

To Placate the Angry

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THE spring quarter of the 1968-69 school year found faculties and administrations dealing with the problems of resident black students which were presented in the form of demands. The academic year prior to that had seen the recognizable fermentation of black anger. One item listed in the demands alluded to the reality of the absence of sizable numbers of recognizable black faces among the student body. It is on this specific item that I would like to comment.

The Unfinished Journey: Issues in American Education is a 1968 publication by the U.S. Commission on Education that deals with relevant problems of America's young, especially in the area of education. One of the writers, Allison Davis of the University of Chicago, has a timely topic, "The Educability of the Children of the Poor."¹ In his chapter he made references to several studies conducted by himself and others dealing with intelligence and cultural differences.

Data collected and recorded in 1951² and again in 1966 revealed that one-fourth (24 percent) of slum children in Northern cities have IQ's above 109, and thus are su-

perior in academic potential to more than one-third (37 percent) of children from professional and business executive families who have IQ's below 110. Suppose we were to assume that these figures could be applied to the general population. Then about one-fourth of the more than 20,000,000 slum children in this country, at the times of the studies, under the age of 15, had academic verbal abilities superior to those of a third of the approximately 6,000,000 upper-middle class children under 15.

To support these data I refer you to *Statistical Abstract of the United States*.³ Since the slum population was then about three times as large as the upper-middle class population, it is reasonable to assume—based on these data—that there actually are more able children, in gross numbers, in our slums than in our upper-middle class areas. What we have here are figures that tell us that about 4,000,500 slum children possess *above average* intelligence as compared to 3,000,500 upper-middle class children. However, studies show that the vast majority of this able top quarter of slum children will be

¹ Allison Davis, "The Educability of the Children of the Poor." *The Unfinished Journey: Issues in American Education*. New York: The John Day Company, 1968. pp. 69-84.

² Kenneth Eells et al. *Intelligence and Cultural Differences: A Study of Cultural Learning and Problem Solving*. Allison Davis, chairman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951. pp. 154-58.

³ Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 87th Annual*. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966. pp. 23-24.

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lost to our society via the "educational waste heap." Persons in other nations look upon us as a nation with economic and human resources to burn.

Regardless of the verbiage being spumed by so-called revolutionists, we are still a capitalistic nation. The efficiency of this nation and the preservation of this nation's position *vis-à-vis* the Communist powers center on how we motivate and teach the lower socioeconomic groups in our schools. It stands to reason that since those who are middle class already are employed, they cannot furnish us with enough skilled and professional people to out-achieve Europe, Russia, and China. In the light of reality it means that we must go to the lower classes to meet future needs. If such does not become a reality, we shall run the risk that England experienced, that is, the failure to start soon enough to recruit large numbers of able children from the lower classes.

In One Generation

Another force which will shape this nation's future is the process of acculturation. Acculturation, I dare say, has been the very lifeblood of this country. This nation credits itself in doing this better than other countries. Over a long period of time this influence became an irresistible force. At present, I submit, such a timetable is no longer valid. The level of skill of the bottom third must be raised via the acculturation *modus operandi*, and it must be achieved in *one generation!*

Our study of depth psychology and sociology has revealed that life in the slums is most untenable, especially for children. We are aware of the decadent, demoralizing microcosm of the ghetto. We are aware of the survival culture created out of such an existence. What we have failed to realize is that children from such areas are likely to lose their expressiveness and zest after kindergarten unless they are exposed to very insightful and skilled teachers. It is a fore-

gone conclusion that children from such areas need, most of all, teachers who will encourage them to try, and to believe in their future, their abilities, and themselves. When one considers the experiences of poor blacks and the facts revealed by the Allison Davis study, the only expression one can utter is incredible. It is incredible in the way that they have developed and have out-achieved their chronological peers.

As these children moved into early adulthood via enculturation from black rural areas of the South to areas of the North, it was revealed that some growth continued. An increased standard of living, better teaching, better equipment, better living conditions—all contributed to this growth. In another study by Allison Davis⁴ it was revealed that black children whose families moved to Chicago and who later acquired middle class status did, in fact, increase their IQ scores.

