

# Computers hold key to black empowerment

By Don Rojas  
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Daily we are told by an array of pundits and academics that American society and, indeed, the whole world is about to enter the Information Age, that we stand on the threshold of the Digital Era, that human civilization will soon experience a revolution more significant and transforming than the great Industrial Revolution of the mid-19th century and that the engine driving us towards this new high-tech revolution is the personal computer.

Bill Gates, one of the richest men in the world, has made his billions in less than 20 years by designing and marketing the central operating system for most of the world's personal computers. He has just written a book prophesizing society's coming journey down the Information Superhighway, predicting in it

## Information age skills key to advancement as a race

that he and his company, Microsoft, will continue to play a pivotal role in the unfolding information revolution. To be sure, Gates has no intention of relinquishing his monopoly grip on the software industry. Undoubtedly, he will make himself a few more billions in the years to come.

Indeed, the information revolution is spawning billionaires and millionaires almost on a daily basis. In Gates' \$50 billion company alone, more than 2,000 Microsoft executives have become millionaires in the last 10 years.

But few are people of color, and fewer still of African ancestry. The stark reality is that black entrepreneurship plays little or no role in today's burgeoning hi-tech industries.

The situation is even more disturbing when one looks at the "haves" and the "have-nots" of the computer age.

A recent study by the London-based Panos Institute concludes that a new form of poverty—"information poverty"—threatens the Third World because the Internet is concentrated in a handful of rich countries. Seventy percent of computers linked to the Internet are in the United States, while fewer than 10 African countries are connected. Poor countries, because of the high costs of computer equipment and low literacy rates, are already being left behind on the instant access to vast stores of information the Internet can provide. A modem—the equipment that connects a computer to the

Internet through the telephone network—costs around four times more in India than in America. A new computer would represent around six months of the unemployment benefits paid to a jobless Briton or several years worth of wages for an underemployed Indonesian.

A recent Internet Society survey found that there are about 3.5 million "host" computers hooked up to the Internet in the United States and just over 500,000 in Western Europe. By contrast, Africa has just 28,000 "hosts" (the vast majority of these are in South Africa), Central America and South America 16,000 and the Middle East 13,800.

The situation in America among whites and people of color is not much better. "Information poverty" has been established in familiar racial lines. A recent U.S. Commerce Department study on American home computer ownership found about 30 percent of white households own

computers, compared to 12 percent of Latino households and 11 percent of African American households. Out of the African American percentage, less than 10 percent are even connected to the Internet.

In my mind, this situation is just another indication of the racial inequities in both income and wealth that continue to bedevil American society.

What can we do about all of this? Some ideas:

- Encourage black investors to immediately turn their attention to the new technological world, and find small black companies and individuals who are on top of what is happening. If we use the same energy and vision we used to establish entertainment companies during the past 10 years, this should not be problematic.

- Pool our collective resources in order to make sure every youth center, church, etc., in our communities has at least one Internet

hookup. Then, we must make the commitment to teach ourselves and our children about the Internet. This way, they will not suffer from "information poverty."

- Use the Internet to create on-line publications, "cyberspace universities," and other forums.

These are just a few of the things we can do to empower ourselves in the New Media Age. We should not enter it, and the next century, with old problems. Now more than ever, the solutions to our collective woes are in our hands, not in the minds of our "leaders." Pan-African unity and empowerment must begin in cyberspace.

Computer terminals of the world, unite! We have nothing to lose but our ignorance and sense of powerlessness.

*DON ROJAS, an internationally known advocacy journalist, is president of Communications for a New Tomorrow, a multi-media company based in the Baltimore area.*

## Kozol reminds us about children

**Marian Wright Edelman**



Jonathan Kozol is a gentle, kind man whose voice breaks with emotion when he speaks of the injustices heaped on the children and families in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx, one of the poorest, deadliest neighborhoods in America.

"Depression is common among children in Mott Haven. Many cry a great deal but cannot explain exactly why," Jonathan says in his extraordinary new book, "Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation."

It's no wonder. The air around Mott Haven is filled with the ever-present foulness of a medical waste incinerator, constructed there against the objections of the local parents. Those parents on the wealthier East Side of Manhattan, where the incinerator was first scheduled to

be built, successfully resisted the construction because of concern over feared cancer risks to their children.

