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Christian, Pagan, novelist, playwright-our author will tease our memory (or conscience) with a personal anecdote. At the age of sixteen, he had an after school job at a book store and a life-long love affair began at once.

As it has happened to many in this situation, he was soon to begin taking unfinished books home to read, intending to return them. Of course, that never happened and Manguel goes on to quote black author Jamaica Kincaid confessing to a similar escapade at her childhood library, "it was just that once I read a book I couldn't bear to part with it." I know the feeling.

Now here, I have an opportunity

to illustrate in an uncommonly clear manner, how it is that without the prior years of specialized training devoted to the researcher's craft, I was able to present so many new and documented revelations in my very first book. I always answered inquiries, "I read alot."

Many readers are familiar with my research and writings on the famed "Alexander Dumas," France's black poet and novelist extraordinaire; "The Count of Monte Cristo, The Three Musketeers, The Man In The Iron Mask," over 67 plays, 92 novels, plus histories and travelogs.

And certainly, neither I nor the readers would expect the selection of a book like "The History of Reading" for some basic research on Alexander Dumas; now then there are dozens of titles with a direct reference to or that have a firm inference relating to the subject matter. But as I say, "I read alot," so low and behold!

In the 1870's the U.S. Supported Cubans fleeing a revolution, these immigrants making Key West Florida the 'Havana Cigar' making capital of

the world. They brought reading habits.

"The workers who immigrated to the United States took with them, among other things, the institution of the lector: an illustration in the American Practical Magazine of 1873 shows one such lector, wearing glasses and a large brimmed hat, sitting with legs crossed and a book in his hands while a row of workers (all male) in waistcoats and shirtsleeves go about their cigar rolling with what appears to be rapt attention."

"The material for these readings, agreed upon in advance by the workers (who, as in the days of El Figaro, paid the lector out of their own earnings), ranged from political tracts and histories to novels and collections of poetry both modern and classical. they had their favorites: Alexandre Dumas's The Count of Monte Cristo, for instance, became such a popular choice that a group of workers wrote to the author shortly before his death in 1870, asking him to lend the name of his hero to one of their cigars. Dumas consented."

Next week we will get into the real beauty and depth of this book.

Cornerstones of Equality

BY HUGH B. PRICE

PRESIDENT NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

As we stand at the cusp of the 21st Century, America must pay heed to the clarion call tolling across the land. The call is sounding from many quarters: It's time to purge the vestiges of racism from our hearts and from our institutions and to commit ourselves to achieving a true equality of opportunity in America.

We at the National Urban League have sounded that clarion call ourselves at our annual conference this week in Philadelphia.

True, that call to arms has often been couched in terms of achieving greater economic opportunity and economic power. The new world order of today-popularly known as globalization-demands that we all be extremely sensitive to the economic winds of change.

Nonetheless, the call we make now is

fundamentally the same clarion sounded 88 years ago by the founding of the National Urban League itself (and of our sister organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). It is a call for jobs and freedom.

Those were the words on the placards the civil rights leadership approved to be carried at the March on Washington in 1963-in that era when the gaining of fundamental civil rights necessarily had to take precedence.

Times have changed considerably, and the opportunities for people of color have expanded, it must be acknowledged, enormously.

ously.

But one can still sense that slogan's imprint, if you will, underneath the words on the "placards"-their business cards-many African Americans carry today. Black Americans are still pursuing their historical dual agenda of jobs and freedom.

The welcome understanding of many American institutions, including the businesses, universities, and federal agencies that have come to our conference, of the society-wide benefits of equal opportunity shouldn't blind us to the work still to be done.

It's time, once and for all, for the nation

to honor the spirit and letter of the Constitution by welcoming African Americans, and other people of color, as full-fledged members of the American family. No exceptions and no excuses. No discrimination and no more procrastination. It's high time we relegate racism to a sorry chapter in the history books about the 20th century.

