SOCIAL CYBERPOWER IN THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF AN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY:

A REPORT ON ACTION-RESEARCH IN TOLEDO, OHIO[i]

3/04

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Introduction

What will the experience of the African American community be in the information age? This is a critical question as it appears more and more that the social transformation underway utilizing information technology is permanent, and increasingly redefining standards for social life: literacy, job readiness, upward social mobility, and social power. Most African Americans were not among the early adopters of this new technology and therefore appear to be beginning the 21st century in much the same way as the 20th century, not at the cutting edge of economic development. This reality can be changed.

This paper reports on an action-research project designed to explore the ways in which the everyday life of a community can become the content of its virtual community identity, and by so doing create a bridge over the digital divide. The project is based in Toledo, Ohio (USA) and is a joint effort by the Africana Studies Program and the Urban Affairs Center at the University of Toledo and the Murchison Community Center. The field work for much of the research reported here was done by the first masters' degree graduates in eBlack Studies, Africana Studies based on information technology. They continue to work together in the Murchison Center as executive director, Americorps VISTA volunteer, and volunteer teacher.

Background

The Murchison Center began in 1992 as a program of the St. James Baptist Church. It has become a full service community technology center, with 20 networked

workstations, cable internet connection, and capacity for printing and multimedia. The program includes after school tutoring and adult classes four nights a week. The annual budget of the Murchison Center has been about $30,000, not including VISTA funding, which pays several volunteers just under $800 per month. There have been stages when the decisive influence on the center was the church, the government, and then the university. Each stage was cumulative, so that previous influence and contributions were not lost. Current transformations appear to be towards greater community influence and inputs to the Murchison Center (Alkalimat and Williams 2001).

The local community is the kind of neighborhood where people are usually locked out of the access and training needed to be an active part of the information society. As master's student, center co-founder and executive director Deborah Hamilton described the area,

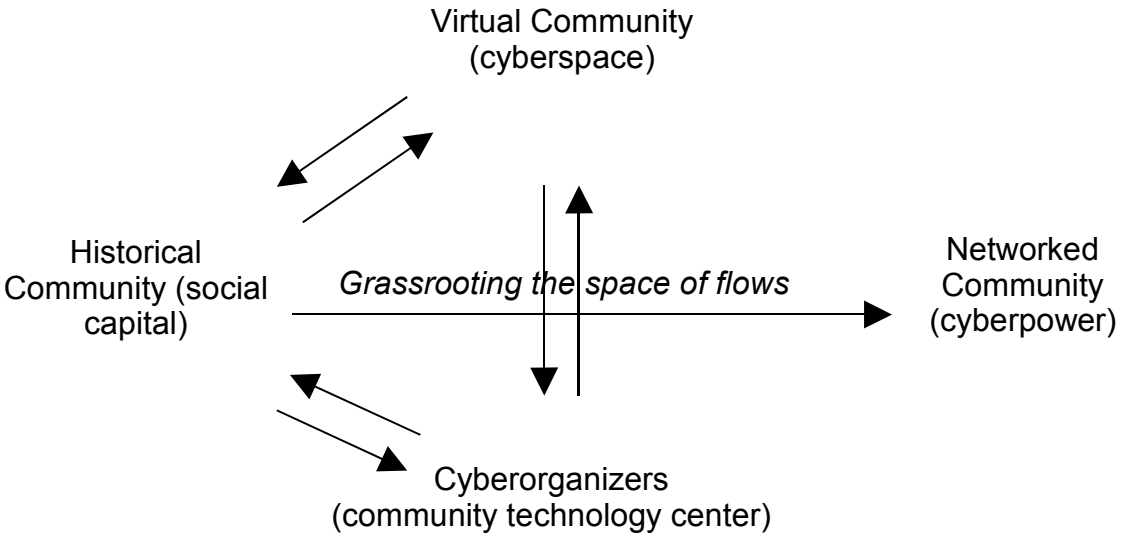
> It is located in central city Toledo where the community…is 70% poor or near poor. Ninety-seven per cent are African American in the immediate area (census tracts 25 and 26, Toledo, Ohio). The 1990 median income is $12,400 and $15,400 respectively in both census tracts. Single mothers head more than 60% of the households. One fourth of the residents are under 13 years of age.
>
> (Hamilton 2002: 13)