All but seven of the 800 children who attend the local elementary school qualify for free lunches. And, according to the principal, five of those seven get reduced-price lunches, because they are classified only as "poor," not "destitute." Crack cocaine addiction and



intravenous use of heroin are rampant. Nearly 4,000 heroin users, many of whom are HIV-infected, live there. A quarter of the Mott Haven women who are tested in obstetric wards are HIV-positive, and virtually every child in the neighborhood knows somebody who is dying or already has died from AIDS.

The homicide rate is high enough to earn Mott Haven the distinction by the New

York Times as "the deadliest blocks" in "the deadliest precinct" of New York.

"The houses in which these children live, two-thirds of which are owned by the City of New York, are often as squalid as the houses of the poorest children I have visited in rural Mississippi, but there is none of the greenness and healing sweetness of the Mississippi countryside outside their windows, which are often barred and bolted as protection against thieves," Jonathan writes.

"Some of these houses are freezing in the winter. In dangerously cold weather, the city sometimes distributes electric blankets and space heaters to its tenants. In emergency conditions, if space heaters can't be used, because substandard wiring is overloaded, the city's practice is to pass out sleeping bags.

"In humid summer weather," Kozol continues, "roaches crawl on virtually every surface of the houses in which many of the children live. Rats emerge from holes in bedroom walls, terrorizing infants in their cribs. In the streets out-

side, the restlessness and anger that are present in all seasons frequently intensify under the stress of heat." In writing about his experiences, Jonathan has ripped the scab off of one of America's festering realities: that the world's richest, most advanced nation is allowing a good part of its hope for the future to waste away in rotting, rat-infested, war-torn communities.

"These beautiful children haven't yet figured out that their country despises them," Kozol told the Black Community Crusade for Children Working Committee recently at the former Alex Haley farm.

Right now, as our Congress and President ponder whether to take away billions of precious dollars from our neediest and most destitute children in order to give tax breaks to wealthy individuals and corporations, the question for each of us is this: "What kind of America do we want for our children?"

*South Carolina native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president of the Children's Defense Fund, and a leader of the Black Community Crusade for Children.*

## Experience God for yourself

By Junious R. Stanton  
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER  
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

I overheard a worker talking about his mother who was very ill battling cancer. I asked him how she was doing. He said she was improving, but a few weeks ago they didn't think she was going to make it. He shared how he was traumatized to see her like that. But he said he felt so blessed to have both of his parents alive during his childhood and adult life, he didn't think he had the right to pray for his mother to get better. He said when she rallied and improved, his father and siblings were elated, giving thanks for their answered prayers. He said he just didn't think he was worthy to ask for an additional blessing. How sad, this young man (he is 35) didn't feel God was gracious or accommodating enough to call upon in his hour of despair. My response to him was if you are suffering from thirst, you wouldn't go to a fountain with a thimble you go with a bucket. There is no quota on blessings or miracles.

After I left work I thought

about his situation. We really have a warped view of God and ourselves. Many people, like my co-worker, view God as a stingy, tight fist old geezer who doles out blessings like weekly allowances. Personally I take the opposite view. My experience is that God is good, kind, loving and giving all the time, no matter what.

Far be it from me to get preachy, but we need to know on a very rudimentary level that there is a power greater than ourselves that is ready, willing and able to grant our heart's desires, that nothing is too good to be true. This power is not far off. It is closer than your very skin. It resides in all of us. It is the power some call the Holy Spirit.

I thought about the words of Joshua Ben Joseph who said, "which of you whose child asks for bread will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will give him a serpent? If you who think and do evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more

shall your heavenly father who is altogether good give good things to them that ask him?"

It seems pretty clear to me to ask for what you want. The truly sad part is there are so many people who have a negative concept of God. They see him as the Big Zapper in the sky—the man upstairs who loves to punish and chastise.

They have brought into the concept of a God propagated by unenlightened people. Their God has favorites, is mean, vindictive, ruthless and impossible to please. I can see why a person would be hesitant asking anything from a God like that!

