

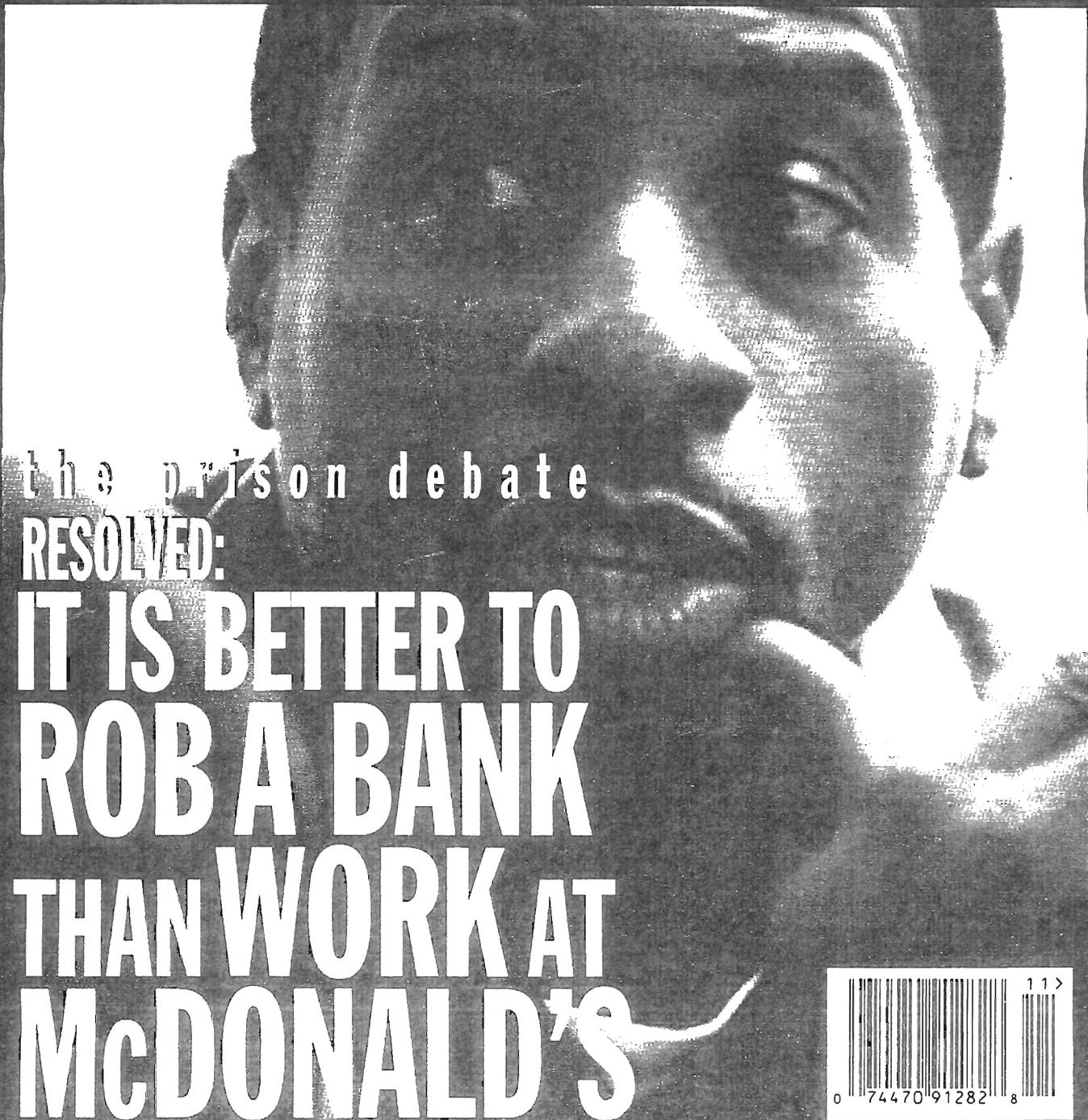
- ♦ Building Momentum—Fast ♦ Best Business Books of 1999
- ♦ Does Unequal Pay Lead to Unequal Performance?

# ACROSS THE BOARD

THE CONFERENCE BOARD MAGAZINE

\$4.75

NOV/DEC 1999



the prison debate  
**RESOLVED:**  
**IT IS BETTER TO  
ROB A BANK  
THAN WORK AT  
McDONALD'S**



# Unpredictable

Readers of *Fortune* and *Business Week* and *Harvard Business Review* have a pretty good idea of what to expect when they pick up those magazines. The same can't be said of *Across the Board*. Which is not to say there's not a method and sensibility to *ATB*, just that it's not nearly as apparent as it is for most business magazines—or for most magazines, for that matter.

Yes, we are a business magazine, make no mistake about it, but we define ourselves differently than others in our field. We are, first of all . . .

A *practical* magazine. Note two articles in this issue. The first, "The Soft Realities of Mergers" (page 27), deals with something everybody pays lip service to but ignores in the breach: That is, how do you cope with the feelings of abandonment and neglect, even betrayal, that are often the side effect of M&As? Better yet, how can you keep those feelings from flowering in the first place? Two executives from the Hay Group write about what leading companies are doing to deal with such so-called people issues.