A study by the Selective Service System⁵ showed that the rates of failure on intelligence tests for whites in every Southern state for which figures were available were much higher than for blacks in Illinois, New York, or Massachusetts. Whereas 2.5 percent of blacks tested in Illinois failed the minimum educational requirement tests, the following proportions of Southern whites failed the tests: Alabama, 8.5 percent; Virginia, 8.4 percent; Texas, 10.4 percent; Arkansas, 9.8 percent; Georgia, 8.2 percent; Kentucky, 6.1 percent; North Carolina, 10.7 percent, and on for the sixteen states where the percentage was higher for whites failing as compared to blacks failing in Illinois, New York, or Massachusetts.

There are many studies which reveal that these children *can* learn and will be

⁴ Allison Davis. "Social-Class Influence Upon Learning." Inglis Memorial Lecture. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948. pp. 46-50.

⁵ Selective Service System. "Special Groups." Special Monograph Vol. 1, No. 10. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1953. p. 147.

"If colleges persist in admitting inadequately prepared black and poor students, then they had better get about the business of making up academic deficits."

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able to make a contribution to this nation—providing they are given more than lip service. This brings me to the crux of my concern. Is there a role for the colleges and universities to play at this juncture?

The Allison Davis studies and those in Klineberg⁶ and Lee⁷ deal, for the most part, with the children of what I call "firstborn in the North." "Firstborn" relates to those children born in the North of blacks who had migrated from the South. In an article in a national journal, I focused the readers' attention on the basic makeup of these unique personalities.⁸ The process of acculturation was a living reality, but it also became the seed of so-called anger. Those who made it through the maze were able to articulate just how deliberately the educational institutions systematically disfranchised their fellow blacks and the poor. It became quite obvious that their success was a "slip." The system's "computer" was mis-programmed; educational achievements of all blacks and poor were to have been programmed to "end" around age 15.

As we approached the 1960's, the "first-born's" articulation of the system was heard by young, aggressive blacks. They responded via the action route ranging from sit-ins to memberships on college boards of regents and boards of trustees. Many non-blacks asked the question: "Why are the blacks so unreasonable?" Other questions rang out and guess-timates were bandied about. One of the decisions made by these well-meaning, fair-weather liberals was actively to recruit more blacks and poor for the colleges. I often wonder why these learned ladies and gentlemen neglect to speculate about what would happen to the blacks and poor (and black is really a euphemism for poor) once they reached the hallowed halls of ivy. Did they assume that the physical presence of blacks

⁶ Otto Klineberg. *Race Difference*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935. pp. 185-97.

⁷ Everett S. Lee. "Negro Intelligence and Selective Migration." *American Sociological Review* 16: 231; 1951.

⁸ Romeo Eldridge Phillips. "Firstborn in the North." *Educational Leadership* 26 (1): 21-23; October 1968.

and poor on campus would bring about instant acculturation? Is it that these learned scholars were unaware of the tenor of the enculturation brought to the hallowed halls of ivy by the blacks and the poor? The fact that no preparations were made gives the appearance of placation.

The Chances of Success

The December 13, 1970, edition of *The New York Times Magazine* included an article by Thomas Sowell of the Department of Economics at UCLA.⁹ In the article, Dr. Sowell issued a charge that "colleges are skipping over competent blacks to admit 'authentic' ghetto types." His data revealed that those blacks whose innate abilities permitted them to manipulate the maze of the system were being denied admission and advancement due to the fact that they appeared not to be militant enough.

Dr. Sowell cited several examples. He told of a young black woman whose score of 142 on the middle class IQ Achievement Test, combined with excellent grades and recommendations, prohibited her obtaining a grant to study law. It appeared that the national organization which financed blacks for law schools adjudicated that her scores were not *low enough!*

Another example was a young man with a brilliant academic record in difficult college courses who was turned down for a doctoral fellowship for black students. After his interview centering on sociopolitical issues, it was adjudicated that he was not *militant enough!*

Still another example centered around a young, black man with SAT scores in the 700's who was denied admission by a special black admissions committee. It was adjudicated that his record looked "middle class" to them! Actually, his father was an alcoholic, and his mother was a domestic.

As a black faculty member, I echo a statement made by Dr. Sowell:

⁹ Thomas Sowell. "Black Professor Says: Colleges Are Skipping Over Competent Blacks To Admit Authentic Ghetto Types." *The New York Times Magazine*, December 13, 1970. pp. 36-37+.

As a Black faculty member, I encounter more than my share of demoralizing private discussions about programs for Black students. The private discussions revolve around unprepared Black students who are in over their heads academically and whose white faculty members fudge their grades out of guilt, compassion, or a desire to avoid trouble. . . . (They) think they are doing a favor to the students, or to Black people in general.