The priests of old devised theologies and images of God to frighten the people into doing what they wanted, as a means of manipulating them. We still have this legacy today in most religions. If you go to different churches or try different religions, you'll hear different ideas about God even from preachers—sometimes even in the same denomination. It's sort of like the story of the

three blind men and the elephant. Each man described the elephant differently because they examined and touched a different part of the animal. Speaking of blindness, we know what happens when the blind lead the blind? Perhaps your ideas about God need revising. Wherever you are spiritually, your ideas about God are based on that level of understanding. If you think God is mean, everything you think, say or do will reflect this concept. If you believe in a god that is good and loving, this is how you will interpret your life's experiences.

I say all of this to simply say this: experience God for yourself. Don't be content to take someone else's word for it. Don't depend on second hand notions or some religious functionary's ideas for your understanding. Ask, call, beg, plead, cry out, on your own. Discover for yourself whether or not He or She will answer your prayers. "...before they call I will answer and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

Try it for yourself.  
JUNIOUS R. STANTON is a syndicated columnist in Washington, D.C.

## Letters to the Editor

### McColl leadership outstanding

*The writer is a vice president at the Charlotte Chamber to Hugh McColl, chief executive officer at Charlotte-based NationsBank.*

I read with interest the announcement that you were to be honored by the MLK Center in Atlanta for promoting the ideals championed by the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A simple "Well done my friend" is not sufficient praise for your accomplishments during the past eight years.

You have put your faith and values to work on a scale worthy of national recognition. The "Salute to Greatness" award from the King Center is, perhaps, the best way to acknowledge that Charlotte does not have a cultural institution of their stature and, since it is your adopted home, we may be less appreciative than everyone else. However, by all measures, you personify Charlotte's 33-year-old vision for itself. Hopefully, we will one day see you recognized as our "world citizen."

I marvel at your unparalleled business accomplishments but am more impressed that your civic leadership has kept pace with them. Relationships with the NAACP and the National Urban League, extremely ambitious lending visions, concern for transit riders in Charlotte, ventures which elevate African American businessmen and professionals and collaboration with the Richardsons which has established new diversity benchmarks for professional sports franchises are all very laudatory. Taken together with your leadership in the arts and center city development, they elevate you above the rest of your contemporary business peers.

Your growth and leadership are nothing short of outstanding. If I can be of any assistance whatsoever as you focus on your vision for Charlotte, please let me know; I would consider it an honor to collaborate with you.

—Lawrence J. Toliver  
Charlotte

### Why not honor O.J.'s lawyer?

The writer is president of the Durham Chapter of the NAACP. I find it extremely interesting that a decision to present Attorney Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. with the key to the city of Durham has created questions (in the media) which may have never been raised before (regarding his honor). Furthermore, I resent and reject the idea which implies attorney Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. is suppose to be a "controversial figure" who is undeserving of a key coming from the city of Durham!

Obviously, Councilman Clement, who for decades has served as a city representative of Durham, sees why brother Cochran deserves the key to our city; obviously Durham's distinguished brothers of the Alumni Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity see why brother Cochran is deserving of the city's key; obviously, the approximately 1,000 Durham citizens who supported the event (where Cochran spoke) see why brother Cochran is deserving of the key to the city; obviously as a Durham citizen, and one who represents the Durham NAACP, I clearly see why brother Cochran is deserving of Durham's key to the city.

The answer is simple, as we would like to clarify whatever confusion might exist. The fact of the matter is, Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. has proven he may be the most talented attorney in the world. Through the success he has exemplified as an attorney, he is an outstanding gentleman and role model for the world (not just Durham). Furthermore his accomplishments unquestionably and vastly exceed Durham's current and past criteria for receiving the city's key! So without question, he deserved Durham's key, our prayers, support and anything else we could possibly give him, which would make him even more visible to the multitude of black men who are left without justice and without hope.

As we seek "righteousness," we should expect to be labeled as "controversial" and ultimately frowned upon. So was Moses; so was Malcolm; so was Martin; so was Mandela; so was Christ. If attorney Cochran is a so-called "controversial figure," perhaps more of us should strive to become "controversial" in this "hell-bound" society!

—Curtis Gatewood  
Durham

### What's on your mind?

Send your comments to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144, Charlotte, N.C. 28230 or fax (704) 342-2160.

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Correspondence must include a daytime phone number.