

THE BRONX
Journal

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250 Bedford Park Blvd West, Carman Hall 259
Bronx, New York 10468-1589 Telephone: (718) 960-8217
Fax: (718) 960-8218 e-mail: tbj@lehman.cuny.edu

Editorial

TWO-THIRDS OF FOURTH-GRADERS CAN'T READ WELL. This is the sum of the April 6, 2001 report on reading, by the National Center for Education Statistics. "The best students are reading better, while the worst students are falling further behind," said Gary Phillips, acting Commissioner at the NCES. Although the "average" reading scores have remained the same, the gap between high and low performers has increased. While the scores of high-performing students at the 75th and 90th percentile increased, the scores of low-performing students in the 10th percentile, decreased.

The NCES also reports that, as in the past, female fourth-graders performed better than their male counterparts, and that among racial/ethnic groups, only Asian/Pacific improved their scores, averaging better than blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians.

If two thirds of our fourth-grade children cannot read well, the nation has a serious problem. Here there is a situation we cannot blame on the students. The government, the schools, the system, the parents have failed them.

A recent editorial in *The Bergen Record* rightly stated that "if literacy is 'the new civil right,' as President Bush has proclaimed, adding that he wants to leave no child behind, then the rights of many children are being denied".

We couldn't agree more. The time has come to move, and move fast. We already know what the solution to this serious problem is: commitment, commitment, commitment. Review once and for all our school system, invest in education. As the saying goes: "if you think education is expensive, try ignorance". And, again, like charity, education begins at home. Parents should be the first ones to help their children to be prepared to take over the nation and make it better for future generations.



Jim Carney is the Executive Director of Bronxnet

By the time you read this there may have been one more fatality charged to tragic Oklahoma bombing. However, there will be few tears shed for this final death linked to the worst domestic terrorist attack in American history. This is primarily due to the fact that the final fatality is the mastermind of the attack - Timothy McVeigh. Thanks to either the incompetence or arrogance of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the first federal execution of an inmate by lethal injection will take place no sooner than mid-June. The question of just how many witnesses there will be to the execution is still unresolved at this writing. At the behest of the people of the United States of America McVeigh is to die for his crime barring a sudden change of heart on his part, resulting in challenges to his conviction and sentence. Ironically, our nation - ambivalent

about the ethics of executions - found itself more embroiled in a debate over whether or not the execution should be available to the mass media.

In April, audio tapes documenting the dramatic last minutes of condemned prisoners on death row in Georgia, surfaced and were aired over Public Radio. Immediately the debate over the ethical merits of the death penalty was revived. The question of the role over the media and its responsibility in documenting the solemn final minutes of a convicted inmate were also raised. In the "Execution Tapes" as they have been dubbed, "play-by-play and color commentary" are presented from civil servants assigned the disturbing duty of performing and witnessing the execution of "the will of the people." For the most part, they are difficult to listen to, not because of their content, but because of the mundane and rou-

tine nature of the commentary. In other more disturbing tapes, the last words of inmates range from condemnations of the prosecutors and jurists who convicted the inmate, to prayers of thanks for the kindness of prison staffs. In perhaps the most disturbing of the tapes, a sheriff narrates a botched electrocution that takes three attempts before the prisoner is actually pronounced dead.

The public airing of these tapes angered many public radio listeners who mainly lean towards more liberal views, and are generally against the death penalty. However the display of these episodes through a mass media has made allies among two disparate groups: those who favor the death penalty as a deterrent and those who oppose it on ethical grounds. The pro-death penalty side feels that taking the process from behind closed doors and

showing potential criminals the possible result of their activities will deter crime. The anti-death penalty group feels that exposing a process they feel is barbaric to the light of day, will create a backlash and force the abolishment of the practice. Regardless of the reason, a growing number of journalists and activists are championing your "right" to see McVeigh breathe his last breath.

One danger is that the frenzy resulting from the spectacle will result in an environment reaching back to the public executions of the 1800's. Except in this modern age, you can buy a commemorative tee shirt and possibly even pay \$19.95 for the pay-per-view special. But the most important element that must not be forgotten, is the memory of the dozens who died in the blast, and whose names are already drifting into obscurity.

Letters to the Editor**BronxTalk with Gary Axelbank**

I enjoyed your enthusiasm at our interview. Monday, March 26th, 2001, on Colon Cancer: Screening and Prevention. Thank you for bringing an important community-health topic such as this up for discussion. I look forward to an encore discussion on macro and micro issues that have a direct impact on the health of our community.

Sunil S. Jhangiani, MD, MBA
Change Healthcare Services

On Lincoln Memorial

Wow! I didn't know that the Lincoln Memorial was carved in the Bronx. I am glad to know that there are good stories coming out of our borough. Thank you for calling our attention to this invaluable piece of historical fact. My congratulations to Ms. María Castro for a wonderful article.

Shirlene M. Kennedy

MLD's VII Colloquium

It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in the Media Panel of "Visions and Voices: The Hispanic Experience in New York City", an annual colloquium of the Department of Modern Languages of the Borough of Manhattan Community College, CUNY. The event will take place at the Richard Harris Terrace.

Rafael Corbalán
Associate Professor BMCC

Workshop on Latin America and the Caribbean

On behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Center at Florida International University and our partners, the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida, the Rockefeller Center at Harvard University, The Miami Herald and American Airlines, I am pleased to invite you to the 19th Annual "Journalists and Editors Workshop on Latin America and the Caribbean" on May 3-5, 2001 at the Marriott Biscayne Bay Hotel in

Miami, Florida. The workshop's theme is "Between Plan Colombia and the Free Trade Areas of the Americas: The Future of Inter-American Relations."

The journalists and Editors Workshop brings together leading representatives of the media, government, and academia in a series of "on-the-record" panels and discussions. Panels examine critical issues facing Latin America and the Caribbean today and are designed to provide participants with the opportunity to improve their coverage of the region by exchanging perspectives with fellow journalists.

Eduardo A. Gamarra, Ph.D
Director & Professor
of Political Science, Latin American and Caribbean Center

Letters to the Editor must include your name, address, and telephone number so we can verify your comments. The letters may be edited to conform to space limitations. Readers may also send comments via e-mail to: tbj@lehman.cuny.edu



I told you you should have stayed in the intensive care unit

Commentary**Witness For The People - Only \$19.95**

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