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SUBTLE IMPACT: TECHNOLOGY TRENDS AND THE BLACK CHURCH

Introduction

The concern of the twenty-first century is who controls information and who owns knowledge. Knowledge is a popular commodity, and corporations have obtained copyright for everything from software programs to genetic sequences and new life forms. Today's technology is not governed by neutral values; it is economically driven. This situation offers positive outcomes as well as dangerous problems. Complex decisions about technology cannot belong to private corporations alone; they require Christians to bear social responsibility as well. This essay examines the technological context of mission and introduces nine technology trends and their impact on the Black Church.

Technological Context

Most people think of computers or the Internet, not cell phones, barcode scanners, or ATMs, when they hear the word "technology." These are all devices ushering us into a real-time interaction, right-now type of world. Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, University of Georgia, Frederick Ferré, defines tech-

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nology as the "practical implementation of intelligence, that is know-how expressing values."[1] Dutch physicist and theologian Willem Drees speaks of layers of technology that humans experience: the material dimension of devices, the social dimension of organizations and skills, the psychological dimension of attitudes, and the daily dimension of life in a technological culture.[2] The writer's use of "technology" refers to high technologies associated with contemporary Western culture.

The global transformation into a network society has profound implications for black people and the Black Church. During the twentieth century, industry growth and emerging technologies have propelled rapid innovation and social change. Manuel Castells, noted urban sociologist, University of California, Berkeley, prefers the phrase "network society," which he defines as "a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks."[3] "Network society" is a more analytical term for information or post-industrial society.

The subtle impact of technology on society changes everything. We are now in the midst of three paradigm shifts affecting mission in the Black Church: changes the way we experience church, redesigns the global context for ministry, and challenges our spiritual beliefs. David Welbourn, a telecommunications professional, believes that information technology transforms our ability to communicate the Good News,

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[1]Frederick Ferré, *Philosophy of Technology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1988), 26.

[2]Willem B. Drees, "Human Meaning in a Technological Culture: Religion in an Age of Technology," *Zygon* 37 (September 2002): 599-600.

[3]Harry Kreisler, "Identity and Change in the Network Society: Conversation with Manuel Castells" [interview online] (Conversations with History, Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley; accessed 9 October 2003); available from http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people/Castells/castells-con4.html; Internet.

changes the nature of our mission field, and places our theology under renewed scrutiny.[4]

The church has historically participated in black people's struggle for economic, educational, and environmental justice. In order to continue this ministry into the twenty-first century, the Black Church must dialogue about the shape of faith and mission in the Information Age. The church cannot afford to continue a sweeping condemnation of technology nor can it blindly endorse it. In *The Ministry of Information Services*, chief information officer and ordained minister, David McKay writes: "The church must be engaged with technology's advancement and usage in order to protect human rights, equality, and justice. If the tools of the Digital Age are left solely to the secular powers, the church is unilaterally disarming itself and will not have an informed, credible voice to lend to the oppressed, the disenfranchised, and the poor."[5]

Technology and Church Administration

There is a growing movement to use technology in the local church: resources include software, hardware, technical volunteers, and technology staff (or maintenance outsourced). This trend has led to the haphazard acquisition and maintenance of information systems. In order to properly plan for needed resources, the Black Church must turn its attention to strategic technology planning, utilizing church administra-

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[4]David Welbourn, "Methodist Conference 2001 Reports: The Challenge of Information Technology" [report online] (United Methodist Church, accessed 24 March 2003); available from http://www.methodist.org.uk/information/it.htm; Internet.

[5]David McKay, *The Ministry of Information Services* (Kearney, ME: Morris Publishing, 2001), 7-8.

tion, worship, education, and evangelism. Administrative equipment includes computers, local area networks, church management software, calendar and graphics software, antivirus software, desktop publishing software, phone systems, uninterruptible power supplies, and data storage systems.

Most pastors are aware of the technology used in the local church, and they usually rely on recommendations from laity to guide purchases. Indeed, pastors are often too busy with pastoral duties to focus on strategic planning. They do, however, need to have a sense of the "big picture" with technology in their church. A lack of understanding or planning for hardware and software leads to overspending, selection of obsolete technology, mishandling of technical volunteers, and sometimes the loss of important church documents and information. For this reason, it is beneficial to create a committee that deals with overall needs, implementation, and maintenance of technology within the local church.

