

Nat Hentoff

The Isolation of Black Schoolchildren

In Brooklyn's Junior High School 57, "fewer one percent of the students are white," the New York Times reports, "and more than 87 percent are eligible for free lunches." In the eighth grade, only 11.7 percent of the youngsters are reading at grade level.

These kids and many more like them—and Hispanic—in segregated public schools around the country were missing in the president's "landmark" speech on race relations at the San Diego campus of the University of California.

The president wants us to be "one America" in the 21st century, but he explains, "money can't do it. It can only come from the human spirit." Hugh Price, president of the National Urban League, knows better: "It will take money . . . to provide the resources and quality of schooling required for youngsters to succeed." Especially isolated youngsters.

Unless attention is paid to the students at Junior High School 57 in Brooklyn, the 21st century will be the same for most of them as their bleak present.

The president ignored the crucial fact that the division of the races is profoundly affected by experiences in the most formative ghetto in our society—the public school. And these increasingly segregated schools continue to be

inferior in resources of all kinds, including, with exceptions, the teaching staff.

This continuing discrimination—not by law but by indifference—is not only racial but is a matter of class.

Yet Clinton, in speaking of education in San Diego, focused only on colleges as he ritualistically preached the necessity of affirmative action. The students at Junior High School 57—

where attendance is less than half in some classes—may not get any closer to a college than a job as a security guard. Yet the president passionately said in his talk that "we must give our children the finest education in the world."

Which children? Or, more to the point, which class of children?

Much to the president's chagrin, affirmative action in colleges is in trouble not only because of Proposition 209 in California—which the Supreme Court is likely to affirm—but in courts elsewhere. So, what will happen if race and gender preference—as a factor in college admissions—can no longer continue, however it is "mended?"

At San Diego, Clinton said he was willing to listen to any alternative to affirmative action.

("I would embrace it if I can find a better way.") Apparently his advisers had neglected to tell him what's going on around the country in class-based alternatives to race-and-gender-based affirmative action.

The very university of California system, for instance, has created a partnership between the state's 50 low-performing high schools that will

help students achieve better test scores and grades and thereby qualify

for university admissions on academic merit. Many of the high schools involved in these college preparatory programs have predominantly black or Hispanic students. But there are also whites and others who have potential that needs to be nurtured.

Other colleges and universities—aware of the dubious future of affirmative action as currently practiced—are engaged in similar outreach programs.

The University of California alternative—a mention of which would have given some substance to the president's superficial speech—is eventually going to include training of elementary and middle-school teachers in those isolated lower schools.

Already underway in the Martin Luther King

Jr. Middle High School in San Francisco—as reported by Rene Sanchez in The Post—is a University of California engineering and science achievement program for students. The school is in a very poor neighborhood, and the principal, James Taylor, points out that for those youngsters to be qualified for college, "we have to start very, very early."

The students in these various programs—from elementary school on—will legitimately achieve self-esteem, to use a modish term. Most important, they will learn that they can learn. The most harmful effect of many ghetto schools is that many kids there learn that they are dumb—and they are not.

Moreover, college admissions directors will no longer have to play a color-coded game in deciding who gets in and who doesn't.

In his speech, Clinton pointed to the presence of White House aide Thurgood Marshall Jr. Clinton did not mention Thurgood Marshall Sr.'s insistent focus on undoing the racial isolation in the public schools. Nor did he address the criticism of Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) who has said: "If Clinton wants a legacy of race relations, he should invest in public schools."

To the students at Brooklyn's Junior High 57, the president was far more distant than San Diego.

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Study on Education of Blacks Finds Problems

By WILLIAM H. HONAN

A new reference book devoted to the preschool and secondary-school education of black students offers less that is encouraging than an earlier volume about higher education. Both are part of a planned three-part series.

"The news in this volume is not as good as it was in the first," said William H. Gray III, president of the United Negro College Fund, which raised \$5 million to support the publications.

"The first volume showed things like the remarkable growth in the college graduation rates of black women," he said. "This study has more negatives. Our next task is to find out why."

The 370-page book, being released today in Washington by the college fund's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, compiles, but does not analyze, decades of information from 40 archives. The first volume was released in March and the third, to be published this summer, will focus on the transition of black students from high school to work or to college.

