

The Plight of Black Parents

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THE 1954, and more recent, Supreme Court decisions and the Civil Rights Acts have brought forth emotions of both satisfaction and anxiety in black parents. Many thousands of black parents were, at one time, elated by the adamant edicts and guidelines emanating from the nation's capital relating to adequate and equal educational facilities and instruction for *all* of the children of this country. On the other hand, feelings of anxiety have been provoked in this group as a result of "so-called implementation," "half-hearted" attempts, and no implementation of these requests and suggestions. Where "half-hearted" implementation or non-compliance has been the case, the ire of black parents has been stimulated. These parents would be much more secure in their feelings about the education of their children if they simply "felt" that "things were in order" and sincere efforts were being expended to "set things right."

Does the social revolution this country has experienced in the past several years reveal that many citizens possess frames of reference as espoused in the opening paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence and in Christian teachings, but do not functionally operate in that realm? We will not attempt to assess the pros and cons of that possible phenomenon; however, such a paradox warrants some thought as one attempts to unravel the morass of the state of the American people in present-day America.

Our concern is related to the matter of providing an education for all children which is commensurate with the ability and interests of those children within the framework in which they live, regardless of ethnic background. If such is to be the case, one is compelled to have absolute faith in the idea that this country will achieve its ultimate potential greatness only by utilizing the talents, abilities, and strengths of all its citizens to the maximum.

De jure and *de facto* segregation have wrought more complexity and dilemma than are certainly desirable. This state of affairs has created a dilemma for black parents. The dilemma is further complicated by the bases for decision making. The concerned black parent is faced with a situation in which he must make a choice between two alternatives involving a monumental sacrifice in the choice of either.

Residential housing patterns throughout the United States make it easy to determine that most schools are of the "neighborhood school variety" and draw their populations from their immediate environs. This is particularly significant in the larger urban metropolitan areas. To complicate the matter further, especially in the Southern section of the country, these schools are ordinarily staffed by members of the same ethnic group the school generally serves.

Many will argue this point by simply asking: "What difference does that make?"

It is felt that the Coleman report made it quite clear that persons coming from impoverished backgrounds, receiving their education in separate and unequal dual systems of education, were victimized by a perpetuation of what can at best be called mediocrity. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule; but historically, by and large, education of blacks in the South has been inferior. Hence, many blacks in the field of education may have limitations, not because they are innately inferior, but rather because they did not receive the educational opportunities which would have developed their potential to the fullest extent.

In many schools with "integrated staffs," members of the ethnic group other than that of the students are unrelating, unaccepting, and unresponsive to the needs of the students and parents. An article written in *Contemporary Issues in American Education*, growing out of the 1965 White House Conference on Education, states that if there are situations as described, it is not likely that a "top flight," high quality of education will evolve, or is taking place. This is one concept with which the concerned black parent must reckon.

Regarding the other side of the coin, the concerned black parent then considers sending his child to a school which allegedly has an acknowledged high quality educational program. This consideration generally means the child will attend a school out of his neighborhood, because of the housing pattern cited previously. It will probably further involve the child in association with a larger number of children not of his ethnic derivation. Is this important? If one conceives of the school as a social situation, then it is significant! Herein lies a problem. Human relationships are somewhat like a football—they take some funny bounces. The implication here is that in football the oval often bounces favorably for the home team; on the other hand, the reverse sometimes occurs.

The same analogy can be made about human relations. As one revolves in a social spectrum, one can "bounce" favorably or unfavorably. The black child in a minority

population position in a "high quality" school runs the risk of limited social contacts, social acceptance, and cocurricular involvement, finding himself on the outside of the total school experience, while simultaneously being the recipient of so-called "high quality" academic exposure. Here then is the point where the black parent raises a question in trying to arrive at a decision in the education of his child. He must ask himself whether or not it is best for his child to get "high quality" educational experiences at the risk of being "left out" of the total school program; or for the child to be a part of a total program in another school which encourages a better self-concept, yet run the risk of not obtaining "high quality" academic exposure.

What meaning does this have for educators and all Americans? It would appear that if the concept of the "neighborhood school" is felt to be best, then there should be no question as to the creditability of the education program or staff of the local neighborhood school. The attainment of this reality is presently a challenging one to educators.

Two questions are raised by this challenge. Does the staff of any school have to be ethnically integrated to be a high quality staff? Does the student body of any school have to integrate ethnically to assure a high quality educational program? Recommendations growing out of the 1965 White House Conference on Education indicated that positive responses to these questions are necessary to assure a high quality educational program in any setting. If America, and its urban cities particularly, are to progress toward the educational goal of providing the best educational programs for all children, yielding the best product of those programs, then the formula for the successful development of the total, or "whole child," must become a reality. This is what contemporary public urban education is all about.

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