Overall, Toledo is a metropolitan area of over 500,000 people, 20 percent of whom are African American. It has a shrinking manufacturing base historically linked to the auto industry headquartered in Detroit 50 miles to the north. Its irony in the global economy is that Toledo produced the classic World War II Jeep that was vital in the war against Germany. Now today Daimler-Benz owns the plant, which produces the Jeep Cherokee. Toledo's capital used to be local, community based, and big enough to

finance local projects like building a major art museum (1901), university (1872), and manufacturing, especially glass and auto components. Now most of the big capital is absentee-owned.

Toledo has had considerable effort put into developing community level technology resources. Two 1996 initiatives led to the formation of a local organization called Coalition to Access Technology and Networking in Toledo or CATNeT (http://uac.utoledo.edu/metronet/catnet/). A local housing manager got a Housing and Urban Development grant to build and staff several computer labs in private apartment complexes, and a local academic researcher got involved with a State of Ohio initiative, the Urban University Neighborhood Network. The network started with 9 labs and now has a membership of 34 labs (Stoecker and Stuber 1997). A recent survey to locate all of the public computing in Toledo found over 250 public access sites including schools and libraries (Williams and Alkalimat 2003 forthcoming). In addition, the Toledo labs are active in a statewide organization (Ohio Community Computing Network, http://www.occcn.org) and a national organization (Community Technology Centers Network, http://www.ctcnet.org).

Figure X.1. The Toledo Model



The Toledo model shown in Figure X.1 proposes how a socially excluded community can be transformed into a networked community, able to mobilize cyberpower to advance its interests. In the model, the transformation from a historical community to a networked community is catalyzed by cyberorganizers and by the organizing and mobilizing impact of the content and interactivity of cyberspace. This is how the actual social organization of the community can create or cooperate with cyberorganizers to build an existence in cyberspace. The process intensifies as the community becomes more engaged in using information technology and dependent on the new opportunities of an entire community sharing a virtual collectivity. It is precisely this collective that will learn how to act, first in cyberspace like sending mass emails or signing a petition, or swarming emails, then by leaving cyberspace and taking action in the real world. Both of these actions, virtual and actual can be called cyberpower as the key staging area for the collective action was in cyberspace.

Findings

We will now use this four part framework to report on four of the cyberpower projects. Cyberfamilies is a project to utilize the existing practice of research for family genealogy to build a database beginning with individual extended families to network and link-up an entire community. Cyberhair is a project based on databases of beauty salons, combs, and information resources about hair care and design. Cyberchurch is a project to build a dynamic database of church websites, and extend that into a comprehensive virtual community of individual churches and the entire religious community. Cyberschools is a project to use cyberspace in two ways, as a directory of individual school web pages, and a site for a community wide campaign to pass a state mandated proficiency test. This is a work in process.

Table X.1. The Historical Community: The Actual Experience and Its Virtual Representation (The Toledo Model)

Actual Experience	Virtual Experience	URL
Neighborhood	Virtual Dorr Street	http://www.murchisoncenter.org/dorrstreet/
Family	Cyberfamily	http://www.murchisoncenter.org/cyberfamilies/
Church	Cyberchurch	http://www.cyber-church.us
School	Cyberschool	http://www.murchisoncenter.org/cyberschools
	First Saturday	http://www.murchisoncenter.org/firstsaturday/
Business	Cyberhair	http://www.murchisoncenter.org/cyberhair
CTC	Murchison Center	http://www.murchisoncenter.org

I. Cyberfamilies

Historical community

The family is generally regarded as a core institution of every society. It has been the vehicle for procreation and social reproduction – people have babies to replenish the community by creating a family, and then in turn rely on the family to socialize the

children to become members of society. The research focus on the Black family, especially on changes in Black family organization, has charted the Black family from its origins in Africa through the destructive terror of slavery, sharecropping tenancy, and industrial city life. Within this, the most persistent debate has been over the relative importance of slavery in understanding the persistence of family disorganization today.