Michael T. Nettles, a professor of education on leave from the University of Michigan who has devoted nearly a year to the project, said there were a number of unexpected revelations in the latest volume, which used data gathered through 1994, including:

¶ Contrary to the widespread belief that black students are a dominant presence in urban public schools, Mr. Gray said, less than one-third of black public school students attend schools in large cities.

¶ Young black children participate in preschool programs at a higher rate, or 53 percent, than white students, who represent 44 percent.

¶ Black preschoolers display abilities comparable with those of white students in verbal memory, social behavior and physical development, but fall behind in vocabulary skills.

¶ Black students are more fearful of physical harm at school than whites, and must cope with more security guards, gangs, weapons and metal detectors. And more black students in suburban schools worry about being harmed while traveling and from school.

¶ Although blacks are 12.5 percent of the population of the United States, they represent more than 16 percent of all public school students. The graduation rate of African-American students, however, is lower — 12.5 percent, in proportion with their percentage of the population.

¶ Black students represent a disproportionate 28.7 percent of students in special education schools.

The compilations were conceived by Mr. Gray, a former Congressman from Philadelphia who became the first black House member to serve as the Democratic whip.

"Congressmen, policy-makers and others can't do their jobs unless they have this raw material available to them," he said.

Sources in the book include the Department of Education, the Census Bureau and the National Science Foundation.

Corrections

An article and an entry in the News Summary yesterday about Malcolm Shabazz, the 12-year-old grandson of Malcolm X who is accused of having set the fire that critically injured the boy's grandmother, referred incorrectly to a court hearing in the case on Monday. It was a detention hearing, to determine whether the boy would remain in custody; technically, there are no arraignments in Family Court. The summary also misstated the status of the hearing. It was adjourned until

yesterday; it was not completed on Monday.

In addition, articles yesterday and on Monday misstated the date of Malcolm X's assassination. It was Feb. 21, 1965, not May 21.

An article yesterday about the survivors of the Oklahoma City bombing misstated the number of days a 5-year-old boy, Brandon Denny, spent in intensive care for his injuries. It was 71 days, not 17.

An art review on Friday about an exhibition of works by Joaquín Torres-García at the Jan Krugier Gallery in Manhattan through July 30 misstated the gallery's address. It is at 41 East 57th Street, not East 57th.

The credits with a television review yesterday about "Bill Clinton: Rock 'n' Roll President" on VH1 misstated the given name of the program's Washington producer. She is Joy Roller, not Jay.

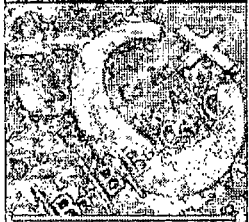
The New York Times
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 1997

MIKE C. —
We should get
a copy of this.
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File: Educ - Urban Schools

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Race and Demography

BY LYNN OLSON

Quality Counts focuses on what states can do to raise the achievement of all students. Stress the word "all." Raising standards, improving teaching, and creating better schools are only the first steps. States also must ensure that all children have access to a demanding curriculum, high-quality instruction, and nourishing classrooms.

Last month, a revealing report from the Education Trust underlined just how far states have to go to fulfill their obligation to all students. The Washington-based nonprofit organization directs its efforts toward closing the performance gap between children from poor and minority families and their more advantaged peers.

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It found that after decades of progress, the achievement gap between white and minority students is widening again.

Between 1970 and 1988, minority students made striking gains in academic performance, while the achievement of white students remained flat.

During that time, the difference in performance between white and African-American students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress--which tests a representative sample of students nationwide--narrowed by about one-half. The gap between white and Hispanic students closed by one-third.

But beginning in 1988, this progress stopped. And in some subjects at some grades the gap began to yawn once more. Today, African-American, Hispanic, and American Indian students still perform well below other students in all subjects at all grade levels tested. In some cases, the gap has widened because the scores of minority students have declined; in other cases, the performance of white students has improved, while the performance of minority students has remained relatively stable.

"The fact that progress in minority achievement has stopped at a time when minorities comprise a growing portion of the student population should sound a wake-up call to the whole country," the Education Trust says in its report, *Education Watch: The 1996 Education Trust State and National Data Book*. "For while virtually all minority students master basic skills by age 17, disproportionately few master the higher-level skills they need to assume productive roles in society."

