

CIVIL RIGHTS JOURNAL

Strickland's vision gives inner city new life

By Bernice Powell Jackson



In the midst of the violence, in the midst of the drugs, in the midst of the recall of affirmative action, in the midst of the cuts in welfare and housing subsidies for the poor, in the midst of civil wars in Africa and not-quite peace in the Middle East. Bosnia and Ireland, it is easy to lose heart. But, every now and then one hears stories which show that God's light still shines in the midst of the darkness. Every now and then one hears a story of hope. Here is one of them, which I heard about on a recent National Public Radio news broadcast.

The Manchester Craftsmen's Guild is located in the heart of a poor community in Pittsburgh. Once home to wealthy industrialist, the Manchester section of the city was left out of the 1980's re-birth of Pittsburgh.

But, because of the vision of one man, Bill Strickland, that community has not been forgotten completely. Thirty years ago Strickland, a University of Pittsburgh history student and pottery maker, began a ceramics program for children in this neighborhood. Today it has blossomed into an arts program which impacts thousands of Pittsburgh children and into a training center for hundreds of poor adults in that neighborhood.

Strickland, combining his pottery-making expertise with his experience in the 1960's civil rights movement, realized that the arts and a caring teacher had saved his own life and could do the same for others. Using the apprenticeship model under which he flourished, he established a program which today includes 500 students who learn ceramics, photography, painting, drawing and computer imaging. Another 4,000 students attend workshops run by the guild in the city's 12 public high schools. In addition, guild students attend summer arts residency programs at nearby universities.

Through exposure to the arts, these students come to realize their own creativity and imagination and develop a new sense of self-worth. From this new view of themselves, students have new reasons to go to school and new reasons to stay alive. "You can't teach a kid algebra if they're not interested in being alive," said Strickland. Remarkably, 80 percent of Manchester Guild students go on to college.

But Strickland realizes that it's difficult in a poor community to talk about culture in a vacuum and without looking at that community's whole context. Thus, the Bidwell Training Center, housed in the Manchester Guild Building, offers jobless adults courses in medical, pharmaceutical, computer technology and culinary arts. And he established a for-profit food company which now employs 50 people, has grossed more than a million dollars, and puts its profits back into the center.

And for the future? Strickland's plans include a greenhouse which will grow flowers and hydroponic food on a nearby vacant lot. His dream is to build an office tower and a women's health care facility to make the Manchester Guild and Bidwell Center self-supporting. Strickland says, "I think that we could solve the problems of the cities in our lifetime...But in order to achieve that, we're going to have to get a lot more aggressive and a lot more activist in terms of our orientation and our thinking, and the meter's running."

Signs of hope. Signs of light in the darkness. It takes only one man or one woman with a vision to be the light... And the meter's running.

Outlook

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The Cuba, Lebanon, and CTBT developments show that the world body may well put onto its agenda the main concerns of the United States and Europe, but may just as easily resolve them in ways that defy the aims of the major powers.

The "oil-for-food" deal with Iraq, begun this month, was another lesson in independence.

Further moves planned for 1997 will again test the United Nations' ability to steer between the West and the rest.

Iraqi diplomats have made no secret that, now that they have a deal to sell \$1 billion of oil to buy humanitarian goods every 90 days, they want to strike an even better deal with the United

Nations. Iraqi Ambassador Nizar Hamdoun has repeatedly pointed out that, under the present deal, Iraqis outside the Kurdish north receive goods worth only half of the money earned in the deal, an amount Baghdad wants raised, but Washington wants to leave unchanged.

Sudan, another Arab nation which Washington seeks to isolate, still faces the threat of stiff sanctions linked to allegations over a 1995 assassination attempt against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. But other Security Council members, including veto-wielding nations like China, France, and Russia, are wary of further U.N. embargoes.

On the peacekeeping front, the world body is likely to send home many of its more than 25,000 troops.

The U.N. mission in Haiti likely will end completely by summer, even though President Rene Preval has worried that the nation still needs U.N. support to maintain law and order. Gen. Maurice Baril of Canada confirmed recently that troops under his command in eastern Zaire are no longer needed and will soon return home. Other missions are on the verge of collapse. U.N. peacekeeping efforts in Liberia stalled badly with new fighting last April, and are stagnant at best. The sluggish process to hold a referendum in Western

Sahara has pleased no one, and may be wound up soon. From Bosnia to Angola, U.N. troops are more involved in planning how to end peacekeeping efforts than how to end lingering conflicts themselves.

All these factors add up to what could well be a quiet, contemplative year for the United Nations. Few major changes—from reform of the Security Council to the creation of an international criminal court—are expected to be resolved in the coming months.

Of course, a sense of history could change all that. "Kofi Annan will have only one five-year term, so if he wants to make his mark, he will have to do it soon," one African envoy noted.

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