This leads to one of the main obstacles in building a family database. There are limited records of biological parenting under slavery. Although a slave culture did emerge and provide a counterweight to the system, official records regarding family continuity were based on the slave owner and not the slave. In addition, family relations without formal legal marriage, and generally without documentation, presents a problem for anyone researching family history. On the other hand, it is precisely these problems that lead people to value the successful attempt to reconstruct family networks.

Cyberfamilies pointed up a big difference between lineage as tracing ones origins versus family history as tracing ones socio-biological network, inclusive of all its many branches and hubs. A lineage network will include the shortest available distance between two points in a family network, but a social network includes all available branches. Some family members seek historical meaning by linking with a particular ancestor, others by linking with broad social forces in society and the world. In my own family, the progenitor is Free Frank, a slave who bought himself and 19 other family members. The family points to him as the main frame of reference. The question is, How are you related to Free Frank? On the other hand, during family gatherings people might have spoken of the role the family played in different wars, of the different professions and industries people worked in, cities where different family hubs were located, and so on (Simpson 1983).

The family has been a hot topic in cyberspace, even for African Americans who are not online to the same extent as other ethnic groups. We identified two main kinds of genealogical sites designed for African Americans: general genealogical sites on African Americans, and research databases such as the census, government records and so on, including a great deal of information on specific families. (See the following: http://www.afrigeneas.com, http://www.prairiebluff.com/aacemetery, and http://freedmensbureau.com) In addition, many personal websites have some kind of reference or link to family content. The people who make up the content in most of these sites often do not know that information about them is available in cyberspace. This is public information.

Cyberorganizer

The cyberorganizer for this project is Pauline Kynard. Ms. Kynard completed her undergraduate degree in Africana Studies while working as Director of the Art Tatum Resource Center in African American Culture of the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library, Kent Branch. She developed the Cyberfamilies project as her undergraduate thesis project. The project is now a formal collaboration between Africana Studies at the University of Toledo and the Art Tatum Center.

The first stage was to identify one or more families who met three criteria: basic research materials have been collected, a family member is willing to work with the project as liaison with the family, and the family agrees to have this information freely available on the cyber families web site. Working with her on their respective families are another undergraduate major in Africana Studies representing the Jaynes family, and my sister who had started a web project on our McWorter family. The three families

were different in their approach to family history, but each already had completed a great deal of research. The Kynard and Jaynes families are large families settled in Toledo for three generations. The McWorter family is part of the official record of African Americans in the state of Illinois from the 1830's.

Cyberspace

Ms. Kynard worked with each family to organize available material and assist in additional research. When discussing the digitization aspect of the project it was necessary to discuss continuing research on the family. Once she has gathered and codified the information the task was for the Africana Studies Media Lab to write software for a database to express the full branching of a family social network. The working model enables every person in the network to become the center of an investigation that can follow every branch of the network that we have information for. It is a matter of statistical calculation to determine how many links we are away from each other. The most celebrated finding is that people are no more than six connections away from each other in actual reality, but the way that cyberspace has been constructed any given web page is 19 clicks from any other, but this finding only applies to the 24% of cyberspace that is available via simple surfing (Barabasi 2002: 25-40, 165). Clearly our actual social lives are more connected than our representations in cyberspace. But this need not be the case.

Each individual in a family network has a page. This places them at the center of kinship links to the broader network, through their parents and their children. Each individual is at the same time at the center and the periphery of an expanding network

of humanity, going back into history and forward into the future. Stable communities will be more closely connected, but over generations most groups are likely to be much closer than people think.

Networked community

The first outcome from the pilot stage of this project is that Ms. Kynard was asked to prepare a CD for the Jaynes family reunion. This project has now become an organizing activity in the family to digitize their history and current make up. Secondly, she is preparing a slide-lecture presentation on the project for community groups interested in genealogy. And, the library is considering expanding its uploading functions such as is required by the cyberfamilies project, i.e., giving more importance to creating digital libraries of local content.

