

# CHALLENGE TO EDUCATION

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**V**IOLENCE is a fact of American life, and it has been since the beginning of our national life. It was present in the early encounters of the settlers with the Indians; it erupted in incidents leading to and culminating in our separation from England; it marked the extension of the western frontier; and it now marks our present attempts to grapple with the pressing domestic and international issues confronting our society.

Now, as never before, the various manifestations and expressions of violence are viewed with increasing alarm as they threaten the foundations of our social order. This widespread concern results from the greater awareness by our population as a whole of the extent and nature of violence as presented by the mass media. Unlike earlier times, when news traveled slowly and people learned about situations after they happened, many of these violent demonstrations now are presented while they are actually in progress and are viewed on television by millions of Americans.

These outbursts of violence are regarded by many as threats to personal and national security. Today not only are crimes perpetrated against individuals on the increase, but mass demonstrations have been directed against practically all phases of American life. Significant among these phases are politics and government, race, and education.

The widespread publicity, the space and time devoted by the mass media to violence, has become an issue in itself. This phenomenon has posed the question of whether or not this emphasis has had positive or negative results, whether it has presented an image which has served to create or stimulate further violence. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., states that one reason for the climate of violence in the United States is

... surely the zest with which the mass media, and especially television and films, dwell on violence. One must be clear about this. The mass media do not create violence. But they reinforce aggressive and destructive impulses, and they may well teach the morality as well as the method of violence.<sup>1</sup>

The function of news media in a free society is to keep the public informed. These media are fulfilling their responsibility only when the news is accurately and objectively presented.

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, in its report

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. *Violence: America in the Sixties*. pp. 50-51. New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1968.

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of March 1, 1968, states that it found a significant imbalance between what actually happened in our cities and what the newspapers, radio, and television coverage of the riots reported.<sup>2</sup> While the original impressions gotten from the media were corrected as a result of the Commission's follow-up study, millions of Americans who must rely on mass media also formed incorrect impressions and judgments about what happened.

A sampling of the reaction of a limited number of college students to the presentation of scenes of violence on television indicated that they feel that such news should be presented. However, many felt that the presentations tend to "sensationalize and glorify violence" in that many young persons identify emotionally with those engaging in violence and are stimulated to join in the act, thus causing violence to spread.

The reports on violence indicate that the majority of the participants are teenagers or young adults. The Walker Report<sup>3</sup> states that 66.2 percent of those arrested in the Chicago demonstrations ranged between eighteen and twenty-five years of age and 32.6 percent of those arrested were students. This involvement primarily of teenagers and young adults presents a definite challenge to the schools.

As a major social institution, charged with the responsibility of guiding the youth in the development of the basic moral values which we say we cherish, the schools can put forth greater efforts to "practice what they preach." In the organization itself, in financial support, in administration and instruction, the schools can move toward the realization of that basic tenet of democracy which advocates respect for the integrity of human personality, the dignity and worth of the individual human being regardless of race, color, or creed.

By making this element of our democratic philosophy of life a reality in the schools, a major attack can be made on one of the underlying causes of increasing violence on the American scene. Quality education should be provided for all rather than for the affluent only. Respect for law, rather than engaging in devious and subtle practices to evade the laws regarding discrimination and segregation, could set a fine example for teaching the young respect for law and order.

Schools must provide more wholehearted, sincere, and realistic involvement of students in decision making on issues affecting them. Such involvement would enable them to gain valuable experience in problem identification, analysis, and the planning of intelligent courses of action.

Vitalized curriculum content which is relevant to today's issues and problems will enable the young to see some meaningful connection between school life and the significant issues they must confront from day to day. Firsthand experience in dealing with controversial issues vital to American life and relevant to the present needs of adolescents and young adults will prepare them to deal more effectively with some of the underlying causes of violence.

Let us hope that, along with the loud cry for force in suppressing violence, the schools will exercise more effective leadership in helping today's youth shape a better world for tomorrow. □

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, March 1, 1968. pp. 201-202.

<sup>3</sup> The Walker Report. *Rights in Conflict*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1969. p. 357.

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