While it is uncertain what proportions of Black students need, want, or get special consideration of this sort, it happens often enough to throw a cloud of doubt over the performances of able Black students and to risk the devaluation of their degrees and respect.

The basic myths underlying current policies and practices regarding Black college students have been elaborated into a whole system of social theology, interpreted by the anointed and defended against heretics and skeptics.¹⁰

As one speculates about the thinking of admissions committees, it appears that the *modus operandi* is to recruit inadequately prepared black students—even for the most demanding colleges and universities. The myth underlying these policies and practices, as perceived by Sowell, is that these students are essentially the only kinds available in substantial numbers. I do not deny this, but what happens to these young men and women once they appear is what is disturbing. Actually, it is a case of assuming that an appearance on campus will transform this type of student into an instant Negro-scholar. This is a myth, and it is inexplicable how scholars permit themselves to be duped into such action.

The myth continues within the area of financial aid. It developed out of the belief that the good black students "will make it anyway."

It is a known fact that the public schools in black ghetto areas (and the poor white areas) are inferior to those of the middle class areas. If colleges and universities admit these students because the tests are white, middle class materials, and do not offer assistance to bridge the gap, the chances that these students will fail are extremely high. What else can be expected? It is fact that a

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

pathetically small percentage of students from such inferior schools score well on white, middle class standardized tests or otherwise show strong academic ability. Colleges do not admit percentages; colleges admit absolute numbers.

The article by Dr. Sowell reflects his disgust with the reasons for admitting blacks whose chances of success are vague if not impossible. My position is one of concern. The concern centers on the waste of time for these students. I fear for the students who truly have academic potential but whose backgrounds did not prepare them for the academic arena of the hallowed halls of ivy. I am not considering the so-called militant storm troopers charging the gates; I am considering the "other" type of black and poor students. If colleges and universities persist in admitting inadequately prepared black and poor students as a segment of the schools' absolute numbers, then they had better get about the business of making up academic deficits. If they are really serious and committed, it stands to reason that the faculty of a given college or university must "join in."

To Support All Demands

The late Earl Kelley of Wayne State University said that professors who remain distant from their students do so because they do not want their students to realize that they do not know as much as they profess to know. This is acceptable with adequately prepared students. The reverse is not true. It has been the faculty, in most cases, who decided that inadequately prepared black students should be admitted. Once these inadequately prepared persons are admitted, nothing appears to be done to "bring" these students "up to standard." When the students do not quite measure up, these professors line up to damn their colleagues who are on the admissions committee. It is these same faculty members who willingly give vocal approval but tacit support to all demands—no matter how unworkable. What it amounts to is placating the angry.

We are at a crisis stage in colleges and universities. It is obvious that the "talented tenth" referred to by the late W. E. B. DuBois must have their day. The tenth is available, but institutions need not admit all to find this tenth. If all must be admitted in order to placate the angry, I dare say that the talented tenth will be lost in the shuffle. If this happens, it is reasonable to assume that this nation will have failed to develop the wealth of potential located in the lower socioeconomic classes. The one-fourth of twenty-odd million slum children referred to in Allison Davis' study will not even be brought to the fore if college and university administrators and faculties, especially, continue to admit *all* regardless of preparation and potential as referred to by Thomas Sowell. If the powers-that-be believe that social conscience requires that help is needed most by those who are not among the talented tenth because this tenth will "make it anyway," we are doomed.

To placate the angry at the expense of able black and poor students is, to use the vernacular, a romantic "cop-out." This nation cannot afford such romanticism at this point in its history. One must decide as an administrator or faculty member on an admissions committee if it is legitimate to admit "all who apply" in order to find the talented tenth by the process of elimination, that is, failure and suspension, or not to admit those whose potentials appear not to be of the quality needed for success *with help*. To admit *all* to find the talented tenth is really just placating the angry. What is wanted are students with potential who can progress by their own merit alone or with help. With such a selection by admissions committees, the talent will come to the fore. Without such a selection by admissions committees, we are only placating the angry. Grier and Cobbs said:

... this continues to be the dilemma of the Black intellectual—fighting to maintain a tie with his people but paid for being so curiously different from the mass of them.¹¹ □

¹¹ William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs. *Black Rage*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1968. p. 140.

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