The project is moving to an institutional process that will create a new generation of family cyberarchivists, e.g., students in school. Plans have been developed to implement a module for graduating seniors at the local Black high school to develop digital family history. They will have the option to contribute their family information to the database of cyberfamilies. As the families interconnect then the identity of the network will shift from family in a narrow sense to community in a broad sense. We will discover as never before the logic of kinship and be able to transform it as a network into a communications channel for cyber activity. The latent social cyberpower of this dormant network will be activated. This will be its digital awakening and engagement.

II. Cyberhair

Historical community

Taken together, hair care and hair design are an important part of social life, culture and identity in every society. In the Black community they are especially critical because African hair has unique qualities for hair sculpture and because there is a long tradition of African American cultural excellence in this activity. The hair salons are centers of economic, cultural and social action. Doing hair is rooted in deep cultural economics, encompassing family labor, barter with friends, or doing it by oneself.

The beauty salon was created to provide a service in the urban Black community, especially in the 20th century. As a result of proletarianization, African American families became smaller, family networks were de-territorialized, and many services became commodified. The salons became centers of cultural production and economic exchange as well as “third places,” sites of public discourse that form a hub serving across a dense network of families, friends and acquaintances. Transgenerational interlocking networks of families and churches are vehicles for discourse. Beauty salons are a vital part of the African American public sphere.

The main icon of the Black woman as entrepreneur is Madame C. J. Walker, founding leader of the Black hair care industry. She invented a new chemical process for hair care and design. But her impact went way beyond this. She recruited and trained a corps of hair care workers thereby giving beauticians a greater professional profile. This was the most stable form of independent business ownership for Black women in the 20th century. She provided significant financial and moral support to the writers, artists, and institution-builders who became known as the “Harlem Renaissance.” She also did so with the political militants of the “New Negro” movement.

However, today the political economy of the Black hair care industry is changing. One major example is the retailing and wholesaling of Black hair care products. In Toledo there is one Black hair products distribution company over 40 years old. Over the last ten years Asian business interests have opened at least four megastores, each with more than ten times the floor space and product selection. Salons located in the major malls and department stores now include Black people in their market. This has led to a tension between the traditionally more networked, "conversation-intense," and slower beauty parlor in the community and doing hair as a commodity in a time-driven, mass market, mall environment.

The beauty salon in the Black community has historical roots but is in a state of crisis. There is some hope for the future, however, as the main Black high school has a growing cosmetology program. Enrollment there is greater than that in many of the more high tech areas that lead to a college major in engineering and computer science. Enrolling in cosmetology is also evidence of a desire to get a skill and possibly be self-employed and able to support oneself and a family.

Cyberorganizing

The Cyberhair project emerged in three stages: a conference, a class project, and a MA thesis project. The conference defined the project, the class began the enumeration of salons, and the thesis work built the Cyberhair website, "Black People's Hair."

A symposium was held on 6-7 March 1997, "Black Peoples Hair: A Symposium on the Political Culture of Everyday Life." (See http://www.murchisoncenter.org/cyberhair/conference.htm) It was the first year of the

UT Africana Studies program. As a way to bring Black studies to life for UT students, many of whom are first in their families to attend college, a day when art historians who focus on African hair, hair braiders, and students could bring their knowledge together. The conference was scholarly, with presentations on the mutual influence of African and African America hairstyles over the last five centuries. It was practical, with hair braiders demonstrating their work on volunteers. And it was emotional and personal, with participants sharing stories of their struggles with their hair and their identity.

The conference set the framework for the Cyberhair project in three ways. The project would focus on cultural production rather than cultural performance. It would advocate Panafricanism as a cultural approach. And it would advocate the adoption of information technology as a technological foundation.

The Africana Studies program then organized an undergraduate course called “Cyberspace and the Black Experience.” (Chronicle of Higher Education 19 May 2000: A18) Along with readings and seminar discussions, the course initiated a practical research project to build a database of Toledo’s African American beauty salons. Here a debate emerged over whether it was a “politically correct” action to study places that were hostile to a positive Black identity, meaning did anything other than natural hairstyles. The one sister in the class with “trendy locks” was opposed to going to the beauty salons for this reason, but the others who all wore styles more in the mainstream of Black Toledo agreed that this project would make a big impact on the overall Black community. They were responding to the design of the assignment, to build a cyberresource that might motivate people to become computer literate and cross over the digital divide.

