

# OPINION

## Common-sense can help avoid Y2K

Armstrong Williams

Guest Columnist

Recall for a moment, Stanley Kubrick's mysterious and poetic film "2001: A Space Odyssey." In the opening scenes, a group of cave-men learn to hit members of a rival clan over the head with discarded animal bones. In this fashion, man's ancestors distinguish themselves as tool-bearing beasts.

In an ensuing sequence, a cave-man hurls the weapon into the air. As the bone soars into the sky, the action advances to the year 2000, and the bone is transformed into a glorious, metallic spacecraft hovering over war-torn Earth. In that momentous scene, the movie has bridged a million years, as the instrument of man's ascension becomes the harbinger of his destruction.

Indeed, this helpless animal called man has always had to rely upon his technology in order to move forward. By definition, then, as man moves forward, so must that great engine of technology. Ah, but has our technology outpaced our ability to understand its consequences?

That is the question many are asking as the world counts down to Y2K.

In a nutshell, the Y2K problem refers to the fact that computers store dates in two-digit sequences which refer solely to the year. When that two-digit code flips to 00 at the turn of the millennium, the computer may think it is 1900, instead of the year 2000. This minor snafu could have monumental consequences. Since computers are linked throughout the world by a vast



tapestry of information fields, one miscalculation could have a ripple effect that creates whole networks of misinformation. Worse yet, our computers could simply become confused by the anomaly and shut down.

Does this mean that our whole technology-based society will go boom? Presently, all of those kids picked last for baseball - known in their adult incarnation as "techie" - are hard at work attempting to answer that question.

For the most part, the techies insist that the Y2K glitch will not cause planes to start falling from the sky, or banks to become crippled or huge masses of city-dwelling humans to starve. In fact, the Commerce Department recently compared the Y2K glitch to "something like a tangled shoelace for a world-class marathon runner."

Still, if the vast tapestry of wires that connect our modern culture

begins to unravel, that growing engine of technology could provide one heck of a headache. Exactly how big a headache is anyone's guess. Despite funneling billions of dollars into Y2K preparedness, we remain uncertain as to exactly which things may go wrong - from distribution of Social Security benefits, to international trade, to ordinary

traffic lights, to how we will react to these changes.

What we do know is that through some common-sense efforts at preparedness, we can help protect ourselves. For example:

The elderly should place their medications in a place which remains easily accessible in case of temporary power outages.

Families should make hard copies of all important personal and financial documents.

Store enough fresh drinking water and nonperishable food to

last a few days.

You should put together a medical kit in the case of an emergency. You should withdraw some extra cash in case of problems with processing electronic transactions.

Prepare alternative means of communication such as a battery-operated television or radio.

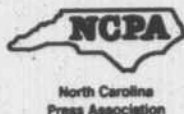
Make friends with your neighbors. You might need them!

Human procrastination in the face of that growing engine of technology helped create the Y2K conundrum. At this point, we would do well to remember that chance favors a prepared mind. By taking some simple precautionary measures, we can help make sure that our technology does not move frighteningly out of scale with our humanity.

Armstrong Williams is a nationally syndicated columnist.

# THE CHRONICLE

ERNEST H. PITT Publisher/Co-Founder  
 NDUBISI EGEMONYE Co-Founder  
 ELAINE PITT Business Manager  
 FANNIE HENDERSON Advertising Manager  
 JERI YOUNG Managing Editor  
 KAREN J. OLSON Circulation Manager  
 KAY STULTZ Production Manager



## A millennium wish list

For the last year or so, all people have been talking about is the dawn of the new millennium.

Prognosticators have predicted the end of the world as we know it complete with an across-the-board failure of computers or a massive terrorist attack.

Most likely, the reality will fall where it normally does - somewhere in between.

For most, the end of the 20th century is a time to look back, but we see it differently. The new millennium marks the perfect time to look forward. For just a moment, we would like to look at the opportunities the future holds for our community and African America as a whole.