This committee (Technology Systems Committee) makes purchase suggestions, researches best practices, follows through on implementation, and operates media resources for the church. Some traditional ministries may plan for technologies used only within their programs; however, this ministry will need a holistic view of how computers and multimedia could improve all of the church's ministries. An important role of this committee is to increase the level of stewardship over technology.

Local churches often place their computer systems at risk due to lack of back-up of church information on a regular basis. If the computer crashes, is stolen, or otherwise damaged, administration has to go through paper copies or try to reconstruct the data from other sources. Data recovery from computer crashes is only sometimes successful; care should be

taken to establish a weekly routine to back up important church files.

Another risk that regularly causes the loss of data on church computers is computer worms and viruses. Viruses are computer programs, some with malicious or mischievous intentions, that interrupt computer systems and can ultimately cause them to crash. Investing in antivirus software is a must. However, even this is an incomplete method of protection if updates on new viruses are not downloaded daily, and church staff do not regularly scan documents suspected of carrying computer viruses.

Technologies for Worship

Technologies for worship, such as multimedia and communications media, are vital components in the daily activities of the church. Multimedia technologies include sound systems and microphones, lighting systems, computers, duplicating devices, video projection systems (cameras, projectors, screens, graphic software), and recording studios. Communications media include broadcast television, videos, video editing and production, the Internet (church web sites) and audiotape/compact discs.

From small to large churches, planning for technologies for worship is important. A bad sound system or poor acoustics in the sanctuary distracts people from the worship experience. Consulting advice from acoustic and video engineers during a church building project can make all the difference in the end results. Another matter of planning is the management of media ministry volunteers. Many times there is no one to relieve these highly skilled technical volunteers when they need a break and as a result, their personal worship and spiri-

tuality is endangered. They may experience burnout but feel obligated to continue. Churches should have rotating teams that operate technologies for worship or consider hiring a media ministry person to a staff position.

Technology and Religious Education

Educational technologies contribute to the teaching ministry of the church. If the truth were told, presentation tools such as PowerPoint have influenced the materials we use in Christian education and worship. Education technology can be a vital tool for the Great Commission, helping to make disciples and teach them (Matt. 28:19). Yet evangelism is more than an educational effort, based not only on information about Jesus Christ, but also on the invitation to encounter an authentic relationship with God and other humans. Churches must achieve a balance between face-to-face and computer-mediated communication. Christian educators often use technologies such as Bible and lesson planning software, educational videos, television, a laptop and projector, video/DVD player, or a portable stereo.

Many seminaries have adapted technology to increase flexibility within educational programs and empower church leaders to maximize electronic media, especially the Internet. For example, the Institute for Church Administration and Management at Interdenominational Theological Center provides clergy and laity practical experience with computers and the Internet through their course, "Computer Technology for the Church." Theological education is becoming more flexible as web-based distance learning courses become available. Virtual campuses enable persons already in ministry to pursue

a Master of Divinity and other seminary degrees by completing a series of on-campus intensive and web-based courses.

Information Economy and Technological Gap

Technology impacts the world economy and creates new challenges for society. In the view of Cornel West, Princeton University professor of Religion and African-American Studies, "The paradox of Afro-American history is that. . .Afro-Americans gain a foothold in the industrial order just as the post-industrial order begins. . ."[6] Information capitalism, globalization, and the digital divide will govern economic opportunities for people of color in local and worldwide settings, in both urban and rural regions.

The information economy is based on the artificial scarcity of information through secrecy and intellectual property rights.[7] It intensifies the economic caste system of the Industrial Revolution. Information capitalism reconstructs work by shifting the economy from manufacturing to service and technology industries. Technological unemployment becomes "the lesser evils" to be tolerated. Workers are classified into two groups: the protected core group (knowledge workers) and the unprotected disposable group (service workers). Since the United States does not produce all of the knowledge workers needed, it requires a global drain of the best and brightest.

The information economy widely affects the black middle class and the black working class, causing a rise in structural

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[6]Cornel West, *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 69.