Another practical article in this issue is Dan Ciampa's "Building Momentum" (page 40), which takes on the matter

he characterizes as a manager's toughest job: coming into a senior job from the outside and motivating a range of people who don't know you (and who may view you suspiciously or downright distrustfully).

An *authoritative* business magazine. As evidence, we submit "Pay Directors in Stock? No" (page 46). Dan Dalton and his colleagues at the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University make a persuasive contrarian case against what has already become one of the sacred tenets of corporate governance: that paying members of the corporate board in stock and stock options results in better oversight and increases shareholder value.

"An extremely high-risk strategy," they conclude, "and, at its best, a potential PR disaster."

An *unconventional* business magazine. See "A Lesson From the Ballpark" (page 54). Alertly, assistant editor Christy Eidson picked up on a study by a Notre Dame management professor that looked at the relationship between pay distribution and performance of major-league baseball teams. The professor found that the greater the spread between a team's top stars and the other players, the poorer the team performed on the field and the worse it placed in the league standings. Does that finding have relevance to corporations and their teams? Christy polled a cross-section of experts, and you'll find their responses here.

And, speaking of unconventional approaches, managing editor Matthew Budman polled leading business writers (and publishers) on the best busi-

ness books they've read in the last year (page 55).

A *thinking person's* business magazine, for which I present as evidence our main cover story for this issue, "The Prison Debate—Resolved: It Is Better to Rob a Bank Than Work at McDonald's" (page 16). An intriguing proposition? We think so, and we're betting you will, too. Is it too much of a reach for a business magazine? A question to which we reply: Is creating jobs a reach? Is keeping people out of prison a reach? Is the growing income disparity between rich and poor a reach? Implicitly, this article asks all of these questions, and, implicitly, all of these are business issues.

I began this editor's note by suggesting that *ATB* was not as predictable as other business magazines, and with the prison-debate article, I rest my case. An unconventional subject for a business magazine? Yes. An unconventional approach to the subject? Again, yes. Does the piece prove that men on the inside are just as smart as the rest of us? Also yes, but sadly so. I wish that were one thing that didn't need proving. ■



EDITOR

# The Prison Debate



RESOLVED:

IT IS BETTER TO  
ROB A BANK  
THAN WORK AT  
McDONALD'S

WHEN JOHN WAREHAM MENTIONED the idea to me, it was impossible to resist. Take three middle-aged white men, all successful in their fields, and three younger black men, all prison inmates, and engage them in a debate: *Resolved: It is better to rob a bank than work at McDonald's*. The twist—it it needed one—that the executives would take the affirmative of the proposition, the prisoners the negative.

The debate would take place at the Riker's Island Correctional Institute for Men in New York City, which is part of the largest jail system in the world. The system admits 133,000 men and women every year and on a given day averages 16,000 to 17,000 inmates, most of them young, and most of them black or Latino.

Four or five years ago, holding the debate that John proposed would have been laughable. Riker's was considered to be out of control. According to Roger Jeffries, commissioner of programs, it averaged 150 stabbings and slashings *a month*. But this year, he predicts, there will be fewer than 100 incidents of violence throughout the entire system. That decrease has allowed the introduction of a program like Wareham's. Under the aegis of the Osborne Correctional Association, he teaches a half-day-a-week class called "How to Break Out of Prison." Wareham's intent is



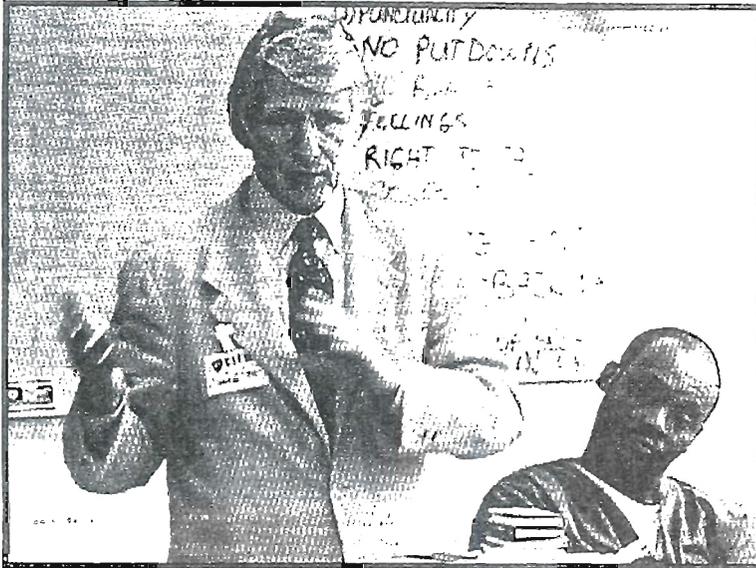
not to help them scale the walls of Riker's but, rather, to scale the barriers that hinder the young offender: lack of education and skills and confidence. And how better, in his view, to give them the self-confidence they need to succeed in the outside world than to make expert debaters of them? What better way to learn how to frame an argument, to develop language skills, to think on one's feet?