The one young man in the class took up the task of completing the database as his masters project in Africana Studies. In his thesis, Brian Zelip explains his situation:

> I am a white male. Every salon I went to was a Black salon. 78% of the salons were owned by women. All of the salon owners were in their mid-30's or older, whereas at the time of the research I was 24 years old. … It was anticipated that the research being carried out by me would be faced with some degree of resistance and non-cooperation." (Zelip 2002: 88)

He bases this on the social meaning of color, gender, hair and age. However, he then attributes his success to how these barriers were overcome: the salon owners' respect for the research sponsors (UT Africana Studies and the Murchison Center) and for his knowledge of the African American community and culture. Zelip had been the hip-hop deejay on the campus radio station.

Cyberspace

The website was built around the 1997 hair conference, the database of beauty salons, and a collection of images of Afro combs. This anchored the digital identity of virtual Black hair in the actual space of cultural production rather than cultural performance. Beauty magazines stress cultural performance – gorgeous women, lots of documentation of spectacular events, product ads, and celebrities. The magazines are like dream books to guide stylist and the customer. In contrast, Cyberhair's emphasis on cultural production targeted the universal experience of everyday life:

The Africana Studies Media Lab digitized a collection of combs from the US and elsewhere that the author gathered over a 35 year period. The process of organizing the digitized images facilitated our discovery that the Afro comb has passed through

four historical stages: traditional, industrial, Panafrican, and global. The combs began in traditional society (made of wood), underwent further development in industrial society (metal), took new forms during the struggles for national liberation (wood, metal, and plastic), and now reflect the reality of globalization (extruded plastic).

Networked community

In the project, students become cyberorganizers, relying on the historical community of salon owners, stylists, and customers to help build the site and determine its future evolution. Out of fifty salons, seven owners were found to have active email addresses, but none of the shops had a computer in the salon for business or the public. But as a result of contact with our project several salon owners and stylists have taken computer classes at the Murchison Center.

Zelip went on a study tour of South Africa and took the opportunity to document hair care practices. On one occasion he found a beauty salon next to a cybercafé. The hair stylists had never been online. He gathered them in the cybercafé to view Black People's Hair on the web. When he returned to Toledo, he showed slides of the South African experience to the stylists who were in the site. This is a small example of cyberspace creating a Panafrican experience at the grass roots in the 21st century.

Survey data collected by students identified a small number of salon owners who are interested in making efforts to use computers and the Internet. The Murchison Center set aside computers to place into salons, and a masters student from the University of Michigan School of Information joined the project as cyberorganizer to carry out the installation and support of the PCs. This will enable the project to support

the use of software for the salon as business, and the Internet and the World Wide Web for customers. In the future we will investigate the possibility of uniting an intensely individualistic group of entrepreneurs into a collectivity to serve common interests.

III. Cyberchurch

Historical community

The church is the most comprehensive social institution in the African American community. It provides a total experience based on its embodiment of culture, ideology, social organization, economic development, leadership, ritual, and a moral order. It is important among the social cyberpower projects because it also has had a long history of adopting new advances in communications technology. Today one can experience the Black church in person, on the radio, on television, in print, on video, CD, DVD, the Internet and the World Wide Web. The actual church takes up regular time each week and provides host space for many community activities. It seems only a matter of time before the church in cyberspace will rival the traditional gathering of a congregation.

Our survey suggests that there are at least 300 churches that primarily serve African Americans in Toledo. This constitutes the most powerful set of leaders, real estate interests, ideological consensus, and mass mobilization in the Black community. However, the church has to adapt to the new technology if it is to serve youth as they become cyberactivists. When we began our project less than 10 churches had their own web page reflecting the community wide impact of the digital divide. When the church adopts a new technology it also has the role of infusing it into other community activities as well. It is in this sense that Cyberchurch is a pivotal project.

