

EDUCATION

Background, media, put Rwandan journalist in quandary

Part II

By Todd Burroughs
Special to Sentinel-Voice

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Etienne Karekezi described his work in his native land of Rwanda as "being independent between two rocks."

It is a familiar refrain to most journalists, particularly to American reporters of African descent.

But the tone of and politics surrounding media and journalism can be starkly different outside America.

On the one side, said the 33-year-old journalist, the government would criticize you for what you failed to say, while the rebel side would characterize your reporting as being too pro-government.

"You only have two or three minutes on the air," he recalled. "You can't say everything that happened," particularly if you work for a government radio station, like he did.

As you may remember, Rwanda, a longtime military regime in Central Africa, was ripped open in 1994 when fighting broke out, mostly between Tutsis and Hutus, its two ethnic groups.

Karekezi was an anchor/reporter for Radio Rwanda's English language newscast. He is both Tutsi and Hutu. All of it made him easy prey for those with competing — and ultimately deadly — political agendas.

He emigrated to America, barely escaping death. Karekezi was granted asylum two years ago. He received his master's degree in journalism from the University of Maryland at College Park last December.

Karekezi believes that radio, Africa's most powerful medium, played an all-too-powerful role in what he refers to as "the war," and what Western media call "genocidal" conflict. He said the massacres that made blood flow in his country four years ago were the climax of years of battles not just between Hutus and Tutsis, but between Hutus rebelling against the Hutu-led government as well.

"There were wounds which couldn't be healed immediately," he says while I, in later reflection, try to look for an obvious double meaning. He said two other radio stations — a "pirate" station owned by the rebel Tutsis and a private one owned by Hutu interests, aired

extremists who pushed the two groups into war with each other, while government-owned Radio Rwanda tried to stay neutral.

"Most people fail to understand why there was such widespread violence, why a radio station would play such a role."

Radio is especially important in Africa, Karekezi explained, because of the lack of both literacy and the ability to afford newspapers. In poor areas, he said, the medium itself has credibility to influence others. In Rwanda, said the radio journalist, it's "The radio say..."

The newscaster said his station aired speeches by government officials who called on citizens to defend the country against insurrection.

Karekezi said he stopped working during April of 1994, when it became too dangerous to go. He said that although in many cases his name recognition saved him from being harmed while trying to escape, it also had made him a target for harassment and death threats.

The Rwandan journalist said some of his colleagues at Radio Rwanda were jailed, harassed or killed — those that didn't flee. Those journalists who turned out to be Tutsi

sympathizers, along with some who were not seen as political, stayed on, he stated, and are now broadcasting for the new regime.

Today, Karekezi serves as managing editor for the Washington, D.C. area-based Voice of America's Kirundi/Kinyarwanda service, which produces a half-hour nightly newscast bounced from satellites to short-wave radios in Rwanda and other parts of Central Africa.

He criticizes Western media for not going past the State Department world view of his homeland conflict. Balking at the idea of Congressionally funded VOA as unobjective journalism, Karekezi charged that U.S. mainstream media (he described American news as "empty") is as controlled by business leaders as VOA is controlled by government leaders.

"They are not going to promote anything going against their own interests," he declared. It's a hard lesson to learn on both sides of the Atlantic.

Todd Burroughs, a journalism doctoral student at the University of Maryland at College Park, can be reached at tburroughs@jmail.umd.edu.

UNCF celebration raises record \$13.1 million in telathon

Special to Sentinel-Voice
FAIRFAX, VA — The United Negro College Fund raised a record \$13.1 million in cash and pledges during its special "An Evening of Stars: A Celebration of Educational Excellence" aired on Jan. 10th and 17th.

"This achievement would not have been possible without our loyal supporters who called in and made their contributions," said William H. Gray, III, UNCF President and CEO of UNCF.

"The \$13.1 million raised during "An Evening of Stars" will provide a valuable and life changing education for thousands of students who without UNCF support would

not be able to get a college education."

Four hours of spirited entertainment was punctuated by compelling vignettes about the success stories of UNCF students and alumni.