For the debate, he chose three young men from his latest class. "Are they nervous?" I asked John as we waited for the official vehicles that would take us over the bridge to Riker's. He replied, "Sure, they are. But a *good* nervousness." For that matter, so were the three executives Wareham had chosen to represent the opposition. They were going to debate on their opponents' turf. What kind of reception could they expect?

Crowded into a room were about 40 of us—the two debating teams, about 30 inmates, a film crew, and Wareham and I, who were to act as judges. Despite the Spartan room and harsh lights, the atmosphere was congenial. Remarks from both teams were punctuated by laughter and applause, and every speaker received the full attention and respect of his opponents and the audience. What follows is the debate as it actually happened.

—A.J. VOGL

**"Sure, they're nervous. But a *good* nervousness."**



**John Wareham, with Clifton Powell at right, presides over the opposing teams.**

**JOHN WAREHAM.** As you may remember, Oscar Wilde, the second most-performed playwright in the world after William Shakespeare, served time in prison. He said two pertinent things about the experience. The first was, "The vilest deeds, like poison weeds, bloom best in prison air. 'Tis only what is good in man that fades and withers there." Well, I think we can all agree that that's not true of this group. In fact, what's good has flowered here: I've met absolutely the smartest individuals in the world in this room, and we've tried to bring out the absolute best in every one of them. Wilde also said, "If England treats the rest of her criminals the way they treated me, they don't deserve to have any." A clever remark, but more to the point is that the men in this room are treated well, and have treated us well, too.

We meet here at Riker's to learn how to think about ideas. Some individuals say ideas are dangerous, and that you should be very cautious about what you say, but we have learned in our class that, no matter how outrageous an idea might seem, we can discuss it. A man here can express whatever view he wants as long as he's able to defend it and listen to an opposing view. And that certainly holds true today as we debate the proposition: It's better to rob a bank than work at McDonald's. I should point out that we're picking McDonald's only because it is the archetypal fast-food restaurant and employer.

Speaking for the affirmative will be:

- **EMILE (TOST) KRATOVIK**, writer and retired New York maritime courtroom and appellate practitioner;
- **JOHN MCLEAN**, courtroom criminal attorney turned international corporate lawyer with 25 years in practice between Hong Kong and New York; and
- **TOM MORGAN**, senior vice president at Smith Barney, syndicated New York radio-show host, and writer.

Speaking for the negative:

- **CLIFTON POWELL**, warehouse manager, 18-month incarceration for sale of controlled substance, and prior conviction for same;
- **HERBERT BERRY**, sheet-rock tapper, 16-month incarceration for drug sale to undercover police officer, and prior conviction for assault; and
- **JONATHAN HUTCHINSON**, shipping and receiving warehousing, seven-month sentence for domestic violence.

We will follow the British rules of debate. Speakers for the affirmative and negative will alternate. Then the leaders of each team will have one minute to sum up their arguments.

**EMILE KRATOVIK.** Our topic is straightforward: "It is better to rob a bank than work at McDonald's." We have the affirmative of that proposition, and I want to define the terms by which we're prepared to support it. We're not talking about individuals with a craft, a trade, a union card. We're not talking about individuals who are, by nature or by acquisition of the talent, computer literate. We're not talk-



**Emile Kratovik**

ing about people with easy entry to an established niche in the job force. We're talking about individuals with limited options, and we're talking about the difficulty in finding a way out of the limitations on those options. We're talking about the real world: we're talking about real options; we're talking about the segment of the population that has been once or multiple times in prison.

I'm going to take the position that the economic imperative is what counts and fundamentally sets the scene to prove the affirmative of the proposition. Mr. McLean is going to address what I would call the situational-ethics side of the proposition; he will speak of man's rights in an unjust situation and, more generally, about the victimless crime. Mr. Morgan, the third member of our team, will analyze the proposition from a business point of view, examining both ventures on a risk-reward basis and comparing the odds of success of each.

Willie Sutton was a famous bank robber. His heyday was in the '40s and '50s. When he was taken on his last job—and he was not easy to take because he was a very canny and crafty individual—some enterprising reporters asked him what it was that he did and why he did it, and he had a very straightforward pair of replies to those questions. He said, "I'm never happier than when I'm inside a bank doing what I was meant to do: robbing it." And when another reporter asked him why he did that, he looked at him as though the individual had about as much brains as a head of cabbage and said, "Because that's where the money is."

Now, where is the money for an individual who is what we will call, for want of a better phrase, an unskilled laborer in the inner city, and is a person of color? The possibilities of getting a job at McDonald's are about 14 to one. About 70 percent of job-seekers looking for that kind of a job are unemployed after a year of looking in the inner city. If you succeed in getting the job, it's a minimum-wage job; it cannot support rent, food, or the monthly needs of an individual, let alone a family. And if you do succeed in achieving it, you have minimum job security, few or no benefits, little or no hope of a raise.

Compare the likelihood of reward in robbing a bank and the risk of getting caught with the likelihood of success in getting a job at McDonald's and of achieving any economic benefit over a course of time. After, say, a year working for McDonald's, at the point that you're about to be given a raise, you're as likely as not to be fired, to be replaced by another entry-level person.