Cyberorganizing

Cyberchurch began as a research assignment in an Africana Studies course on the Black church. Reverend Al Reed, a local minister with a social activist background, was recruited to teach the course once a week every Saturday morning. This schedule was set to allow for non-traditional working students to enroll in the course. Each student was assigned to gather church information for a web page. We began without allot of computer literacy. However, the majority of students became comfortable and fluent with basic computer software and aspects of the web. In fact, out of this course, a couple of students even became teachers at the Murchison Center and leaders of the Cyberchurch project.

A second process was outreach to church leadership to attend free computer literacy orientation sessions offered weekly by the Africana Studies program. The main result of this has been a greater interest in the project. Many of the participants in the early morning outreach sessions also began attending evening workshop sessions. The process of building a virtual community was itself becoming a meaningful social group meeting on a face-to-face basis. These discussions were important for several reasons: they became focus groups to get community feedback on the project, they educated people about the project and got them to buy into the plan, and it allowed for students to emerge and make the transitions from student to community worker.

The project plans four progressive levels in the expansion of the Black church into cyberchurch. Level one is a church in the online church directory, with a web page containing publicly available information about the church, including a photo. Level two is a church that has supplied information about its staff, organization, calendar, and program and that has at least ten of its members with email signed up to a Cyberchurch

electronic discussion list. Level three is a church web site with sound files, and/or video of at least one sermon and one song by the choir. Level four is a church with its own community technology center.

An action-research team called the Toledo Spiders carried out the data collection for level one. This team was made up of undergraduates and led by a graduate student in Africana Studies, all paid with federal work-study funds. The team used digital cameras and tape recorders to document conferences and churches as part of the Cyberchurch project. The project began to take off as people were motivated to get their own church online, and community organizers began to see this as a positive organizing project. The Murchison Center staff is currently organizing to visit each church to make direct contact with the church leadership. Unless a church member has participated in Cyberchurch classes, this visit is generally the first notice the congregation has of the project, which is usually followed by a regular announcement in the printed church bulletin distributed every Sunday.

There are five main lessons from this work: First, standardization of a main template for the project solved problems created by first trying to use freeware and free web hosting with people with low computer literacy. Second, emphasis on email seems a more democratic way to build a networked community while building a main web location as a virtual base of operations. Third, early adopters of this program were church seniors, but the critical mass for the church to become a networked community will be the youth. Fifth, student workers have to be mentored in terms of technical skill, attitude, and time management. Lastly, the greatest resource in building a cyberorganizing project is the bonding social capital that sustains participation.

Cyberspace

The general plan for the page is to combine the feature of a general portal with a database of individual church web pages. Again, our emphasis is on cultural production. We are approaching the church in terms of sites of cultural production (churches, seminaries, and publications) and tools of production (holy texts, hymns, and theologians). Linking all of this together can create an environment embracing all organized religious activity. One sister attending a Cyberchurch session responded to this design with a smile on her face saying, “My Lord, if we can all get together like this in cyberspace then we can all be in the same church.”

On the site, each church’s web page is based on a standardized template. The page allows for voluntary submission of information to start the process of a church being added to the database. Confirmation by the Cyberchurch team is necessary before any information is posted.

The logic of this structure follows an intervention by cyberorganizers into the internal organization of the church resulting in the church becoming itself a cyberorganizing force within the community. The cyberorganizer can join the church or just work with it, but also there will be church members who have or gain the skill who become cyberorganizers as well. In fact it is not too early to see the emergence of a new field for church professionals, cyberministry. The digital archive of the Black church experience will constitute its historical identity, and digital interaction will become a major vehicle for collectivizing religious experience.

Networked community

The church as a networked community can come into existence as each of the four levels of the cyber church project is achieved. The key is level two, when church members join the electronic discussion list. With more than 250 churches at level one now, level two may result in more than 2,500 people on an emailing list. We are currently in the process of building level two and the mailing list. The Cyberchurch team meets in a working session once a week. They will constitute the editorial collective for a newsletter based on a unified church calendar. This will be sent out as an email message, while the annual calendar will be archived on the web site. While starting out as a mailing list, the role of cyberorganizing in this case is to building a discussion list.

