EDITORIAL

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The Portland Observer

(USPS 959-680) Established in 1970

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Deadline for all submitted materials:
Articles:Friday, 5:00 pm Ads: Monday, 12:00pm

POSTMASTER: Send Address Changes To: Portland Observer, P.O. Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208.
Periodicals postage paid at Portland, Oregon.
Subscriptions: $60.00 per year

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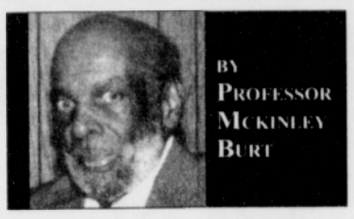
p e r s p e c t i v e s

Life After Internet: The Lead Pencil Society I



BY PROFESSOR MCKINLEY BURT

"What goes around-comes around" is an old, familiar American adage. Almost a decade ago (1990), George Gilder, shocked the communications world with his book "Life After Television: The Coming Transformation of Media and American Life", Whittle Direct Books.

Today, the industrial, academic and media inhabitants of cyberspace are just realizing that their hyper-intensive marketing of the "On Line" venue may seriously harm the psychological well-being of millions. The internet watchers", which included top computer and chip manufacturers and research institutions made a number of unexpected findings (Intel, Hewlet Packard, AT&T, Apple, NSA, Etc.).

Bearing directly on the social and behavioral issues we have discussed here in the past months - "Family Matters, Schoolyard Violence, It Takes A Village" - are the conclusions of the two-year study, "HomeNet". The researchers reported "a decline in interaction with family members and a reduction in their circles of friends'.

Before addressing any problems of isolation that adults might have, I would comment on experiences with the 'Youth Science Clubs' I initiated this year. While I gave a glowing description of greatly increased social interaction with peers and a solid reinforcement of motivation necessary to carry out projects-I did not mention the initial and difficult task that parents had in ensuring the home computers were dedicated to selected projects, not in surfing the Net. And not in 'talk rooms' until wee hours.

It's all very great to have a team 'working the Net' for information relating to a Black inventor like Granville T. Woods (Automatic Air Brake, Third Rail, Etc.), but you don't want to walk in to find the 'search engine' geared up for "Play Boy" type investigations. Parents at home no more than teachers at school can allow children free and unsupervised interaction with this volatile technology (games included).

What the researchers at Carnegie Mellon University (HomeNet) are saying is, "in the most ironic twist of things a quantum increase in communications in one form is found to decrease it in another." The growing use of the Internet is said to "promote loneliness and depression" according to the study. And shouldn't we all be concerned when we are told, "these were normal adults and their families - we are not talking about extremes." Quite true, for I have several colleagues who no longer have time for consultation.

Now "for the rest of the story" as the narrator used to say in an earlier television series. I came across a most interesting little book last year, and so much of it has direct relevance to the electronic enigma we have discussed: "Minutes of the Lead Pencil Club," ed. Bill Henderson, Pushcart Press, Wainscote, N.Y., 1996.

The author has many an intelligent and incisive way to ask, "do you sometimes think we have lost our souls in a constant quest for speed, entertainment and convenience?" This collection of 'minutes' from members as far a part as Tasmania, India, Austria, California and New York is a plaintive protest against "the electronic madness in our society." (We assume they interact with letters written by lead pencils).

But seriously, the author's collection of letters, essays, news clips, poems, and testimonials does offer some useful material that may go a long ways toward fulfilling his broad promise; "...you can restore mindfulness, sanity and simplicity to your life and the lives of your children."

Apparently, America is not the only land contemplating at least a partial move back to "lead pencil" communications before a population already perilously limited in social interaction by television is further isolated. Write a letter today! Cont'd next week.

Letter To The Editor

Send your letters to the Editor to:
Editor, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208

Guest Opinion: Al Mobley

It is critical that the voters of Oregon be informed about the present status of the Campaign Finance Reform Initiative [Measure 6] that they voted into the constitution in 1994. Remember the requirement that only individuals living in a voting district could donate money to a candidate's campaign? That's the one! The life or death of this constitutional amendment hangs in balance.

When we voters passed this Initiative, the ink had hardly dried when a few Republican "high-rollers" in Portland challenged it in federal court--and won.

To his credit, then Attorney General Ted Kulongoski, a Democrat, filed an appeal to the next higher court, the Ninth Circuit Court. Recently, after two years of waiting, a panel of three judges finally heard the appeal. By a two to one majority it was again declared unconstitutional. It would have been great to have won the appeal, but short of that, there is solid good news.