If you apply a purely logical, rational analysis to whether it is better to rob a bank or work at McDonald's, and if you want some money to run your life and you want independence and you want a hope of getting ahead, I think, like Willie Sutton, that you rob a bank.

**CLIFTON POWELL.** Good morning. I will be speaking for the negative of the proposition. I will be followed by Mr. Berry, who will speak on the moral aspects of bank-robbing, who in turn will be followed by Mr. Hutchinson, who will be coming from an allegorical standpoint.

Even for people with limited options, you surely can't believe that it's better to rob a bank than work at McDonald's. Even the great Willie Sutton, a man who successfully robbed many banks, eventually got caught, you see. And that's the bottom line. The risk factor is just not good enough.

The net average of a bank robbery is \$20,000. If and when you get caught, you'll get at least 15 years in prison. Now, it sometimes happens that you can rob a bank and not get caught. So then you can run and run; for seven years you can run—I think that's the statute of limitations. Compare that seven years to two years working at McDonald's—you really don't want to work there more than two years, unless you're planning on getting some type of managerial job. You may not have many skills at the beginning, but that's what McDonald's does: gives you skills. You can become a cook or a chef. You can go back to school. McDonald's has options now. As a matter of fact, I was talking to somebody who told me he'd seen a sign that said McDonald's is looking for managers, starting at \$30,000. Where else can you get that kind of money? Most corrections officers start at \$30,000. Sounds good to me. There's even the possibility you'll be able to save some money working there. And if you're making minimum wage and don't get all your medical costs reimbursed, you can turn to Medicaid.

And look at something else. For a bank robber, nine times out of 10 when you get that money you're going to spend it fast, because you're always looking over your shoulder—you never know when you're going to get caught. So the main option is to spend that money. Then what are you going to do? Rob another bank.

But the old days are over. When Bonnie and Clyde and their crew robbed banks, they robbed the whole bank. They went into the safe, they went into people's pockets, they took *everything*. Nowadays, when you rob a bank, you rob one teller. And when you rob that teller, you usually get only \$2,000 or \$3,000. You spend that pretty quick on the last life. Then what you do? You've got to rob another bank. And like I mentioned before, even Willie Sutton was caught.

**Clifton Powell**





John McLean

JOHN MCLEAN: I would first like to congratulate the leader of the negative team for his excellent presentation. It was most agreeably put. It just contained so many half-truths, so many misleading ideas.

Working in McDonald's for 10 hours a day, being ordered around every few minutes by rude and thoughtless people who regard you only as a robot without feelings—how can that compare with working only a few hours and ending the day not with \$100 in your pocket but with thousands?

Now, I will explain to you other features of our argument about why it is better—indeed sensible—to rob a bank rather than to work in McDonald's. First of all, the world today is about rights, and I advocate that every man should assert his rights. Second, this is a crime that is victimless. Third, in my view, compassion is the name of the game.

Now, as to the assertion of rights, it was Karl Marx who said that, "It is in the history of mankind to create systems whereby the rich and powerful can live by the toil of the powerless." Now, political powerlessness is one thing: It makes it difficult to breathe. But economic powerlessness is another thing altogether. It makes it difficult to *live*.

The person who is working all day in McDonald's at \$6 an hour has to think of his children. He's got to feed them, he's got to pay the rent, he's got to buy them clothes. You don't have to read the newspaper to know that in recent years the common philosophy of our society has changed: It is no longer a completely caring society. People who are, as they used to say, "down on their uppers" are made to go out to work, because we have returned to that old Puritan dogma that work is noble. *Noble*. But my friend here did not talk about nobility when he talked about working for McDonald's. What nobility is to be found in that situation? We are told that we must recognize our social obligations, and so work.

Hear them say, "Oh, well, the only job for you is a job at McDonald's. You know, you've drawn your straw, and your straw's a short straw." I say that's fine and dandy as long as my straw is long enough for me to feed my children, for me to live by. If it's not, then I suggest to you that a man should assert his rights and get a longer straw.

Now I would talk to you about the victimless crime. Let's look at what it's like for the banks. Here is this girl, the teller. You come up to her. You've charmed her with your smile. There are no guns involved: This is just pure charm. And you say to her, "Your life is worth more than that canvas bag. Hand it over." All right, it's a little bit threatening, but so be it. She hands over the canvas bag and she smiles at you. She may be pressing a buzzer on the floor at the same time, but never mind.

The fact is that she has lost nothing. She's handed you a canvas bag full of money. Compare that, gentlemen, with the thought of robbing a girl of her virginity. *She can never get that back once you've taken it—a dastardly thing to do.* But the bank is something different: Even though you've stolen its money, more money will come in again. It's like an ever-filling pitcher. No problem at all for the bank.

I also said that I would talk about compassion. There's a philosopher some of you may have heard about: Bertrand Russell. And he said something that has always struck me—that he had "unbearable pity for all the sufferings of mankind." And I feel that too. I do feel that. And that leads me to the notion that what is black and white in daylight is gray at dusk, and is altogether black in the darkness. Things aren't always what they seem to be.

So I am saying to you, my friends, that to rob a bank in compelling circumstances is, without any reasonable doubt, a much better step to take in life than to spend one's days working in a place like McDonald's. Basically, no one gets hurt, and in the result you get a good deal of satisfaction.

