

INFORMATION NATION OR

DARK AGES II?

by Candi Lace

Complex catchphrases like "power vacuums," "severity of power," and "mercantilist policies" chirp and tongue-twist from the pages of Economist Today, The New York Times and Scientific American magazine. As a genial George W. Bush signs another piece of paper, he ensures billions of dollars will be spent on sleek lightwater nuclear reactors, enriched uranium bombs and cruise missiles. As this measure is sealed by a backdrop of more jolly male politicians, Bush drones on about the primary purpose of education today: produce more high tech workers, upgrade outmoded technology to boost American profits, and stabilize big business. Considering all the rhetoric surrounding war, patriotism and the "Information Age," the climate is excellent for Americans to become even more indifferent to the unbelievable suffering in this country and around the world. After all, how often does the president, or rather, spokesperson for all lands Westernized, publicly discuss poverty, homelessness or illiteracy?

While listeners or viewers may not expect Bush to comment on Peru's or Mauritania's increasing poverty rate, for instance (over 75 percent of the population in both countries, according to Joni Seager's *The State of Women in the World Atlas*), the dialogue absolutely must start somewhere. At least five million American kids are destitute (family incomes less than \$7,000) (documented in the January issue of *Z Magazine*) and there's no safe estimate of how many more are actually living in the streets. One only has to stroll through San Francisco's Mission District or Chicago's Boys Town to catch a startling glimpse of this reality. In essence, has scientific and technological advancement forced society to forget about humanitarian issues?



Dr. Mae Jemison

While new inventions sprout up everyday (including the umpteenth version of Microsoft Messenger, more sites on the universal electronic shopping mall, and telescopes that can see 1.5 million kilometers beyond Earth's orbit), what is the real purpose of technology? Based on e-commerce, thousands of gadget superstores, and shelves of product-based magazines, many people would link technology to play or a sophisticated image. In contrast, Dr. Mae Jemison, who is Founder and Director of the Jemison Institute for Advancing Technology in Developing Countries and an expert in environmental explications, says the fundamental reason for technology is "to assist as many people as possible in fulfilling their needs—love, safety and happiness." Wow—where does this theory slink through our president's sluggish speeches regarding advancement?

"Science is a search for understanding, and technology puts that understanding into practical use," says Jemison, a former astronaut and the first African-American to soar through space. "Once we have understanding, we can come up with the solutions to problems ... and I'm not talking about MC²."

The issues Dr. Jemison often addresses around the world include eradicating poverty, making sure all civilizations have access to electricity and running water, distributing wealth evenly among all existing classes, and stopping the destruction of trees and wildlife. While some scientists work frantically alongside megabytes, airwaves, numbers, and plastic applications in compressed labs, Jemison works extensively on energy initiatives in Cuba, Thailand, Bolivia, and Uruguay, among other places. And as video technology has been widely used to propel violence and war, and satellite technology is most often used as surveillance over military bases, Jemison teaches less popular ideas bred by telecommunications—studying the earth and other existences, and transferring ideas of forgiveness, understanding and tolerance via worldwide communication.

"I celebrate the knowledge, tools and choices we have because of science," says Dr. Jemison. "If we continue to abuse it and not extend it to everyone, the reasons for expanding it are empty for all of us who have created it and taken advantage of it." 🌟

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