Circuit Judge Brunetti, one member of the three judge panel, filed a strong dissenting opinion in which he brilliantly reasoned that the State of Oregon did, indeed, have the constitutional right to protect its Republican form of government, as outlined in measure 6. Numerous experts on campaign finance law will attest that Judge Brunetti's dissenting opinion is a major positive development in campaign finance reform jurisprudence.

Now to the problem; The elite wing of the Oregon Republican Party has amply displayed its active opposition to reform. Democrat Attorney General Kulongoski did, to his credit, follow the appeal procedure to the next higher court, and the Democrats were, to that point, in charge of the high ground in supporting real campaign finance reform. Now that there is light at the end of the tunnel, our present Attorney General, Hardy Myers, is expressing little interest in following the appeals process to its final conclusion in the U.S. Supreme Court. The window of opportunity to appeal is extremely limited.

So, why is there no hue and cry demanding that the Attorney General defend this section of the constitution to its final conclusion? The truth is, there is not taste for reform anywhere in the established power structure. The vast sums of money floating about in the system prevent almost all of the beneficiaries, including the media, where the lion's share of campaign cash ends up, from doing anything to prevent the goose from continuing to lay the golden eggs.

The Attorney General must decide, and very soon, whether to pander to the beneficiaries of campaign cash or to honor the 628,180 Oregon voters who demanded campaign finance reform by making measure 6 a part of our constitution. His decision will speak very clearly to that majority of us who supported, and continue to support, changing the system so as to reclaim the time, attention, and loyalty of those we elect to represent us. There is no middle ground.

[Al Mobley is a retired Safety Engineer and a former Independent candidate for Governor]

The Hidden Agenda Behind Measure 40

The Oregon Supreme Courts decision on Measure 40 has let the cat out of the bag.

The Supreme Court having overturned Measure 40, revealed one of Measure 40's provisions as being overtly discriminatory towards minorities. The provision that only allowed people who were registered voters to be seated on a criminal jury have been down played and kept hush hush and away for the general public.

Measure 40 was designed to give crime victims the right to be notified of, and to be present and heard at, defendants' court appearances. I think this is a just provision.

The problem with Measure 40 and its supporters is that, they didn't mention the provision that requires criminal juries to be comprised only of registered voters. This has nothing to do with the rights of victims.

It is a fact that minorities are less likely to register to vote - so minorities are less likely to be seated on a criminal jury. To sum it up, it means minorities or less likely to have a jury of their peers - which is the right of all Americans.

The provision of none registered voters should not have been added to Measure 40. I thing the Supreme Court was just in overturning Measure 40.

About 90 percent (90%) of people charged with crimes are convicted of something.

Tony

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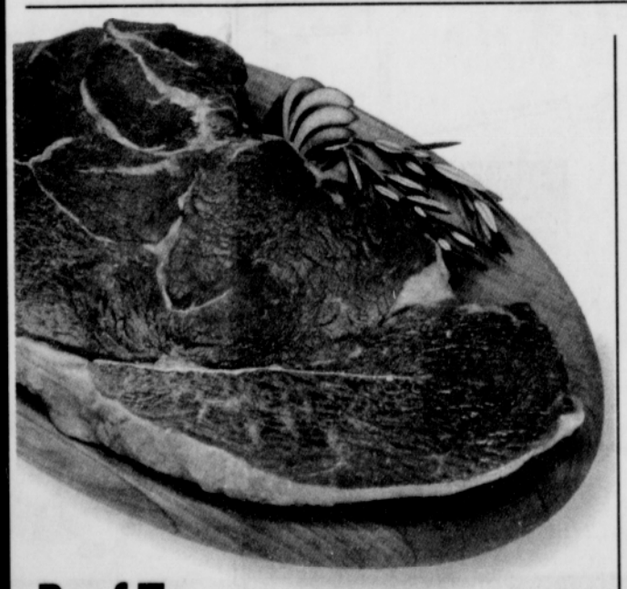

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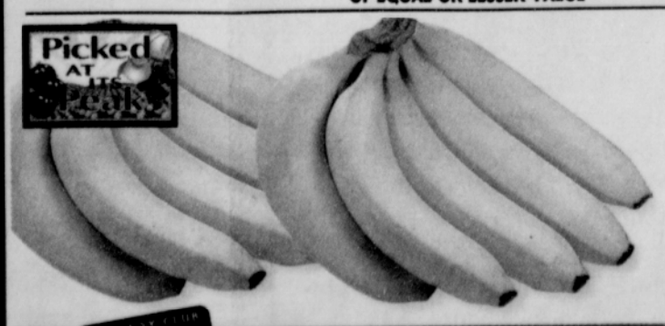

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