[7]Michael Perelman, *Class Warfare in the Information Age* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 88.

unemployment for both groups. It also requires a stratification of work, which the writer labels the "information plantation." This "plantation" has digital sharecroppers—persons who harvest data for low wages and have no health benefits or job security. It is made up of people of color (specifically women) who work in lower level information jobs.[8] The "information plantation" is dependent upon exploitative labor from prisons and globally outsourced labor from developing countries. Private prison corporations, such as UNICOR (Federal Prison Industries, Inc.), make business partnerships with various high-tech corporations, who then build assembly rooms or computer recycling facilities within prisons.[9]

The combination of information capitalism, poverty, and inequality creates multiple regions of social exclusion around the globe. Manuel Castells describes this as more than segregation; it is the bypassing of entire neighborhoods or countries that are considered worthless to information capitalism.[10] Technological underdevelopment leaves inner city ghettos and rural towns on the outskirts of even a basic technological infrastructure and pushes a growing dependence on local informal economies and the global criminal economy.[11] Black churches must work with the community to discover viable long-term means of job creation and asset-building in urban and rural environments.

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[8]Evelyn Nakano, Glen and Charles M. Tolbert, "Technology and Emerging Patterns of Stratification for Women of Color: Race and Gender Segregation in Computer Occupations," in *Women, Work, and Technology*, ed. Barbara Drygulski Wright (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 321.

[9]Nicholas Stein, "Business Behind Bars," *Fortune*, 15 September 2009, 161-165.

[10]Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium,* 2d ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 164.

[11]Ibid., 75.

Cities compete globally to keep local economies and development thriving, fighting to recruit biotechnology and information technology companies from their competitors.[12] Suburban areas with better levels of social infrastructure (schools, emergency services, roads, and hospitals) will continue to have better employment opportunities than abandoned urban centers. Corporations emphasize the value of their services by connecting the "whiteness" of their locale with the "positives of being far from the colored urban core."[13]

Unequal access to information technology plus technological illiteracy is described as the "digital divide." The new problem of the "digital divide" is related to the historical and still unsolved problems of racism, poverty, and illiteracy.[14] In fact, it is an indication of lingering racialised factors within American society. When we consider the Internet on a global perspective, only about 7 percent of the people on the planet had access in 2002.[15] Rhetoric that implies people of color as lazy or unable to grasp technical knowledge is a diversion, which avoids addressing unjust processes that historically created structural discrimination and hides the contributions made by non-Western peoples to technology.

Macalester College, English professor Michelle Wright, in her essay, "Racism and Technology," warns us not to incorporate the baggage of race myths into our views of the "digital divide:" ". . .it is our representation of technology that must

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[12]Makani N. Themba-Nixon, "Beyond the Digital Divide: A Brief Consideration of Emerging Economies, Technology, and Racial Justice," in *Race and Public Policy*, ed. Makani N. Themba (Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center, 2000), 43.

[13]Ibid., 44.

[14]Raneta Lawson Mack, *The Digital Divide: Standing at the Intersection of Race and Technology* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), xi.

[15]Lisa J. Servon, *Bridging the Digital Divide: Technology, Community, and Public Policy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), xvii.

first be analyzed, critiqued and revamped so that we might avoid this slew of foregone conclusions, recuperation of stereotypes, and this mythology of the West as the 'cradle of civilization,' and therefore, the sole owner of 'technology in and of itself.' "[16]

Technology, Racism, and Discrimination

Technological change reveals new forms of racism that requires different modes of resistance. A few of these different designs are "techno-crow" (the twenty-first century reincarnation of Jim/Jane Crow), genetic discrimination, and racialised technology.

"Techno-Crow" and the New Electronic Democracy

"Techno-Crow" is the systemic exclusion of people from participation in democratic processes based on their technological literacy, verification by an automated system, or access to new, functional technology.[17] "Techno-Crow" also excludes people through the architecture of the Internet or "code" (software, hardware, and programming language). In his book, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace*, Lawrence Lessig, Berkman Professor

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[16]Michelle Wright, "Racism and Technology" [journal online] (San Jose State University: *Switch Journal* 15 January 2000; accessed 27 August 2003); available from http://switch.sjsu.edu/nextswitch/switch_engine/front/front.php?artc=30; Internet.

