

# Uniting Forces to Improve Education

Column Editor: H. Gordon Hullfish

*NO SINGLE individual, and no commission constituted as are commissions of the ASCD, will be able, in this time of complex and subtle factors that bear upon the shape of American education, to report monthly on all of the forces that affect the work and morale of those who teach in our schools and of those who administer them. This column can do no more, therefore, than catch up from time to time with that view of the American scene with which many of its readers are already familiar.*

*The column could be more effective, however, were its readers to consider themselves participants in its creation. Its author welcomes their participation. He will be happy to receive brief descriptions of situations which, in the judgment of any reader, reflect the presence of a force or forces in the shaping of educational practice or policy, either locally or nationally. He must add, in all honesty, that those who send him items will have to trust his ability to reflect them accurately in the column he prepares. Perhaps it should be said, also, that there are forces that advance the educational interest, as well as those that retard it.*

*Communications should be addressed to H. GORDON HULLFISH, 209 Arps Hall, The Ohio State University, Columbus 10, Ohio.*

## How Quiet Is the Educational Scene?

**A** CERTAIN quiet may seem to have settled over the educational scene during the summer months. No spate of headlines or broadcasts, at least, has reflected any barrage of criticism. But this is to speak in general. To individuals in specific situations a description of the over-all view may appear to be an odd distortion of the facts they confront.

How serene, for instance, was the educational atmosphere this past summer in a South Carolina community where teachers, in making application for employment, had to answer the questions that follow (all of which, of course, on the face, simply sought information, not exposing openly the threat they implied)?

"Do you belong to the NAACP? \_\_\_\_\_  
Does any member of your immediate family belong to the NAACP? \_\_\_\_\_

"Do you support the NAACP in any way (money or attendance at meetings)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

"Do you favor integration of races in schools? \_\_\_\_\_ Are you satisfied with your work and the schools as they are now maintained? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_. If yes, comment on back.

"Do you feel that you would be happy in an integrated school system, knowing that parents and students do not favor this system? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ (Check one and give reason for your answer)  
\_\_\_\_\_

"Do you feel that an integrated school system would better fit the colored race for their life's work? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

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(Check one and give reason for your answer) \_\_\_\_\_.

"Do you think that you are qualified to teach an integrated class in a satisfactory manner? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_. (Check one and give reason for your answer) \_\_\_\_\_.

"Do you feel that the parents of your school know that no public schools will be operated if they are integrated? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_.

"Do you believe in the aims of the NAACP?"<sup>1</sup>

What was the nature of the calm that preceded the storm in Clinton, Tennessee, and in Mansfield, Texas? According to the *Southern School News* for August the continuation of school segregation was not, in Tennessee, an issue "as prominent politically as first predicted." Meanwhile, in Texas (as well

<sup>1</sup>The full application form is reproduced in *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, June-July, 1956, p. 334-35.

as in Arkansas) "continued school segregation was a dominant issue of primary elections," though the "Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals held in the Mansfield school case that local (anti-desegregation) opinion was not of itself a sufficient reason for denying Negro children the right to enroll in an all-white school."<sup>2</sup> Schools and school people have their character shaped, their values enhanced or thwarted, however, by the nature of local opinion, as has been made abundantly clear in Clinton and in Mansfield. Nor are these isolated cases. The order of a federal judge to bring an end to segregation in the public schools of Charlottesville, Virginia, in the fall of 1956 was no more effective in getting immediate action than was the determination of the Catholic Bishop in New Orleans to end segregation in parochial schools at the same time.

<sup>2</sup>Vol. 111, No. 2, August 1956, p. 1.

At a higher "local" level such states as Florida, North Carolina and Louisiana have joined other Southern states which have either strengthened existing laws, or proposed constitutional amendments, for the sole purpose of continuing segregation. Meanwhile, to note a contrary "local" trend, the effort to live up to the injunctions, legal and moral, of the decisions of the United States Supreme Court in this matter continues unchecked in Missouri, West Virginia, Kentucky and Maryland.

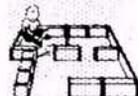
One further fact must not escape notice. The creation of white Citizens Councils and the stirrings here and there of the Ku Klux Klan have introduced a local force that will add to the heavy burden Southern educators already bear. Moreover, the activities of these groups provide a climate within which certain rightist groups of recent memory, that leveled direct attacks upon education, may again flourish.<sup>3</sup>

Two conclusions may be drawn at this time. First, while it is true that education is not under attack today as it was a few years back, the future of education is in many ways being affected more adversely now than earlier. Our battle of conscience—and nothing less than this is involved as the moral imperative of the Supreme Court decisions on desegregation is slowly, yet surely, working its way into the habits of the nation—is not confined to the ground of color. Friend has been pitted against friend, members of families against each other, church against social mores, section against section, and political group against political group. And, in that agony of internal struggle that often slowly erodes character, many individuals are, in fact, pitted against

<sup>3</sup> See "Patriotism on the Far Right," by Gordon D. Hall, *Social Progress*, April 1956, p. 5-7.

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themselves as their loyalty, say, to their religious principles, finds itself checkmated by their loyalty, say, to the privileged group of which they have always been a part. Meanwhile, the schools that the nation needs are not being built, the legislation that would give the federal government a chance to help the deprived local community is not being passed, and many whose talents and intelligence would add, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to the teaching profession are turning to other careers.

Second, the "local" incident which captures the attention of our news media, and thus of the nation, is not, in fact, merely of local interest. What is at issue is the law under which all of us, not merely some of us, live. And this law but reflects an issue which lies more deeply in our associated lives—

our commitment to a way of coming at life which respects equally all men, without regard to race, religion or color. Nothing other, in short, than the democratic aspiration is at stake, and this at a time when it is equally at stake in the world at large. The schools of the nation, dedicated as they are to bringing into adulthood individuals who may, with increasing intelligence, live up to the demands of our democratic heritage, are not unaffected when what may appear at first glance to be a *local* situation calls the essential meaning of this heritage into question. The simple fact is that education is under attack today in the same way that the ideals which nourish it are under attack. The calm we seem to have witnessed is deceptive.

—H. GORDON HULLFISH, *professor of education, Ohio State University, Columbus.*

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