

A sense of frustration, a desire for children to succeed, and a questioning of the sincerity of Americans in wanting to realize the American Creed . . .

How Parents View Urban Education

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THESE are the voices of parents of children who attend inner-city schools speaking of these schools:

Mother of six: "I hear so much about freedom and justice. Do people really know what's happening to us while all this talk goes on?"

Civil rights worker—mother of four: "Are white people hypocritical or do they honestly feel poor children can grow up and be somebody in inferior inner-city schools?"

Father of eight: "I try to raise my children to be good boys and girls but this seems impossible in this 'project.' The children are so bad in this area, I'm surprised you can do anything with them in school."

Mother of five: "I'd like to move to a better neighborhood where people are trying to raise their kids to be something, but I can't afford it."

Tenth grade dropout: "Go to school for what, man? Where's the payoff? People south of the tracks don't get good jobs. People think we're fools."

A maid—mother of three: "The school attended by the children of the folks I work for seems to be more beautiful, a more happier place—easier to learn in. I wish my kids could go to a school like it."

A janitor: "I want my son to do better than I—something more than a broom jockey."

One can glean from these typical comments by inner-city parents certain messages—a sense of frustration and hopelessness, a desire for children to succeed, and a questioning of the sincerity of Americans in wanting to realize the American Creed.

Yet, one senses a basic belief in the schools and what they can do for individual upward mobility. They however view the schools within a larger context—as reflections of a society in need of a number of basic changes. The success of the schools is inextricably bound with the quality of life in the total community.

A distillation of their arguments appears sound, forthright and defensible.

What Parents Say

These are exciting times with many problems—the two most obvious are Vietnam and the realization of the American Creed symbolically represented by the Civil Rights issue.

When we speak of the Civil Rights issue, we also note its nuances of poor schools, run-down environments, broken homes, economic dependency, hopelessness and low aspirations. Improvement in the Civil Rights area will be reflected in improvement in each of these representative areas.

According to America's fundamental creed, all are created equal and have certain inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Yet, when applying the problem of Civil Rights and the American Negro to this creed, we are immediately faced with three alternatives:

—Is it an ideal Americans believe in and are working hard to approximate?

—Do Americans really understand the implications of what they are saying when they speak of freedom, opportunity and justice?

—Are Americans hypocritical?

If the creed is an ideal they really believe in, we will find more and more support of the American ideal of constructive participation by all, thus implying the personal development of all.

If Americans are to understand, there must be opportunities for dialogue and for rich meaning association between all racial, ethnic and economic groups.

If Americans are hypocritical, however, they must be admonished that—

“youth picks up the tab for their hypocrisy.”

The nation's founding fathers wisely saw the need for each citizen to live constructively if our American Democracy was to survive. The doctrine of equal opportunity grew from this milieu and has been embedded in the law. Yet, despite the Bill of Rights, Constitutional Amendments, judicial decisions, Federal executive actions, and State and local legislative action, there is much evidence to indicate the civil rights of citizens—particularly of Negro citizens—continue to be widely disregarded. There is evidence that denial of equal opportunity has inflicted deep wounds upon the community. This evidence is in the form of abrasive psychological and sociological pathologies.

This awareness, along with the crucial place of an intelligent citizenry, establishes the place of education in America. In looking at the Negro's educational achievement, one must also realistically include his economic, expected role and segregation status.

Numerous studies confirm that 48 percent of male Negro high school graduates were unemployed, while 63 percent of Negro male dropouts were unemployed. In such a situation, a boy may well ask, “Why bother to stay in school when graduation for half leads to a dead-end street?”

The problem of unemployed youth is largely a Negro problem because of discrimination practiced quietly but extensively.

Another implication of economics is the importance of social class status which limits the child's learning because of models to be imitated. Social class

status conditions his goals, motivations, attitudes and experiences.

We know that the economic position of the Negro is an offshoot of discrimination. Its irradiating effects are disturbing.

Effects of Deprivation

Many of the children are lacking in food, clothing, shelter, affection and socialization. They have missed many out-of-school opportunities which children in middle-class homes experience at an early age—experiences which develop concepts, abilities and attitudes favorable to school success.

In many cases they have never: been read to; been exposed to good language; been taken to local places of interest such as zoos and museums; been secure long enough to become future-oriented; had children's books at home; had creative playthings like blocks and paints; developed correct images of a child's world. We have case after case of children of large families living in cramped quarters who in order to survive have learned not to listen.

We know there is continuing dialogue between the middle-class child and parents that is largely missing from lower-class homes thus leading to poor readiness for school. Therefore, in school, because of shallow experiences, children of lower-class homes generally are poor listeners and lack many sense impression skills necessary for school success—again a collateral of discrimination, prejudice and lack of opportunity.

Yet, we are being told that the first four years of life are critical in mental growth. A study by Benjamin S. Bloom of the University of Chicago shows mental ability developing this way:

'	50%	'	30%	'	20%	'
	Conception		Age		Age	Age
			4		8	17

In short, intelligence—the capacity to learn—grows as much during the first four years as in the next 13. After age 17, intelligence continues to develop but at a very slow pace. Failure to develop proper learning patterns in the pre-school and early school years, says Bloom, "is likely to lead to continued failure or near failure throughout the remainder of the individual's school career." Bloom further states that the growth of intelligence is stimulated by family environment—the parent's intellectual aspirations for the child, the rewards offered for intellectual development, the emphasis put on proper use of language, the availability of books, magazines and other learning materials.

Then there is the role the Negro—explicit or implicit—has been forced to play. The situationist tells us that, by and large, human beings respond as situations require them to respond. Gardner Murphy says there is a cultural psychology of race. By means of sociological data, one should be able to show that each race is automatically cast into certain roles and enacts these with consistency. As roles change, new patterns of behavior characterize these races.

Fight for Integration

Thus, one strand of the American Negro's quest for justice is a fight for integration. For any group that is excluded from the valued things theoretically open to every American will manifest considerable open resentment and aggressive drive to cut away the restrictions.

This is the crux of the integration

problem—one is only half a man unless there is the opportunity to enter the open society and communicate with the rest of the culture. The opportunity to exchange ideas in the society is the basis of our intellectual development. Many careers and much greatness in the world were fashioned in individuals by the classmates they met in school, the words they heard, the people they met.

It appears safe to assume that as Negroes become better integrated into the total community life and are granted equal opportunity to develop, there will be a collateral interest in education, a finer appreciation of self, a more positive attitude and a finer achievement in school.

In spite of the press of environment there are outstanding examples of leadership thrust by parents in the inner-city. Mrs. A. is chairman of the neighborhood council of one school. Mother of eight children, herself a high school dropout, she has recently earned a General Education Degree from High School plus a Leadership Certificate. Through her leadership, land has been obtained, a proposal written and plans firmed up for a preschool—day-care center—adult education center.

Other in-progress educational accomplishments include a Head Start project operating in a local church. Local area residents, under her leadership, have also studied the community, identified needs and established priorities. A high

priority was given to street and sidewalk improvement. An improvement district has been formed and local residents have taxed themselves to improve their area. This quality of interest and action by indigenous leadership has forced school personnel to enlarge their visions of the function of schools. A further outcome is deeper mutual respect.

There are apparently adequate resources—human and physical—within and outside of the inner-city to more nearly approximate the ideals of the American Creed. I think Americans will accept the challenge!

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