[17]"Techno-Crow" is a term created by the writer, describing the combination of technological architectures and bureaucratic procedures that result in a person's exclusion from exercising civil rights. This resulting effect is a reinforcement of the embedded social practices of racism, sexism, and classism, adding segregation based on lack of access/understanding of computers.

of Law at Harvard Law School, argues that code is law.[18] This brings to light the supposition that the architectures of cyberspace are as important as the law in the governance of civil liberties on the Internet. Just as the physical architecture of a building determines how a building is made and how it will be used, the architectures of cyberspace determine its design and use.

Jim/Jane Crow was infused into the social and physical architectures that were specifically designed and applied in ways that discriminated against freed blacks. These architectures regulated the behavior of African Americans through law (the Black Codes) and through custom (racial segregation). Much of the gains made in civil rights came by means of legal challenge to segregation laws. "White only" and "colored" signs, job and educational discrimination, and refusal of service to blacks by restaurants and other businesses, were factors creating an environment that reinforced white supremacy. Political theorist, Langdon Winner supports this view, noting that "embodied in the tools and instruments of modern technology is a political world."[19]

Although literacy tests in place during Jim/Jane Crow did not mention race, they still were an effective informal method to extinguish the rights of African Americans to vote. Likewise, today's technological literacy of course does not mention race; yet it represents a test not only of computer skills, but also of the ability to navigate networked systems and critically question the social consequences of innovation.

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[18]Lawrence Lessig, *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 6.

[19]Langdon Winner, "Artifact/Ideas and Political Culture," in *Technology and the Future*, 6th ed., ed. Albert H. Teich (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 288-289.

Public access to the Internet and computer ownership does not equal meaningful exposure to cyberspace or personal computer use.

Cultural experiences involving abuses of technology and science, e.g., COINTELPRO and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, have led to an attitude of mistrust towards science and technology among African Americans. Training inequalities and limited technical skill sets translate into innovations, such as electronic voting and online applications for government aid, becoming barriers for blacks, especially those who have a limited understanding of computers/the Internet. According to a recent research study at Pennsylvania State University, slow adaptation of technology has hampered access to federally funded programs for Black Churches, as many program applications are accessible only online and require applicants to respond electronically.[20] Lessig describes two modes of protection, one being the traditional protection of law, the other is a fence, "a technological device (a bit of code) that (among other things) blocks the unwanted from entering."[21] One example of control through digital architecture is the recently modified process to contact President George Bush. Prior to July 2003, a person wanting to send electronic correspondence to the president would click on an email hyperlink, quickly communicating their thoughts or concerns. With the introduction of the new White House web mail system, a sender is required to complete nine webpages of forms prior to actually receiving confirmation that the White House received the message. This change in architecture, that is the "code" or

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[20]Penn State Harrisburg News, "Research Study Focuses on Black Churches and Technology" [news online] (accessed 21 September 2003); available from http://www.hbg.psu.edu/hbg/news/rodlee.html; Internet.

[21]Lessig, *Code*, 122.

algorithms controlling the process of sending email, significantly reduced the friendliness of sending a message and has been critiqued as a method of reducing the White House's electronic mail volume.[22]

Another blatant example of "code" being a law or a fence can be seen in the 2000 presidential election, where many black voters were disenfranchised before and during election day. Two years prior to the election, 94,000 primarily black and Latino voters were purged from Florida's computerized voter rolls because their names and race loosely resembled that of convicted felons.[23] Thousands of minority votes were not counted in Florida because outdated and confusing voting machinery led to incomplete ballot completion.[24] The United States government's anticipated move to electronic voting has the strong potential of excluding millions of people from the democratic process; an exclusion that will undoubtedly be reflected along class and color lines.

Genetic Discrimination

Genetic discrimination is the unfair treatment of persons based on actual or perceived genetic differences, such as genetic disorders or individual predisposition to certain diseases.[25] Health and life insurance companies and employers have used

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[22]John Markoff, "White House E-Mail System Becomes Less User-Friendly," *New York Times*, 18 July 2003, sec. A, p. 1 and 15.

[23]Martin Luther King, III and Greg Palast, "Jim Crow Revived in Cyberspace," *The Baltimore Sun*, 08 May 2003, editorial, p.15A.

[24]Mack, *Digital Divide*, 143.

