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Introduction

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Introduction

by James Jennings

This issue of the *Trotter Review* focuses on one of the most important set of challenges facing the Black community in the U.S., and that is, how to access, and manage, and control, significant facets and processes associated with the information superhighway. This current issue identifies the nature of the challenges, but also proposes some strategies that the Black community and its leadership might consider to ensure both access and control over information technology.

While an increasing number of reports and surveys indicate that our society is rapidly becoming a “have and have-not” one, in terms of access to the information superhighway, the potential difficulties are actually even more problematic for the Black and Latino communities. The issue of “have and have-not” involves much more than mere access to this new form of technology. It also includes issues related to the management and control of resources of the information superhighway. Thus, while increasing number of Blacks are beginning to enjoy some limited access to the Internet via email and subscriptions to online services, like America On-Line, very few people of color are actually in positions supporting the management, or control of this industry. Increasing access, furthermore, is not synonymous with enhancing capacities and effectiveness of community organizations to respond to a range of social, educational, and economic problems. This issue represents a collection of essays that respond to the call, not only for greater access to the information superhighway, but also focuses on related issues of management and control.

As director of The Trotter Institute, I am both proud and honored that President Nelson Mandela has agreed to begin this issue with his own thoughts and concerns about this new challenge. As his essay indicates, this challenge is a worldwide one. Access, management, and control over facets of the information superhighway can facilitate communication and collaboration between Blacks in the U.S., and the African diaspora. The next several articles describe some of the problems facing Black and Latino communities regarding this topic. The articles by Mhlaba, Scott, and Wilhelm identify areas that must be considered by those interested in enhancing access to the information superhighway.

The next set of essays by Jennings, Roberts, Jackman and Payne, Wilhelms, McDowell and Castano, and Alkalimat offer concrete proposals and suggestions for responding to some of the problems identified earlier. While many of these proposals are specific to certain community organizations, collectively, the articles begin to suggest elements for policies and actions that should be considered.

Finally, the Commentaries section includes a brief statement by Congressman Bobby Rush about national politics related to race and the information superhighway.



This section also includes an interview with E. David Ellington. Mr. Ellington is the president and co-founder of NetNoir, Inc., a Black-owned software company in California. This interview provides some insight about related issues considered important by Mr. Ellington, and how he approaches questions related to increasing access for the Black community, but also moving beyond access, to management and control possibilities.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms. Kimberly Moffitt, our publications manager, for all her efforts in making this issue possible. Ms. Moffitt is responsible, not only for producing this issue, but also working directly with me in designing the issue, and assisting contributors in developing their ideas and essays. As Associate Editor, Dr. Harold Horton also played a critical role in producing this issue. Dr. Stephanie Athey of Stetson University provided assistance with the conceptualization of this issue, as well as with editing. The Trotter Institute relies heavily upon the contributions of its staff, and faculty and research associates to publish the *Trotter Review*; my thanks and appreciation to all of these individuals.

James Jennings, Ph.D. is director of The Trotter Institute and professor of political science at UMass Boston. He is the author of a number of books, including *Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America* and *Understanding the Nature of Poverty in Urban America*.