The 1998 "An Evening of Stars" blended the old with the new with performances by Luther Vandross, Vanessa L. Williams, Toni Braxton, The O'Jays, Maze featuring Frankie Beverly, Sinbad, Kenny Lattimore, CeCe Winans, Teena Marie, AZ Yet, Kool and the Gang featuring James Taylor, Jerry Butler, The Dells, Mark Curry, The Ch-Lites and Ziggy Marley and the Melody Makers. Special appearances were also made

by Earvin "Magic" Johnson, Quincy Jones, Isiah Thomas, Ruby Dee, Maynard Jackson and Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell.

National overnight ratings were up 31 percent over the prior year's ratings for the annual show and production costs for this year's show were 17 percent lower than for last year.

The special was aired on CBS, NBC, ABC, FOX, WB and UPN affiliates, as well as on independents, USSB satellite and cable networks such as Black Entertainment Television (BET).

UNCF decided to change the annual television special's format after research showed

that it was experiencing declining revenues, viewership and rising costs. This year's program was produced and directed by Emmy Award winner Louis J. Horvitz.

"We knew that we needed to cut costs, increase revenues

and give viewers the kind of quality programming that they expect from other television specials," said William H. Gray, III, UNCF President and CEO.

"The increase in this year's ratings, revenues and decreased

costs prove that this was the right thing to do. We thank all of the entertainers, students, member institutions, alumni, production personnel and UNCF supporters that made this our most outstanding special ever."

Students: Internships very important

Special to Sentinel-Voice
There are top notched newspapers from New York to Nevada.

It has been my experience that African-American and Afro-Caribbean publications are very open to training high school and college students through internships in the ways of the media and community re-empowerment.

So what exactly is an internship?

An internship is an official or formal program that provides practical experience for beginners in an occupation or profession. Some allow for academic credit and some offer wages or stipends.

One of the great things about being a college or high school student is that you have time to explore many professional and academic options without making a firm commitment.

During the summer and throughout the school year, students can get a taste of professional life as a writer, photographer, advertising representative or even as a graphics artist. You



By Dr. Keith Orlando Hilton

don't even have to be a journalism major to benefit from a newspaper internship program.

One program with which I am very familiar is the Heritage Freelance Fellows Program of the Precinct Reporter newspaper in San Bernadino, Calif.

This program is open to interns nationwide and several of the student participants are not journalism majors.

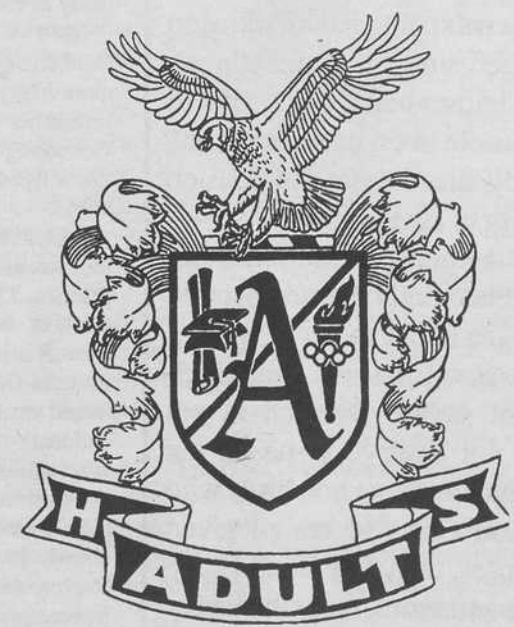
With regular supervised guidance from the newspaper's senior management, students in the Heritage Freelance Fellows Program often choose their own topics on which to write.

With appropriate guidance, students go through all the steps from interviewing for a newspaper job to interviewing leads for a front page story to learning about the agenda setting nature of community newspapers.

A good internship sponsor (such as a newspaper or educational institute) understands (See Hilton, Page 14)

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Friday 7:30 AM-5:00 PM



Adult Education Programs are open to students age 17 and over who do not have a high school diploma. Classes in all academic areas required for a high school diploma, occupational classes for career training, and classes in pre-vocational basic skills are offered tuition free to eligible students.
A full service GED Testing Center is located on site.
Classes are held at over 40 site locations.
Morning, afternoon and evening classes are available.
Call 799-8650 for further information.

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