A community organization in Chicago has also joined Cyberchurch, adding Chicago churches to the site. On a national level, the project has been joined by the National Society of Black Engineers (http://www.nsbe.org) with more than 300 local college chapters of African American students in engineering and computer science.

The project is also networking the existing resources in the community. Five women who have become cyberorganizers in the cyber church project are also now the webmasters for their respective churches. Several churches have started labs on their own, and have affiliated with CATNeT.

IV. Cyberschools

Historical community

The school as a social institution and a site for social change has always been an important part of the African American community. Free Black communities established schools before the Civil War in the 18th century, and then universal public education

was established during the Reconstruction in the South in the 19th century. A third level was reached in the 1950's and 60's, when the school became a key battleground in the 20th century. Throughout these high points were critical shifts in the political orientation of the Black public sphere. There were different great debates that dominated public discourse: the emancipation debate (including the abolitionists, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction), the self-determination debate (the alternative views of people such as Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. DuBois), and the Black liberation debate (especially the alternative perspectives of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King).

Schools are vehicles for socialization. Each school level with a simultaneous experience (for example, the students in one high school at one time) constitutes a generation. This same group will share social experience throughout their life cycle. The schools in Toledo had a functional fit with the economy when industrial mass production required lots of workers with general skills. People graduated from high school into the factories and got good, often lifelong, jobs. In the 1960's, Black youth were overcoming lower rates of success, but by the 21st century the process has been reversed. At this stage of deindustrialization, the Toledo schools have become dysfunctional, falling far short of expected levels of achievement. The teachers are mainly white, and the students are mainly Black. The economic interests of the union are discussed independent from the quality of education facing the children and their parents. The school is the primary battleground over whether the future of the current generation of Black youth is to be part of the information society or delinked in isolated lower-income inner city "forbidden zones."

Cyberorganizing

There have been three stages to this project:

1. The Community Math Academy: a two year long initiative at the Martin Luther King Elementary School focusing on “parent power” and information technology.
2. Cyberschools: a networking from the base of one school to create a web portal for a groups of schools;
3. Online practice proficiency test: a web page with new practice math tests every month from September to March.

The core group of the CMA included eight people, four cyberorganizers based in the university (one faculty and three graduate students) and four grandmothers based at the Murchison Center and the surrounding community. Every person in the group had a computer or was provided a refurbished one through a program of the Murchison Center. The CMA established a discussion list. We knew it was working when one of the grandmothers used the list to organize a community barbeque. Michelene McGreevy was the student cyberorganizer on this project and she based her master’s thesis in Africana Studies on her work (McGreevy 2002).

Our first initiative of after school tutoring in the Murchison Center led to meeting with parents and grandparents with a concern for school reform. Their focus was on the school where everything seemed to be going wrong. The parents were demobilized and the teachers union did not have a positive relationship with the community. The CMA became active in building the local Parent Teachers Organization. When we joined, the meetings were called and attended by a husband and wife team of parents with little or no support. After meetings increased in size up to 10 per meeting conflict led to a

contested election. A new principal was appointed for the next year and demobilization was chosen as the new administrations strategy for control.

In response to this the project shifted focus from the actual to the virtual, to building web pages for schools to recruit parent, teachers, and students to unite in an effort to take virtual control of their schools by defining them in cyberspace. The initial focus was on building web pages for each school, going well beyond the administrative page on the main web site of the Toledo Public Schools. This was aimed at making the school a transparent user-friendly seeming place. We also wanted to demonstrate the power of machine assisted community memory. One example of this is that when the local Black high school won the city championship in basketball it was in the newspapers for one day and that was the end of it. We put up a web page on it and it remains there today as fresh as ever to bolster the local spirit of excellence.

This second stage shifted from a focus on a high school and its nine feeder schools to a focus on the high school alone. There was positive recognition of each new page of local content, but as the school and the local community leadership did not promote the necessity of building a virtual identity this was a good but not very utilized community resource. Our attempt to digitize the bonding social capital was a highly valued but seldom used resource. The missing element was support from the local school culture, especially the legitimacy of support from parents and teachers.