As the nation braces for the worst, here's a list of what we hope to see in the 21st century:

- A black president.
- The end of racism as we know it.
- An apology from the United States to African Americans for the atrocities committed during slavery. Only after Americans realize the ramifications of slavery and what it did to African Americans can we move toward becoming a unified nation.
- African Americans realize the value of buying black.
- The end of the debate over the resegregation of schools. Separate was never and can never be equal.
- A long and achievement-filled tenure for new WSSU Chancellor Harold Martin.
- Winston-Salem's first black mayor.
- A Board of Education that has the best interests of all children in mind.
- More elected officials like Geneva Brown.
- A revitalization effort in East Winston that rivals the effort to transform downtown.
- A real congressional debate on reparations for the victims of slavery. Each year, a bill is introduced in the U.S. Congress to study reparations and each year that bill somehow never makes it to the floor of Congress.
- A solid commitment from the city to keep the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem. Despite the fact that city officials seem to have a hard time believing it, other cities are interested in stealing away the festival.
- A concerted effort by the media to cover black issues fairly.
- World peace.
- A retirement party for the Confederate flag and Ku Klux Klan.
- A safe, happy and prosperous new year for everyone.

## No victory for Port Chicago defendants



Earl Ofari Hutchinson

Motivational Moments

There was much cause for joy and celebration when President Clinton issued his Christmas pardon for Port Chicago defendant Freddie Meeks.

He and 49 other black Navy men were tried and convicted for mutiny during World War II. The case is the largest mass mutiny trial in U.S. Naval history.

It's certainly tempting to see the long overdue presidential pardon as final vindication for Meeks and bringing closure to a case which ranks as one of the greatest travesties of justice in U.S. military history. But that's precisely why Clinton's pardon of Meeks can't and shouldn't close the books on the issue.

The Port Chicago defendants' horrific story is simple and straightforward. On July 17, 1944, the Bay Area Naval Depot of Port Chicago was leveled by a blast which killed 320 Navy seamen, 202

of whom were black. The powerful blast accounted for a large percentage of the black Naval casualties in World War II.

The 20-year-old Meeks, a Navy reserve seaman for three years, was one of hundreds of blacks assigned the dangerous job of loading ammunition on ships bound for the Pacific. Meeks and the other black loaders worked under white officers. They were subject to inhuman productivity rates and had little or no training in safety procedures and weapons handling.

When Meeks and the other black sailors refused to go back to work they were jailed and charged with mutiny. They were speedily convicted of the charge by an all-white Naval panel, sentenced to 15 years, stripped of their benefits and given a less than honorable discharge.

Although the 50 defendants were given a general amnesty in 1946 and their sentences were reduced to time served, their convictions stood. They were permanently branded as "mutineers." It was the start of an anguishing 50-year odyssey of fear, personal pain and hardship for the men and their

families.

Clinton's pardon cannot give Meeks back those agonizing years. Clinton and Congress can and should do much more to try to right this part of America's past. Clinton should immediately issue a posthumous pardon to all the Port Chicago defendants. Meeks and one other defendant, Jules Crittendon, are the only known living survivors in the case.

The general discharges that the Port Chicago defendants were given should be upgraded to honorable discharges. Crittendon also insists that Congress reduced the death benefit payment to the families of the 300 men killed from \$5,000 to \$3,000. If that's true - and Congress should immediately launch an investigation - the monies should be paid out to family members with appropriate interest. The same applies to any back pay, pensions and other benefits that the men may have been entitled to but were lost when they were jailed. Whatever monies they are owed should also be paid with appropriate interest.

When full restitution is made to them and their names are fully cleared, Clinton and Congress

should apologize to the Port Chicago defendants for their suffering.

In recent years federal officials have apologized or paid reparations for a litany of government improprieties and historic wrongs such as the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, the Japanese-Americans held in detention camps during World War II, Philippine and Vietnamese servicemen who assisted the U.S. military in World War II and during the Vietnam war, as well as assorted individuals harmed by government misconduct. The Port Chicago defendants are just as deserving of this gesture as any of the other victims of governmental injustice.

The Port Chicago defendants loyally served their country. Their only crime was being black in an era when black lives were degraded. And Clinton's Christmas pardon of one man is not enough to wipe that shameful stain from the record.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is a nationally syndicated columnist and the director of the National Alliance for Positive Action. His email address is ehutchi344@aol.com

## VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY...

We asked local people to tell us their New Year's resolutions. Experts say that because of the millennium a record number of people will make resolutions.



Maurice Wright Sr.  
"To get closer to God."



Toderina Johnson  
"To do better in school."



Andre Gould  
"Continue to do what I'm doing, but only do it better."



Maurice Wright Jr.  
"To get better at football."



Charles Fletcher Jr.  
"To be a better parent and spend more quality time with the family."