As my ending parable, let's say it's a bit like the result you might get if you ever had the opportunity of squeezing a rich man's testicles. It hurts, it hurts—but there is no permanent damage.

HERBERT BERRY: No permanent damage? I think Mr. McLean would be singing a different tune if I—or anybody in this room—put the crush on *his* testicles. Now, I would like to ask you a question: What if your son or your daughter came to you and said, "Dad, I'm thinking about robbing a bank. Should I do that or get a job at McDonald's? What should I do?" Just think about that for a minute. This is a child that you nurtured; this is a child

that you love. What would be your answer to that child?

I know what my answer would be, because for me robbing a bank is no option, no option whatsoever. How about you? Would you tell your child, "Yes, child, yes, son, just

who have used McDonald's as a stepping-stone. The first black mayor of this city, David Dinkins, once worked at McDonald's. So did another great man: Martin Luther King. Think about how he changed the course of history. Not for just me, for everybody.

*Everybody.*

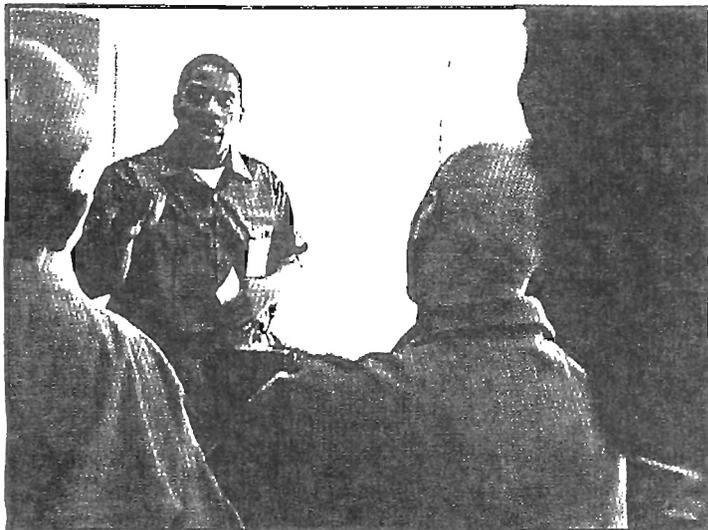
I would like to leave you with a good quote that will help you understand what I'm saying: "Adversity makes a man look at himself." When you look in the mirror at yourself, what do you want to see? When other people look at you, what do you want them to see? Do you want them to see an upstanding young man that's trying to do something of himself, trying to better his life? Or do you want them to see a thug?

**TOM MORGAN:** To Mr. Berry's list of famous people, such as Mayor Dinkins and Martin Luther King, I'm going to add one: John Hancock, who as you know had the largest signature on the Declaration of Independence. I'll tell you why in a moment, but first let me respond to some other points.

Mr. Powell said there's not much money to be had in robbing a bank, that the Bonnie and Clyde days are over. *Au contraire*. These days you rob a bank electronically, and you get a hell of a lot of money. You don't deal in a few thousands; you deal in millions. Mr. Powell then said you can be assured of jail time. Not true. In fact, the statistics say that for most crimes committed in America, something like only 15 percent of the perpetrators go to jail. So the odds are in your favor. More on that later, too.

Mr. Powell also made the point that a bank robber will blow the money he's taken on the fast life. Hey, if you're going to blow the money from a robbery, you're going to blow the money you make at McDonald's also, so what the hell's the difference? You might as well blow \$100 grand or \$600 grand than to blow six bucks an hour. If you're going to blow it, that's part of your nature.

This is capitalism. We live in a capitalist society, which means you've got to have capital. Capital ain't six bucks an hour. Capital is \$100 grand, which you can get from robbing a bank. Mr. Berry raised the question, "How am I going to answer my child?" I'll tell you how I'd answer: "This is capitalism—you've got to have capital." Everybody



**Herbert Berry**

go and rob the bank. You might do well." Or would you tell that child, "Get off your butt, go to McDonald's, work your way up, use it as a stepping-stone to something bigger and better for yourself."

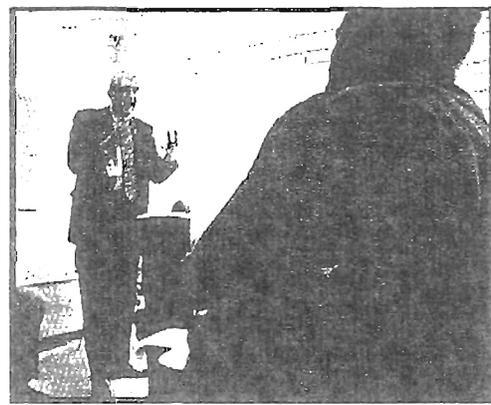
Mr. McLean made some good points. He was talking about being ordered around in McDonald's, the manager telling you, "Look, do this, do that." But ask yourself: Would you rather for him to be telling you that, knowing you can go home after working your shift, or would you rather be in here at Riker's, with the officers ordering you around, knowing you can't go home, knowing you have to do what they say? Think about it. The only thing I can do is put it on myself. I know right now that if I had an option to work at McDonald's today, even with that manager ordering me around, I'd take it.