Researchers attribute the dramatic gains of the 1970s and early 1980s, in part, to changes in family characteristics and demographics. In particular, more black parents were better educated, had fewer children,

and were less likely to live in poverty by the late 1970s. And all of these characteristics are strongly correlated with higher test scores.

But David Grissmer, a senior research scientist at the RAND Corp., argues that changing family characteristics alone cannot explain the large gains made by minority students. He calculates that changes in families accounted for only about a third of the total gain.

"Teachers and schools with large numbers of minority students may have been responsible for the most significant gains in test scores over the past 20 years," he suggests.

Massive desegregation of the schools, federal programs focused on boosting the basic reading and mathematics skills of disadvantaged students, and increased public spending on education all may have contributed to the academic progress of minority children.

The problem now, says the Education Trust report, is one of will. Experiences from real schools show that poor and minority students can excel if they are taught at high levels. "But most schools don't teach all students at the same high level," the report says. "In fact, we have constructed an educational system so full of inequities that it actually exacerbates the challenges of race and poverty, rather than ameliorates them. Simply put, we take students who have less to begin with and give them less in school, too."

The Education Trust report documents the following disparities:

Poor and minority students are less likely to be in classes with teachers who at least minored in their fields. In the 1990-91 school year, for example, only 42% of math classes in high schools with majority-minority enrollments were taught by teachers who were math majors. By comparison, in high schools with few minority students--less than 15% of enrollment--69% of math classes were taught by math majors. More than two-thirds of African-American and Hispanic students attend predominantly minority schools.

In schools where more than 30% of the students are poor, 59% of teachers report that they lack sufficient books and other reading resources. By contrast, only 16% of teachers in more affluent schools report such shortages.

Poor and minority students are more likely to be taught a low-level curriculum with low standards for performance. Only one in four students from low-income families is placed in a college-preparatory sequence of courses. In contrast, poor and minority students are overrepresented in less challenging general and vocational education programs.

Roughly 55 out of every 100 white and Asian students complete Algebra 2 and geometry. Only 35% of African-American and American Indian seniors take this math. Although one in four white seniors takes physics, only one in six black seniors and one in seven Hispanic seniors completes this course.

Some states provide disadvantaged students with better teachers and a more challenging curriculum than others do, the report says. For example:

In Tennessee, 23% of public K-12 students were black in 1992, and 24% of students in Advanced Placement mathematics and science courses were black. By contrast, in Virginia, 26% of public K-12 students were black, but only 7% of students in AP math and science courses were black.

In New York state in 1992, 20% of public K-12 students were African-Americans, and 20% of students in gifted-and-talented programs were black. In Mississippi, 51% of public K-12 students were black, but African-Americans made up only 7% of those in gifted-and-talented programs.

Poor and minority students also achieve significantly more in some states than in others.

Mr. Grissmer calls these "value added" states because their students perform better on national assessments than their family and demographic characteristics would predict.

Take the case of Texas and California. Both states have a similar percentage of poor and black students. And Texas has a higher percentage of Hispanic students.

Yet on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, poor and minority students in Texas perform significantly better than similar students in California.

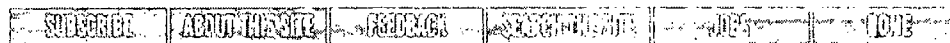
For example, in Texas, 44% of 4th graders in disadvantaged urban schools performed at the "basic" level or above on the 1992 NAEP math assessment, compared with only 27% in California.

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Hispanic 4th graders also fared significantly better in Texas than in California. On the 1994 NAEP reading assessment, about one-third of the students tested in both states were Hispanic. But in Texas, 41% read at the "basic" level or above; in California, only 22% did so.

Mr. Grissmer speculates that one reason for the difference may be the investment Texas has made in reducing class sizes in the early grades. About 90% of Texas' elementary teachers now have fewer than 25 children. Until this year, that was true for only 7% of California's elementary teachers.

The point is that while states cannot control the demographic or family characteristics of their students, some states do a much better job providing a decent education to all of their students than others do. When it comes to education, quality counts--for all children. And states should be held accountable for how well all students perform.



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