The third phase of this project focused on the crisis of poor academic achievement as measured by low scores on state mandated proficiency tests. These annual tests cover five subject areas, and are given to three grade levels (4th, 6th, and 9th). It is now necessary to pass these tests or be held back to repeat the grade level until you pass the test.

We began giving practice proficiency tests in math every first Saturday. The project grew from nine students to 400 students. The tests are composed based on official state guidelines by a student community teacher work team, and the tests are monitored and graded by a collective of college student volunteers. Now the first Saturday practice tests are online and available for access to everyone (http://www.murchisoncenter.org/firstsaturday/). The tests are a major battlefront in education, as the state is requiring more testing. Our project is designed to mobilize people in the struggle for good test scores. Some people will be helped in the short run and their children will get higher scores. In the longer run we are building a social process that can be linked to other efforts for school reform.

Cyberspace

Each stage of this project has had a corresponding representation in cyberspace. A webliography of links served as a resource for the tutoring activity. Cyberschools was a portal with a common template for web pages about each of the 10 schools. The tests online are for printing and administering, with a separate answer sheet for immediate review and study. Each of these cyberspaces is useful: global, local, struggle for good test scores.

Networked community

We have positioned two paths to networking in this project, the digitization of local school culture and the digitization of test preparation. One is a focus on the local, the particular differences of each school, while the other is global, and points to the universal struggle faced by all students. As computer literacy becomes universal in the high schools then both paths will be used, but under these circumstances the use of the

online tests has had the greatest result as it maximizes the potential of a small group to meet the needs of a very large group. The proficiency test is a state level law hence our project online is of immediate use to everyone in Ohio.

The greatest potential for new cyberinitiatives lies within the high schools in the USA. There is widespread availability of computers and high speed Internet access. The youth are wellsprings of creative energy. Our work is but a prelude to the revolution being born among the hackers, gamers, texters, and all the other smart mobs that Howard Rheingold (2002) has helped bring to our attention.

Conclusion

Just as there are many bridges across the digital divide, there are alternative ways for a community to become networked. There at least five models: 1) early utopian community free-net projects, 2) experimental communities like Netville, 3) dot-coms built for mass participation like eBay, 4) Social movements and political campaigns, and 5) public computing for social cyberpower. We have reported on action-research in Toledo, Ohio involving a project to implement and study the public computing model, based at the Murchison Community Center.

Our approach focuses on four factors: historical community, cyberorganizers, cyberspace, and the networked community.

1. The historical community: We have found the content of the historical community in the institutional structures that sustain and reproduce the community. We have concentrated on the family, the church, the school, and the beauty salon as key institutional contexts. In addition to digitizing the content of institutional life, two other points of focus emerged. The first is to pay attention to the antagonisms that

the community faces because these struggles create the social future of the community; and the second is the recruitment of emerging cyberorganizers from the indigenous activists that keep these institutions going. The search is for the ways in which social cyberpower contributes to the sustainability of an institution and the overall community.

2. The cyberorganizer: Social cyberpower is associated with public computing, especially the school, the library, and the community technology center. Organizing forces for actual social struggle in this way is emerging as a new field for research and curriculum development as there is a growing need for the kind of work reported in this article. We anticipate that information technology will induce changes in the fundamental methods of social research and social activism alike. The challenge is for academic programs to learn how to link research and practical experience. The land grant college system did it for agriculture and mass production industry, and now we need to do it again in terms of information technology.
3. Cyberspace: The work thus far has emphasized collecting and uploading content into dynamic databases that are configured to assist poor communities in organizing efforts for their own behalf. In addition, all of our databases must be configured to interface with each other so we will in fact be reaching higher and higher levels of collectivity.
4. Networked community: We have merely put basic ingredients together for the virtual reincarnation of a community. The magic of cyberspace's future will be created as more of humanity gets online. It is in this context that the virtual struggle for the future is on. In general what is at stake is the fundamental social

structure of cyberspace, and that is one of the most critical factors that will be influencing democracy and quality of life. We have the polar opposite choices of the corporation or the community. Our action-research is to learn about and work for the community paradigm as the future of the information age.

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