The simple fact is a first-time offender who gets caught robbing a bank may get 15 years. Me, myself, if I go and rob a bank and I get caught, I'll never see the daylight again.

However you perceive your reality to be, that's what your future will be. If you perceive yourself as a person whose only option is robbing a bank, then that's what your future will be: in jail. For me, that is no option.

Now, Mr. McLean also made a point about nobility. Do you actually believe that, if you felt yourself to be a noble person, you'd rather break the law than work for your money? I don't think so. Noble people study, they learn, they work hard, they make things happen.

We have very good examples of nobility in our history—people whom we all know of



**Tom Morgan**

here spoke of "working at McDonald's." No. You're working *for* McDonald's. When you've got capital, you're working for yourself. Big difference.

Mr. Berry made a point about nobility: "Noble persons work hard and honestly," and this is where my reference to John Hancock comes in. He worked very nobly and hard. He was a big man, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and he even had an insurance company named after him. But do you know what he also was—a criminal. Yes: a damn smuggler. That was how he fought against the British system, imposed on the Americans in this country. You are fighting against the system that is imposed on you, and I say be a John Hancock.

Finally, as I said earlier, I'd like to talk about odds. Life is a series of decisions where you weigh the odds. Life is also an opportunity to distinguish yourself. How do you give meaning to your life? How do you distinguish yourself? You do something unique. Is working for McDonald's unique? Hell, no. Millions of people have gone that route. But how many people rob a bank? Few. Very few. That's a way to distinguish yourself. Now you might say to me. "Hey, I can distinguish myself by climbing Mount



**Jonathan Hutchinson**

Everest." And I would reply that the odds are bad. Most of the people who try to climb Mount Everest hurt their lungs. A good many of them die. Or you could distinguish yourself by going over the wall here. But very few people get out of Riker's Island that way. Again, bad odds.

But good odds: to rob a bank, to commit a crime, because a majority of crimes are committed by people who never get convicted. And those who are convicted do the appeals process by squealing on their brother, and they don't have to serve much time. The average bank robber in this country only

serves a couple of years, the average murderer only five and a half, six years. Robbery, murder—hey, the odds are with you.

I'm in the investment business, so I've got to advise people about odds all the time. They ask, should I invest here or should I invest there? And I answer, "What are the odds? Here's what the stock market has done over time, here's what the bond market has done. Let's go over the odds." If a guy came to me and said, "Hey, should I put my money on this guy who's going to work for McDonald's, or on him—he's going to rob a bank." I'd say, "Him! Him! That's a better investment. Let's go with the odds. The odds favor the bank robber."

I say join the ranks of criminals: Nelson Mandela spent most of his life in jail. Muhammad Ali went to jail. President Kennedy's father, Joseph Kennedy, broke the law—he was a bootlegger. And, as I've said, so did John Hancock, a great American. So follow a great tradition, a great American tradition. Get even with the system. Go with the odds.

**JONATHAN HUTCHINSON:** We've heard a lot of words today, words like logic, education, limited options, compassion, victimless crime, capitalism, playing the odds. But nobody said *better*. I'm going to tell you—that's the key word this morning.

We're not really talking about robbing a bank; we're talking about doing something with the limited options available to us. We're talking about being better able to help children who are the real innocent victims of the society we live in. We're talking about being better able to support the economic institution that we are a part of, whether we know it or not. We're talking about being part of a group of people, a community of humanity. We've got to be better, right?

The arguments you heard were persuasive. "It ain't going to hurt nobody." But when your brother and your sister go to the bank to get a property loan, there ain't going to be no better for them, because interest rates are going to be very high. It ain't going to be no better for your children, because in the future the bank is going to want that money back, and somebody's got to pay; someone's always got to pay. It ain't going to get no better.

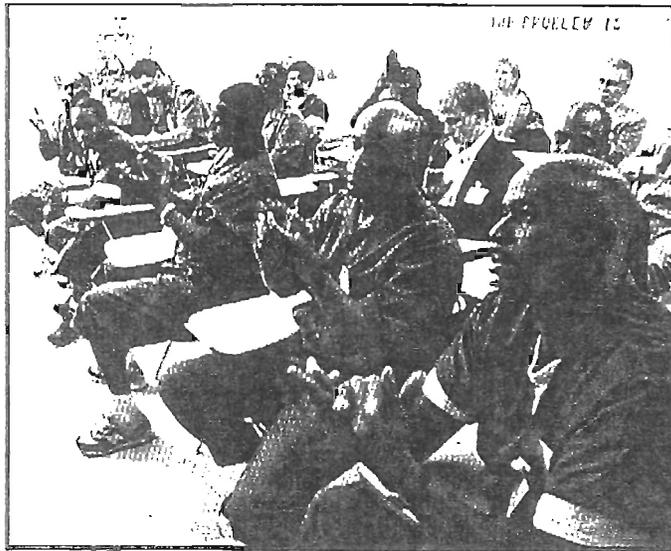
It was said before that when you rob a bank you rob one teller, and the average take is \$2,000 or \$3,000. For purposes of debate, let's figure it at \$4,500. At that rate, if you rob a bank every year, it will take you 50 years to make \$225,000. You can be working at McDonald's for 15 years and make \$225,000. Which is better? To have your children living in a house that will be sold out from under them when you're caught by the police? Or to have your children living in a house that

truly belongs to them, because you bought it by money honestly earned?