America can do that if we honor the guarantee in the Bill of Rights of equality and justice for all, if we pledge allegiance to the cornerstones of equality.

Those cornerstones are compassion, opportunity, and economic power.

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Civil Rights Journal

Dangers In The Prison Industrial Complex

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

One of the fastest growing industries in the United States is the prison industry. As states and the federal government rush to build prisons, as local communities vie to have them located where their low-skilled and unemployed residents can get jobs and as politicians use crime as a scare tactic to get elected, what used to be a government-operated small business has now become an industrial giant. At least one private company which operates prisons is traded on the stock market and more and more states are looking at privatizing their prison systems, in an attempt to keep costs to a minimum.

But in Ohio, where I live, at least one prison is proving that the rush to privatize the prison industry is premature at best and dangerous at worst. In the year or so since the Corrections Corporation of America was given the contract to manage the new prison in Youngstown, two inmates have been killed, at least 13 have been victims of stabbings and now six have escaped. The Youngstown prison, the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center, is supposedly classified as a medium security prison, but four of those who escaped were convicted of murder and two of armed robbery. Clearly, something is wrong in Youngstown.

Part of the problem seems to be that in the prison industrial complex mentality, prisoners are commodities or profit centers and are traded between states. So, in this case, District of Columbia prisoners were sent to Ohio since D.C. prisons are overcrowded. The Ohio prison then made money from these

out-of state prisoners. But it seems that either the D.C. officials or the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center mis-classified these prisoners, intentionally or not.

After early indications of problems made Ohio legislators leery, they began to look more closely at the Youngstown prison. But when a delegation led by Ohio legislators made an unscheduled visit to the prison a few months ago, they were not allowed in. The company pleaded ignorance, saying they had not realized who the visitors were and promising to be open to future legislative visitors. Now the state is looking into closing the prison or at least turning it over to the state prison system.

One could get caught up in the trees of the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center case and not see the forest. The forest in this case is the concept of the prison industrial complex. A concept where prisoners - human beings - are profit makers. A concept which in some prisons means that prisoners work for cents an hour for private employers, making clothing, furniture and other commodities. A concept where the future of hundreds of thousands of young people is planned for incarceration rather than education since we as a society are choosing to spend our tax dollars on building and running prisons rather than educating young people and preventing their initiation into-crime. A choice we have made in spite of the fact that it is much cheaper to educate than to incarcerate.

The underlying concept of the prison industrial complex is that prisoners are a growth industry in this

nation and that free market should prevail. The free market should prevail over morals and ethics - the morality and ethics of prisoners being sent out of state long distances from their families, making visits nearly impossible. The free market should prevail over our concerns that the majority of people incarcerated in this nation are people of color. The free market should prevail over questions of humane treatment by private prison officials who must only watch the bottom line, cutting costs in sometimes questionable ways. The free market should prevail and force local communities to choose between prisons which provide jobs and unemployment for their low-skilled and unemployed citizens.

The prison industrial complex concept is a dangerous one to a free and democratic society. We do need prisons in this country, but we do not need private ones. We do need prisons in this country, but we need a fair and just criminal justice system which offers alternatives to sentencing and drug and alcohol treatment programs and which provides recreational and educational programs for young people who need help navigating difficult waters. We do need prisons in this country, but we do not need politicians who use crime to scare voters.

We do need prisons in this country, but we do not need politicians who use crime to scare voters. We do need prisons in this country but we need to bring back the concept of rehabilitation which we have abandoned for the sake of punishment.

Just think: Your son is bright, healthy and headed for college one day. You love the direction your career has taken. You're doing a lot of the things you planned and even a few you didn't. Living life to the fullest is easy when you have family behind you. American Family Insurance. Call and talk to one of our helpful, friendly agents. You'll find out why we're consistently rated A+ (Superior) by A.M. Best, the insurance rating authority. Then, go on. Dream. Plan. What you do next is up to you and we'll be here to help you.

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