

Will America Survive?

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I AM optimistic about America's future. I could just as easily be fatalistic. There really is not much choice. Either you have faith in mankind, or you do not. Either you believe we can resolve our social dilemma by the turn of this century or you believe we will perish as a nation. In the past, people have said give us a hundred years and we will resolve our differences. No longer do we have a hundred years. According to Alvin Toffler,¹ maybe we do not have the thirty-two I have so optimistically referred to. Toffler says, "We are suffering the dizzying disorientation brought on by the premature arrival of the future."

If the future is *now*, we will not survive. But, if the future is a mere thirty-two years away, we may make it. In a very complex society like ours, it takes a little time even to destroy ourselves. Witness the hot summers of 1966 and 1967. Rather than the beginning of the end, these, for some, turned out to be blessings in disguise. For if we, as a nation, were not concerned, we would not have become involved in dialogue that produced the Kerner Report² or groups like The Detroit Committee.³ These are not ends in themselves. They are a part of the dialogue. The vast TV networks are involved in this dialogue; America's churches are a part; the Federal Government, social agencies, service clubs, and Chambers of Commerce are involved.

By the year 2000, equality of opportunity will be a way of life. Social justice will be a reality. Subcultural differences will be de-emphasized, giving more meaning to a unified American culture.

These changes will not come easily. Nothing in a democracy does. One route could be through quality education which, coupled with black pride and proper motivation, will develop an innovative urban sophistication. A highly educated, well-trained leadership, supplemented with black urban sociologists, black psychologists, scientists, engineers, and technologists, will begin to use the power and control that cities have. Sub-

¹ Alvin Toffler. "The Future as a Way of Life." *Horizons*, Summer 1965.

² *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, March 1, 1968.

³ "Progress Report of the New Detroit Committee," appointed by Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh and Governor George Romney of the State of Michigan.

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urban areas, which depend on the cities for water, sewage, electric power, and employment, will find themselves at the mercy of this highly sophisticated center of control. Those suburban communities that have elected to become isolated from the cities will find themselves taxed greatly by the control centers to get these much needed utilities and services. The dense population brought on by the increasing birthrate in these core areas will, by our method of representative government, give these centers political power and control. A "sharecropper revolution" of the Appalachian Whites, Puerto Ricans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans, coupled with the disappearance of the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) myth, will further complicate the American scene. This power and complication will not come easily. There would be violence in degrees unbelievable.

Education as Change Agent

A second route could be through education as an agent of change. Education, with vision and with forthright conviction of its leadership role in sociocultural development, could through reorganization and innovation bring us to the same point by the turn of the century that revolution and violence threaten to do.

Education could realize that there is nothing sacred about our graded system of organization, our report card as a means of evaluating pupil progress, our neighborhood schoolhouses, our localized boards of education, our present administrative organization, our outmoded system of financial support for schools, our perpetuation of the status quo, our lip-service to the ideals of democracy or our silent consent to racism.

Given the climate of today and the frightening thought that we may not turn this century as a free democratic society, if a society at all, education could effectively utilize all it already knows. We know how children learn, how children feel, much about individual differences, implementation of innovations, and reorganization and consolidation of school districts. We have skills in human relations, in in-service education, and in research. We know how to implement research findings.

Education could, or rather must, take the leadership in moving boards of education and communities toward the realization that support of the ideals of democracy is our only hope of survival as a nation.

Communities must be made to realize that political boundaries serving as school district boundaries in metropolitan areas are as obsolete as they are in outstate, sparsely populated areas where consolidation is taking place. Socioeconomic and racial factors are the main reasons for urban community adherence to old boundaries. Rich districts do not want to support poor districts and all-white districts do not want to combine with districts that have non-whites. Today, we cannot, financially or socially, afford these injustices.

These communities, through planning, can voluntarily move to eradicate these ills and thus smoothly execute redistricting, or they can wait for court decisions and risk shameful conflict.

Let us assume that good will prevail.

New school districts will fan out from central cores of our cities like Detroit, and others whose base is along a river or ocean front. Or they

may become vertical or horizontal strips in cities like Chicago. These areas would extend across many city and township lines.

Educational parks would replace individual school buildings. Revenue from the sale of the old prime sites could assist with the cost of the new parks. These parks would be complexes that would accommodate from twelve to twenty thousand students from kindergarten to college. The location of these parks would assure socioeconomic and racial balance.

The problems that divide communities over pupil placement would disappear. Educators and social scientists have struggled for fourteen years to find ways of integrating schools. There has been some success but the frustration has far exceeded the gain. Little Rock, Birmingham, Cleveland, Milwaukee, New York, and Boston lead a long list of cities where conflict accompanied attempts at integration. Integration has been abandoned as a way toward equality by big city ghetto communities for an emphasis on quality education—separate but equalizing.

The educational park would be designed for economy, efficiency, innovation, and experimentation.

The elementary school organization would be non-graded and self-contained. The schools of River Rouge, Michigan, with their non-graded two-year blocks in the six years after kindergarten, with parent conferences in lieu of report cards, have proved significantly that children learn more and are psychologically and socially better adjusted than they were before the reorganization.

Innovations in secondary school curriculum would be built on what we learned from the Eight-Year Study, The Michigan College-Secondary Agreement, Life-Adjustment Education, and Core Curriculum. Modular scheduling, team teaching, non-graded curriculum would be supplemented by what we have learned from previously mentioned experiments.

The previous development in secondary schools placed emphasis on the affective rather than the cognitive, but by virtue of the process utilized, the cognitive did not suffer.

Sputnik changed all this. Emphasis was put on the cognitive and the affective was thrown out. Today, however, with Federal support for social sciences and the humanities, we are again recognizing that feelings and social concerns pay high dividends in the learning process.

The educational park or any other organization with its advantages would demand a new theory of administration, one thoroughly grounded in what Morphet and others⁴ refer to as the "collegial concept," in empathy and sensitivity.

The staff of such a program must be trained by our teacher education institutions in problem-solving techniques, human relations and leadership skills. These must be coupled with proficiency and accountability. They must have been exposed to the sociocultural scene of America and have developed a resolution toward its unification.

Transportation and other services will be developed by the new Metropolitan Area organization.

All this sounds so simple, yet I am certain that, as one reads it, things are happening in the viscera. □

⁴ Edgar L. Morphet, Roe L. Johns, and Theodore L. Reller. *Educational Organization and Administration*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.

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