**KNOWLES:** I'm going to make this short and sweet. I'm going to give you three reasons why the arguments by our opponents are specious, and then see if I can't sum it up in a song. The first speaker, Mr. Powell, told us that the great Willie Sutton himself got caught, and that's the only reason that we've heard about him. But the system does not publicize the deeds of those who don't get caught. They are not publicized in song or story. But they're there, and the odds are in their favor.

In his very moving introduction, your second speaker, Mr. Berry, asked you what you'd say to the child who asks whether it's better or worse to rob a bank than work at McDonald's. But what do you do when your child can't speak? What do you do when your child is born to you in a tenement apartment and your cupboards are bare, when there's no food for the child and there's no food for the mother? So you go to the neighborhood bodega, and you throw yourself on their mercy and ask for food because your wife just had a baby. Because you don't have any money, they don't know you, and they throw you out of the store. Are you going to go work for McDonald's? Or might you steal a loaf of bread, maybe more? Maybe even rob a bank?

We've also been told about the many famous individuals who have worked at McDonald's. I suggest to you that they worked



The audience responds to a point well made.

*With one and a half pair of pants, it ain't cool.  
But there's no dollar for nothing else.  
I've got beans, bread, and rice on my shelf.  
Every day I see my mother struggling.  
Now it's time, I got to do something.  
I look for work, I get dissed like a jerk.  
I do odd jobs and come home like a slob.  
So here comes Rob, his gold is shimmering.  
He gives two hundred for a quick delivery:  
I do it once, I do it twice.  
Now there's steak with the beans and rice. . . .  
The family's happy. Everything is new.  
Now, tell me, what the f-- am I supposed to do?*

**POWELL:** I must commend the affirmative team. I look at these guys and I see executives, but when I listen to them I think *comedian*. Can you believe it—he comes up with a rap song. What are you supposed to do? I'll tell you what you're supposed to do: You're supposed to stick to your guns, be strong. He says, "If you go in the store and they deny you a loaf of bread, what would you do—steal it or rob a bank?" I'd probably steal the bread, but I won't rob a bank, because it's going to take me away from my children much, much too long. Then how would they get anything to eat?

Then they talk about blowing money. If you work hard for your money, you're not going to blow it. You're going to think twice before you just go out there and buy FUBU and Fila and Givenchy and Pierre Cardin. You have a list of the essential things you have to pay for—mainly food, rent, the light bill, the phone bill. But if you went and robbed a bank, then the only thing that's important to you is to have fun—women, booze, drugs.

They say we only hear about the bank robbers that got caught. Yeah, but the ones that got away are probably dead from boozing too much. Even if they escape that fate, they were caught morally. And they cannot live a normal life like the man or woman who works in McDonald's.



Herbert Berry

at McDonald's expressly—whether they knew it or not—so they could leave that job as fast as they could.

This refrain, from a 1990 song by Boogie Down Productions, sums it up. I'm not a rap speaker or a rap singer, but I give this to you for the logic of it as well as for the emotion:

*My mother goes to work cold-bustin' her ass,  
My sister's cute, but she's got no gear.  
I got three pair of pants with my brother  
I share.  
Then at school, see I'm made a fool.*



**Timekeeper Marc Holt (left) confers with two members of the negative team, Jonathan Hutchinson and Herbert Berry.**

They say let's follow the great criminal minds in this country. We all know this country's criminal-minded—that's how the people in power gained most of the things they gained. However, do two wrongs make a right? Should you follow the footsteps of people who you know aren't right? I don't think so. I think we have one and only one option: work, honest work. Let's forget about bucking the system. We done bucked it too long. We have to work with the system. Those who've worked with the system are the great people of this world today. Just remember Martin Luther King: He worked in a McDonald's, and he also said, "I have a dream that one day . . . all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! free at last! thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

**WARRHAM:** The formal part of the debate is now concluded. Time now for speakers from the floor.

**DAVE PATTS:** These gentlemen on the affirmative team argued it's harmless to rob a bank. I doubt that very much. I'm going to give you an example of how a so-called harmless bank robbery can turn out to be a mess. Okay, so I'm walking into the bank. I'm a good-looking guy, and I can go there and throw my charm on the teller, "You've got a pretty smile; you have some nice teeth, some nice hooters." You know—strike up a conversation. And then I tell her, "I have four or five guys standing around and they're all over your security guards. I want your money right now. If you flinch, I'm going to smoke you." She's nervous, jittery, and jumpy. I see her

make a sudden move. Boom! That's it, it's over. Anybody that tries to stop me, I'm smoking them, too. What I'm saying is that people's going to get hurt, because one way or the other I'm getting out of this bank with the money.

Now what would I tell my daughter if she asked me how did I get this money. "Yeah, baby girl," I'd say, "when you was born, you know, I didn't have a job at the time, and you needed Pampers, you needed milk. So I went in a bank and robbed it. I didn't plan to take nobody's life, but it turned out that way." "So, Daddy, you killed somebody?" "Yeah, I did. I'm sorry, baby girl, but I did." "Would you recommend *me* to do that?" "No, I wouldn't," I'd say, "But I had to do it at the time." I tell you I wouldn't feel too good telling my daughter that, you know.