[25]Lisa N. Geller, Joseph S. Alper, Paul Billings, Carol I. Barash, Jon Beckwith, and Marvin R. Natowicz, "Individual, Family, and Societal Dimensions of Genetic Discrimination: A Case Study Analysis," in *The Double-Edged Helix: Social Implications of Genetics in a Diverse Society*, ed. Joseph S. Alper (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 248.

genetic information, such as genetic medical tests and family medical history, to deny coverage or employment. Troy Duster, sociology professor at New York University, referenced by Ted Peters in an article, "Genetics and Genethics," warns that by assuming genetic explanations for race, class, or crime we may unintentionally be reinforcing existing power structures. He argues that "the United States is heading down a road of parallel false precision in...the connection between genes and social outcomes."[26]

Scientific racism is nothing new to people of color, who in the past were "proven" to be genetically inferior based on findings in craniometry, which ranks racial groups based on brain size and phrenology, the measurement of skull structure and facial angles to rank the evolutionary position of various races. From the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, scientists in these fields falsely linked brain size, cranial structure, and facial features with behavioral attributes and intelligence.[27] Scientific documentation of the day supported the general public opinion that there was something intrinsically dysfunctional about non-European persons.

Scientific developments such as Human Genome Project (HGP) raise questions about the future use and misuse of genetic information, such as whose science (or technology) and whose interests will be represented in the politics of genetic research and media coverage of genetic discoveries.[28] HGP is a massive global project to map human DNA, sequencing

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[26]Ted Peters, "Genetics and Genethics: Are We Playing God?" [article online] (accessed 21 September 2003); available from http://www.counterbalance.org/genetics6.html; Internet, 5.

[27]Joseph S. Alper and Jon Beckwith, "Genetics, Race, and Ethnicity: Searching for Difference," in *Double-Edged Helix*, 179.

[28]David Skinner and Paul Rosen, "Opening the White Box: The Politics of Racialised Science and Technology," *Science As Culture* 10, no. 3 (2001): 297.

and making this information available for research. Hope for preventing genetic diseases, such as Huntington's, by intervening with gene therapies is at the heart of this effort. Researchers are developing genetically customized drugs (pharmacogenomics) that they hope will better treat cancer, diabetes, and other conditions in various ethnic groups. Scientists believe that the project will be a unifying force for humanity; however, even this achievement is susceptible to scientific racism.

How might prenatal knowledge of genetic information be used or misused towards blacks? Genetic tests, such as amniocentesis, offers prenatal knowledge of future children. Decisions women of color make as a result of prenatal knowledge involve complex relationships between personal values, cultural norms, and the patient's ability to pay for the service. The historical misuse of genetic information, such as the discrimination experienced by sickle-cell trait carriers during National Sickle-Cell Anemia Control Act of the 1970s may cause some blacks to reject this procedure.[29]

Germ-line therapies, which change not only the genes of the embryo but also the genes of offspring, show promise in preventing genetic conditions such as sickle cell anemia or Down's syndrome. Few families can afford genetic therapy without federal funding or health insurance. Even if federal subsidies were made available to low-income women and women of color for genetic tests, policies may focus on identification of genetic conditions rather than therapy. James Bowman, senior scholar at the Center for Clinical Medical Ethics at the University of Chicago, fears that poor women will be pressured to terminate "genetically defective" embryos

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[29]Ibid., 166-167.

that would be considered as a burden to society.[30]

Even new reproductive technologies, such as in-vitro fertilization, raise questions of class and race bias. The practice of commercial gestational surrogacy, contracting with a third party to be implanted with fertilized eggs, commodifies pregnancy and its "product," which, in this case, is a child with blood ties to the sponsor. This type of surrogacy implies that childbearing is separate from genetic ties, making it possible for black wombs to be put into service for the production of white children.

The reemerging role of women as breeders has deep and profound implications for women of color. Writer/activist and prison abolitionist, Angela Davis, believes that "those who opt to employ a surrogate mother will participate in the economic as well as the ideological exploitation of her services."[31] Low-income women, faced with employment alternatives unequal to that of their wealthy counterparts, may find surrogacy appealing because it pays better than other forms of unskilled labor and provides health care for the duration of the pregnancy.[32]

For example, Anna Johnson, a black woman serving as a gestational surrogate, was declared a legal stranger to her birth child on the basis that she lacked genetic ties and the intention to raise the child after the 1993 landmark legal case of Johnson vs. Calvert.[33] The practice of buying and selling human life for

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[30]James E. Bowman, "Genetic Screening: Towards a New Eugenics?" in *It Just Ain't Fair: The Ethics of Health Care for African Americans*, ed. Annette Dula and Sara Goering (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 176-181.

