

Challenger: A tragic loss -- and a needed reminder?

Yvonne Truhon is a copy editor for the Chronicle.

THE GUEST COLUMN

By YVONNE H. BICHSEL TRUHON

I was as shocked, horror-stricken and grieved as anyone else in the country when I learned of the space shuttle Challenger's destruction last Tuesday and later watched it for myself on the many, many news broadcasts that followed.

I was even more shocked, horror-stricken and grieved, however, at some of the opinions I started hearing after the crash, opinions that perhaps the shuttle -- and America's space program -- should be scrubbed, not just temporarily for an investigation, but forever.

I heard on a news report that some of the children who witnessed the explosion on television expressed the opinion that perhaps the explosion had occurred because God didn't want us to go into space.

That is as ridiculous as saying that, because planes sometimes crash, God doesn't want us to fly in them, or because ships sometimes are lost at sea, God doesn't want us to sail across the oceans.

I don't pretend to know what the Almighty does or does not

want us to do, but I'm sure that if He didn't want us to go into space, the laws of physics (which He set up) would be such that we couldn't go into space.

Other people, with a less theological and more practical interest, opined that we shouldn't continue the space program because it was unsafe -- too great a risk for too little gain.

What is safe? How safe is safe? Statistically, we are more at risk when driving to work and back on Interstate 40 than we would be in flying across the country or go-

ing up in a spacecraft.

We risk death every time we cross a street, get into our cars or perform any part of our normal routine.

The death rate, to paraphrase Robert Heinlein in "Tunnel in the Sky," is the same for astronauts as for anybody else -- one person, one death, sooner or later.

At least Ron McNair and his six crewmates died for something greater than themselves -- the extension of human knowledge. Not all of us can do that.

No matter how impractical or long-term the results of the space program and its attendant Please see page A11



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White college campuses and the myth of equality

FROM THE GRASSROOTS

By DR. MANNING MARABLE

HAMILTON, N.Y. -- It was toward the end of the autumn semester late last year. An undergraduate student, a young black woman, was sitting in my office with tears in her eyes. She had asked me to review two term papers written for another class, which was taught by a white professor.

One paper, which was written by her white friend, had received the grade "B." The black student's paper, which, upon my close examination, appeared comparable in all respects, had been graded "D" work. Her

white professor had given her little guidance or encouragement in the course.

The student explained that she had done her best, and that she and her white friend had worked closely in researching their respective papers. Now the black student faced the possibility of academic probation, while the white student had achieved success.

As any teacher knows, grading

is hardly an exact science. Various factors are weighed before any final grade is given, and to some extent, the results are subjective. But beyond this incident, and hundreds of similar cases I have seen over my 15 years of teaching, institutional factors always play a role in any group's success or failure in higher education. The majority of white students enter my college with the assumption that they will not on-

ly graduate, but that they will do well. At a predominantly white institution, the majority of professors, guidance counselors, administration and staff are white. The curriculum is designed specifically from a perspective which reinforces the dominant values and ideas which exist within White America's economic, political and social systems. Although there are many exceptions, thousands of white professors who encounter a black student in their classrooms consciously or unconsciously Please see page A13

Point

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having seminars in our churches and organizations on how to live with one another without killing one another with words or guns.

I attended one such discussion in Chicago last month. The crowd overflowed. The chief spokesperson, a black woman, said that the novel should never have been written or awarded the Pulitzer Prize. It has on both counts.

I would urge each American, black or white, to see the movie and I particularly urge Tony Brown. It seems to me that the all-important message of "The Color Purple," regardless of its faults, is that we must learn to love one another and be sensitive to the other's needs before we are a destroyed community from within instead of from without. To dismiss this urgent and all-important point as Alice Walker's self-hatred or hatred of black men is the equivalent of Lot's wife ignoring God's clarion call not to look back.

Celie transcends the ugliness of her environment through love, and Brown (as well as all black men and women) must transcend their anger and do something about the real problem "The Color Purple" mirrors.

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