Let me end it like this: I'd rather dress up like Ronald McDonald, put on some makeup and a big nose and a red wig, before I go rob a bank. I hope I got my point across.

**JOSÉ RAMOS:** My English is not that good, but I hope you understand me. You think you have two options. If you win, you win. If you lose, you lose. But sooner or later, you've got to lose, because nobody hides from the FBI. Then you have another two options: You're going to jail or you're going to be dead. I'd prefer to work in McDonald's all my life than be seven feet underground. I hope you get my message.

**ROB HARMON:** The affirmative team argues that bank robbing is a victimless crime, but it's still a *crime*. In the same way, no matter how sophisticated the arguments a bank robber uses to justify his crime, he's still a bank robber. I would not personally want to try to live with that. I'd like to be able to sleep at night. I'd like to have the feeling of coming home from a hard day's work, even if it is at McDonald's, knowing that I did myself some good, my family some good, and possibly my future some good.

**JACK CUNNINGHAM:** I hear people talk about the legal ramifications, but what about the *lethal* ramifications. I mean, suppose you got shot while you were robbing the bank. Think of the pain you not only cause yourself but your loved ones. Think of their anguish when you're taken away from them.

**ALPHONSE BENJAMIN:** I've got something to say, and these guys may get back at me for what I'm about to say, but I'll say it anyway: I'm for robbing the bank. They talk about Martin Luther King and how he worked at McDonald's. Now here's a man who spent a lot of hard time devoted to our people. And what

happened to him? In the end he got killed. By who? Probably the government. We don't know. So my suggestion: Rob a bank. Get back at them. Do it for Martin Luther King.

ROY GARDNER: Two words that were used by both sides in the debate: *better* and *stepping-stone*. Put the two words together: What's the better stepping-stone? If I work at McDonald's, I can learn things—managerial and clerical skills, numbers, cooking, how to think on my feet. And if I apply that, I can be anything I want: a distinguished politician, you never know. But if I use robbing a bank as a stepping-stone, where do I step to—at best, to being a career criminal; at worst, and most probably, to being in jail.

KRATOVIJ.: A last word from the affirmative team: Yesterday evening, as we were rehearsing the debate over a nice meal, I jokingly said that what we were really doing is preparing arguments for the *whining* side. What you've heard from us are arguments as winningly thought out and as attractively presented as we could concoct them. But, reduced to their essentials, they are basically one long, continued whine, a long whine constructed out of irresponsible decisions and instant gratification. In the future, if you hear the whine at about the same time that you see the red herring of temptation being dragged across your path, listen to the whine.

The whine is usually directed against a system that is unfairly stacked against the whiner. But Winston Churchill had a wonderful rejoinder when people would complain to him about the unfairnesses, the inadequacies, the lack of justice of the American and English systems. "You're absolutely right," he would say with a great air of sympathy. "It's the worst system in all the world, except for all the others."

MARC HOLT: There's a serious, serious situation going on in our society right now, and it involves me and most of the other African-American and Latino minorities in Riker's and other prisons. We're incarcerated at a rate that's eight times that of our white counterparts. If we decide to rob a bank, we'll be showing a willingness to go into a situation that's already designed against us. The despair that arises from that is not something we can afford or our kids can afford.

One of the things I've learned at Riker's is that the people we call criminals and inmates are just as intelligent, just as strong, just as talented as anybody who's living a productive life on the outside. We've just been conditioned to think otherwise, and it's time we redirect that negative conditioning into the positive.

A.J. VOGL: As a judge of this debate, I've listened to all of your arguments very attentively, and all of you have shown yourselves to be smart, logical, and fast on your feet. But there's one thing the Riker's team had that the other team didn't, and that is passion. The Riker's team was not simply making an argument; they were making a statement—about their lives, about where they've been, about where they are, about where they want to go. They were speaking from the heart, and the heart wins out over logic, no matter how eloquently presented.

WAREHAM: Each week in this class, a man gets up and says, "Excuse me, my English is so bad." But then, of course, he wins your heart, and you say to yourself, "This guy is so



**Herbert Berry holds up a copy of James Cone's book *Martin and Malcolm and America*, presented to him by John Wareham as his prize for being the best speaker.**

smart and so switched on that despite the broken English, or even *because* of the broken English, he's going to be a winner in debate."

I remember, in New Zealand in 1968, we debated the proposition: "The invasion of Czechoslovakia was justified." And I was on the affirmative, and we presented our reasons, and the other side—they were all lawyers—they presented theirs. And then a man walks up out of the audience and says in very broken English, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am a Czechoslovakian." Well, suddenly he had everybody's attention. "These people"—he points to me—"how can these people say that the invasion of my country is justified? What do they really know of it?" Well, that was it. He won everybody over. As a debater, no matter how good you were, you couldn't get him out of your mind; nor could the audience. As Al Vogl said, the men here who spoke for the negative were speaking from their hearts, and their hearts won the day. ■