[31]Angela Davis, "Surrogates and Outcast Mothers: Racism and Reproductive Rights," in *It Just Ain't Fair*, 45.

[32]Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 104-149.

[33]Supreme Court of California, "Anna Johnson, Plaintiff and Appellant v. Mark Calvert, Defendants and Respondents" [case online] (Johnson v. Calvert 851 P. 2d 776 1993; accessed 9 October 2003, available from http:philosophy.wisc.edu/streiffer/BioandLawf99Folder/Readings/Johnson_v_Calvert.pdf; Internet.

economic benefit mirrors the unethical practices associated with American slavery and devalues the personhood of women and children. New reproductive technologies will challenge our legal and ethical views of black motherhood, racial prejudice, and blood ties.

Racism and Cyberspace

The Internet can be a racialised technology when used to exploit racial stereotypes, spread racial hate, or to emphasize genetic or intellectual superiority. The politics of difference are often played out in anti-black and anti-Semitic web sites that promote white supremacist or neo-Nazi ideology.

On the one hand, the Stormfront web site (www.stormfront.org), founded by former Ku Klux Klan leader Don Black, serves as a haven for White Nationalists who desire to "preserve white Western culture." Stormfront is also the sponsor of a web site that targets civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. (www.martinlutherking.org), demanding that the King National Holiday be repealed. The religious sect formerly called World Church of the Creator (now named the Creativity Movement), uses the Internet to publish information about their racial religion that aims for the "survival, expansion, and advancement of the white race exclusively." They also run an internet radio station that plays and markets hate rock music.

On the other hand, the Southern Poverty Law Center web site (www.tolerence.org) monitors hate web sites and act as a forum of resistance to race hatred. In *Opening the White Box: The Politics of Racialised Science and Technology*, Skinner and Rosen argue that: "The challenge is to appreciate that science and technology are developed and used in racialised social set-

tings and at the same time to recognize the part played by science and technology in the construction, negotiation, and debate of racialised differences."[34]

The Black Church and the Internet

Anne Wimberly, professor of Christian Education at Interdenominational Theological Center, defines cyberspace as "an electronic environment that expands our options for communication and thins the line between real and computerized reality."[35] Now more than ever, black Christians are claiming cyberspace as sacred black space. According to a recent survey of the Pew Internet and American Life Project, middle-aged African-American women are the most likely to seek religious information online. Of those African Americans that use the Internet, 65 percent are more likely than whites that go online to seek religious materials.[36] Church web sites, web casts (electronic broadcasts of church events online) and cyberspace churches represent unique religious uses of the Internet. Blackandchristian.com and *The African American Pulpit* web site (http://www.judsonpress.com/taap/) provide online content about the Black Church that would otherwise be neglected by traditional media sources.

Cyberspace can be used to network and empower diverse ministries and communities, initiating relationships that can strengthen social advocacy. Churches use the Internet to con-

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[34]Skinner, *Opening the White Box*, 292.

[35]Anne Streaty Wimberly, "In Search of the Listener: Receptivity, Bearing Witness and Formation of Self in the Era of Cyberspace," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* XXV (Fall 1997): 13.

[36]Pew Internet and American Life Project. "Report - African Americans and the Internet 2000" [report online] (accessed 10 February 2004); available from http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=25; Internet.

tinue their extended communal relationships by posting neighborhood news, upcoming events, and community concerns. Care and nurture leaders are able to keep in touch with the progress of sick members or those unable to attend worship services by electronic mail. Valuable information on wholeness and healing, employment, and directories of social service agencies are available online. By providing access, online content, and cultural news to the community, black churches bring spirituality, service, and computers together for good works.

Technology and Community Involvement

Information technology equips the church for outreach to the community and other organizations including other churches, non-profits, schools, and local businesses. Like mission itself, technology sends the church to do ministry beyond its walls, helping to breathe new life into neighborhoods and intentionally enabling their transformation.

