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## Why Blacks Don't Learn

I don't know how Black parents reacted to a recent national news magazine cover story that asked "Why Johnny Can't Read." Education seems to be yet another one of those problems a crisis only when it spreads from the ghetto to the suburbs.

Why do minority youngsters do poorly in school? This question has perplexed parents, teachers, and the public for many years and set off bitter confrontations. Some said that the educational system was racist and others that minority youngsters and those from poor families had low aspirations and a poor self-image that led to failure.

A recent study of over 700 high school students in San Francisco shows that both views are wrong. The study found that minority youngsters had a positive view of their achievements and efforts. However, the study showed that it was the students who were doing the poorest who got the most praise from their teachers. True, it is precisely those students who are doing the poorest who need the most encouragement. But apparently many minority students didn't know they were doing poor work and were not given an understanding of how much they needed to catch up.

The report also found that Black students were receiving assignments that were not sufficiently challenging and were often given grades that were unrealistic. For instance, those who simply showed up for classes automatically got a C.

What can we learn from this study? First, Black students have a tremendous desire to learn; they correctly see education as a path of upward mobility. Second, Black children should be expected to meet the same academic standards as any student. To excuse Black students from doing the rigorous and difficult work that must be part of an education does them no favors. Too often, it leaves them unprepared to make it at the next level of education or in the real world.

Third, we shouldn't see the problem of Black students as being a symptom of racism. Even elite colleges have suffered grade escalation that saw lesser and lesser amounts of work required for higher and higher grades. In fact the constant search for racist attitudes has added to the problems. In too many cases do-gooders have put across "enlightened" notions that are merely dressed-up versions of old prejudices. What else is the notion that Black students shouldn't be given an F in mathematics if that was what they deserved, but the old stereotype that Blacks are inherently stupid?

I suspect that Black parents may have a share in the creation of this problem as well. Like all parents, they have sometimes been more concerned with seeing their son or daughter promoted than making sure he or she was getting a real education.

Community attitudes, crimped educational budgets, oversized classrooms have made it difficult for all teachers to do their jobs particularly those in inner-city schools. Many minority students fall behind in grade school and never catch up. As they fall further and further behind, they are unable to understand what is being taught in their classes and frequently become discipline problems.

Faced with oversized classes, teachers are unable to give sufficient attention to these students and sometimes heap praise on them despite their poor academic performance in order to prevent the entire classroom from being disrupted.

Despite all the problems that remain to be solved all is not bleak for Blacks in education. Blacks are entering college in roughly equal proportions to the percentage of Blacks in the general population. But their dropout rate is significantly higher than that of whites. A lack of thorough preparation for college work is one reason for this higher dropout rate. As Black parents have always known, there is no substitute for a real education.

# VOICE EDITORIALS



Benjamin L. Hooks

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Cable television, I now believe, has a bright future. I haven't always been this optimistic but in the last few months after traveling to various parts of the country, observing some of the progress cable has made, I have begun to be more enthusiastic about it.

I have seen cable systems doing marvelous things and many of the operators are performing what I truly believe is a genuine public service. These impressions are reinforced by the survey I just finished reading which reports that approximately four million subscribers now get some form of local origination programming and that 75 percent of the sample group surveyed indicate they are providing time on their local origination channel to public and private schools, junior colleges, colleges and universities, as well as the local school boards. Sixty-nine percent in the same sample indicate they are providing local time on their origination channel to individuals and community groups.

These kinds of figures are heartening to me, particularly when I understand that there are now 10 million cable subscribers in the United States and that cable penetrates 15 percent of all the 70 million TV households.

Because I am encouraged by these initiatives, I intend to do everything in my power to see that cable is given every reasonable opportunity to grow and develop to a socially useful communications tool.

I do get concerned, however, when I notice other patterns of cable growth and development that are disturbing. One of those patterns is what I call the "Donut effect." That is, cable growth which encircles, without serving the central cities, where huge numbers of Blacks

and other minorities are clustered, and concentrates its efforts on the affluent white suburbs and the outlying rural areas.

Not only are such patterns inappropriate because they fail to serve all the people of the U.S. as required by the Federal Communications Act, I believe these patterns are very short-sighted.

After all, most of the population of the U.S. now lives in large cities and I think after a period of mass white (and some Black) exodus to the suburbs and disgust with problems of the cities, we have begun to see a heavy trend in movement back toward those cities.

Anyone who fails to recognize this is going to find himself in the position of going when he ought to be coming. Someday, in order to expand its revenue base, cable is going to want very much to come back into the core cities where increasing numbers of people live and where high density residential clusters make a natural market for diversified services.

If cable fails to realize this, I don't want it coming around again and blaming the Federal Communications Commission for its lack of overwhelming success. Many business judgments made by cable operators have been wrong, in my view.

Recently, a staff report of the House Subcommittee on Communications took the FCC to task for allegedly stifling the growth of cable by formulating rules and regulations that favor over-the-air broadcasters to detriment of cable.

Some of the charges, while they may have some basis in fact, certainly do not represent our over all efforts. Since I have been on the FCC, I have cast my vote in favor of this technology which I sincerely feel could be the opening that Blacks and other minorities can utilize to enter the otherwise historically closed electronics communications media. Of course, much genuine progress has been made here. (I will be writing more on this later).

Nevertheless, cable makes it harder for us to justify supporting it when it engages in such nefarious "Donut Effect" practices.

## COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

by

KENYON C. BURKE



## Abortion:

## A False Issue

While watching the customary jockeying for position and attempts at manipulating public opinion that accompanies Presidential and Congressional races, one wonders why we continue to fall prey to false issues.

Law and Order, crime in the streets, bussing, and now abortion is being offered up by some special interest groups as a major campaign issue.

Most people in our country today are looking for executive and legislative leadership capable of dealing effectively with such gut survival issues as high unemployment, poor schools and health care, inadequate housing, fear of personal safety in our own neighborhoods and the effect of racism and discrimination.

We are searching for leaders who can understand and act upon complex problems of the energy crisis, a sagging economy, along with working toward a world that has more peace than war and more humanity than inhumanity.

One thing we don't need in our survival game plan is another false issue to distract us from keeping our "eyes on the ball." While abortion and its physical and psychological ramifications are not to be taken lightly, access to medically supervised abortion does bring about significant health advantages to individuals and their families.

Since the 1973 Supreme Court decision gave legal sanction to abortion, the maternal death rate and infant mortality rates have materially declined. Any attempt to interfere with a woman's right to personally make a choice on this crucial matter would reverse that trend.

The price of illegal abortion in the days preceding the Supreme Court's abortion decision was paid in the currency of women's dignity, women's health and even women's lives.

Though many paid the price, none paid it more often or more cruelly than minority groups and the poor. More than nine out of 10 of those who died at the hands of incompetent practitioners in the days before abortion was legal were Black and Spanish-speaking.

As serious and important as this subject is, we find it difficult to understand how and why a Presidential or legislative candidate's stand on abortion has anything to do with almost overwhelming problems of survival that we face today.

Indeed, in a pluralistic society such as ours, with many cultures, sub-cultures, lifestyles, special interests and values we can expect differences of opinion.

However, we must be alert to those who are single issue folks and would impose their values on all and keep us from focusing on the real issues.

Beware of false prophets among us for they are riding the abortion horse in our current Presidential and Congressional campaigns.