Churches can minister to the unchurched in disadvantaged neighborhoods through church technology centers. Law professor Raneeta Lawson Mack, in her book, *The Digital Divide: Standing at the Intersection of Race and Technology* states:

> Churches can take a holistic approach to resolving the digital divide. This means that not only can they institute programs that provide internet access and computer literacy development, but they can also address some of the more systemic problems that contribute to the digital divide. . . .The faith-based computer access center is in a unique position to provide personal and financial counsel-

> ing, health education, food, clothing, and other forms of support that relieve some of the core economic issues that prevent people from participating in the digital revolution.[37]

These centers are more than projects that provide short-term relief; they are part of the church's long-term goal of community enhancement.

Today's youth, fluent in digital environments, have integrated technology into their daily activities and social interactions. This natural technical ability when fused with mentoring opportunities allows youth to reflect on both the "how" and the "why" of technology, which influences their approach to technique and values. The myth of equal access to technology in public schools must be countered with the creation of real opportunities in schools and churches for youth to learn more than remedial skills from computers. Churches can advocate for better technology preparedness for youth, families, and seniors, promoting intergenerational programs that encourage computer literacy.

The Media, Cultural Production, and Globalization

Media, such as television and radio, are informing and being informed by black culture. Cultural aspects of technology include attitudes, values, and patterns of practice.[38] The prominence of hip-hop culture as an instrument in marketing consumerism cannot be underestimated. At the same time, the media affects our values and moral fiber through the

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[37]Mack, *Digital Divide*, 175.

[38]William A. Stahl, *God and the Chip: Religion and the Culture of Technology* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 16.

images and lifestyles used to portray black life on television. Images of black youth on cable television, the Internet, and in the movies often support previously existing stereotypes that exploit and distort black sexuality.

Trans-national corporations, attempting to forge a popular cultural consensus and lifestyle, enlist the powerful influence of television and entertainment media.[39] Because technology is enmeshed in culture, it is never value neutral, but integral to social networks and their political and power relationships. The subtle embracing of the culture of consumerism has had a big impact on black identity. We have become preoccupied with acquiring material goods, to the detriment of building strong communal ties in black neighborhoods.

In *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present, and Future*, black theologian Dwight Hopkins argues that culture itself has become an industry as a result of globalization.[40] K. C. Abraham affirms this trend by saying "globalization has become the vehicle of cultural invasion. Technology is power."[41] Globalization can be identified as a new form of colonialism because of the environmental, cultural, and economic exploitation that occurs in its wake. The church is ambiguous about its relationship to globalization because some of the social networks and media that support the Western "cultural captivity of mission"[42] are also the same net-

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[39]Dwight N. Hopkins, *Heart and Head: Black Theology—Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 149.

[40]Ibid., 152.

[41]K. C. Abraham, "Together in Mission and Unity: Beholding the Glory of God's Kingdom," *Voices from the Third World* 22, no. 2 (June 1999): 144.

[42]Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 17-29.

works that silence the poor and exploit the labor of four-fifths world countries. The Black Church will need to search for ways to offer a fresh and authentic witness in communities negatively impacted by globalization and to intervene in the global and spiritual issues of environmental racism, extreme poverty, and the trans-national criminal industry.

Technological Faith and the Church

Many believe that technology will usher humankind into a utopian setting like the Garden of Eden. The claim that technology will usher forth a this-worldly salvation is an extreme example of technological faith. It assumes that humans will make ethical decisions about technology and science based on global human needs, not solely on personal gain or market demand. This point of view is implausible because it does not take into account the present and historical experience of technological abuses among non-European peoples and the poor.

Modern faith and modern technoscience are not opposites; in fact, they have grown up together.[43] The dark side of this union can be seen in the economic, theological, scientific justification of racial oppression of Africans. Europeans used military technology for the purpose of exploiting and dominating Africans (whom they viewed as non-persons) for economic profit. Blacks bodies then became the agricultural and reproductive technologies of the global trans-Atlantic slave trade. In order to maintain control over the "superior technology" of African labor, American slavery was born. During the eigh-

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[43]David Noble, *The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 4-5.

teenth and nineteenth centuries, religion and science were equally co-opted by greed and privilege. While white preachers were busy justifying slavery by labeling Africans as cursed descendants of Ham, white scientists presented biological "proof" of Africans' genetic inferiority.

The language used to describe information and biological technologies is similar to Kingdom of God language; we are told that by putting our trust in technology "death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more." (Rev. 21: 4) In the March 2002 issue of *Black Enterprise* an advertisement says: "It doesn't care about what you wear or the color of your skin. It has no sense of touch yet embraces everybody. Technology is the great equalizer."[44] According to sociologist William Stahl, this use of magical language provides an appealing way to discuss technological change with the general public.[45]

Language covers the price we have to pay to achieve our desired results with technology. It downplays what science journalist Edward Tenner calls revenge effects, the ironic, unintended consequences of technology.[46] These effects are paradoxical because they actually worsen the problem a technology was designed to improve. The possibility of overcoming racism and random violence, death and disease, hunger, and handicap speaks to our deepest desires and fears. Yet technology, with all of its glorious promises, presents humans with an ambiguous future at best.

Co-founder and former chief scientist of Sun Microsystems, Bill Joy, computer scientist, wrote an article entitled, "Why the

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[44]Worldcom advertisement, *Black Enterprise*, March 2002, 86.

[45]Stahl, *God and the Chip*, 96.

[46]Edward Tenner, *Why Things Bite Back: Technology and the Revenge of Unintended Consequences* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 6.

Future Doesn't Need Us."[47] Joy explains the dangers of emerging technologies and urges us to consider the positive and negative impact they will have on the world. We have to take the destructive powers of technology seriously because our actions today have a rippling effect into the future. We cannot live in constant fear of what might happen; instead, we must not lose hope and take action to avoid futures that cultivate exploitation and death.

Neither technological faith nor fear leaves room for a liberating God that cares about the poor. Throwing technology at social issues, such as the "digital divide," will not fix the problems of exploitation and injustice; however, envisioning a new commonwealth and working towards community transformation will move us in this direction. It is with compassion, not greed, that science and technology will attain their highest worth. As persons of faith, we must realize that the gifts of the Spirit are not pay-per-view; God did not set them aside for the wealthy few. Our technical innovations are vital resources, but they are incomplete without God's advocate, the Spirit of truth (John 4:24).

Conclusion

The Black Church must consider the legacy it will leave future generations that live in a technological society. Each successive generation will become more technologically savvy and experience social change more rapidly than ever before. Ronald Cole-Turner, in his essay, "Science, Technology, and Mission," states that emerging technologies will do more than

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[47]Bill Joy, "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us" [magazine online] (*Wired Magazine*, accessed 22 April 2003); available from http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/8.04/joy.html; Internet.

alter the natural environment; they are agents by which the human soul itself will be altered.[48] John Jewell, media director at the University of Dubuque's Theological Seminary, is convinced that "new technologies will have a profound impact on the social, intellectual, physical, and emotional dimensions" of our children's lives.[49] This reason is the most poignant one for the Black Church to become more involved with technology.

The maintenance of civil rights in an electronic democracy will require that black churches understand the evolving shape of social justice advocacy. Successful navigation of networked systems will become important to church leaders in the years ahead. As social ethicist, Robert Franklin has noted, the Black Church needs "technologically literate visionaries" whose awareness of emerging technologies results in renewal and empowerment.[50]

How do we prepare people of color for the road ahead? Not only will we have to continue fighting the present structures of racial injustice, but we also must be in dialogue about future injustices—genetic discrimination and neocolonialism. One need only consider the previous discussion to conclude that planning, teaching, and preaching about technology is and will be needed. The following steps will help black churches to respond to the paradigm shifts mentioned in the introduction.

First, we have to raise our level of technological literacy. To fully understand the factors that create a fear of science and technology in black communities, we will need to face the intergenerational trauma caused by abuses and misuses of sci-

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[48]Ronald Cole-Turner, "Science, Technology, and Mission," in *Local Church in a Global Era: Reflections for a New Century*, ed. Max Stackhouse (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 103.

[49]John P. Jewell, *New Tools for a New Century: First Steps in Equipping Your Church for the Digital Revolution* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 9.

[50]Robert Franklin, *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 124.

ence and technology. We also need to recover the historical contributions to science and technology made by blacks. Next, we should create forums for public discourse between churches and professional associations, such as the National Society of Black Engineers, Black Data Processing Associates, or the National Medical Association about the ethical and social issues of technology and race. We also should talk with the scientists, technicians, and technology lawyers in our congregations and encourage our youth to pursue these vocations. Finally, we must encourage the adaptation and innovation of technology to empower people of color through ministry, Bible study, proclamation, and conversation with other theologies of technology.