

BLACK PRE-COLLEGE EDUCATION: NOTES ON AN AGENDA FOR THE 70's

1. The combination of the war in Viet Nam and the transformation of the civil rights movement into a Black power mood and movement has brought about the hastened decay of the educational system in the United States and highlighted the present crisis in Black education. The war has clearly revealed the moral bankruptcy of the country and the educational system to white students and the Black mood has led to a questioning of the legitimacy of the system by Black people. Hence, the authorities must deal with the revolt of white students while they are trying to devise ways of consolidating their hold on Black education. At the same time, the country is in an economic crisis and the administration in Washington is attempting a fundamental re-alignment of political forces based on a white, conservative, racist "middle America" constituency.

2. Hence, the present context of Black education for the educational system is one which seeks to accommodate itself to the perceived wishes of middle America. Nixon's April report on desegregation was a clear indication of this direction. In this report he gave light lip-service to the concept of "equality of educational opportunity", while at the same time guaranteeing the loopholes which would allow little change in the status quo in the North and provide the means for defeating school desegregation in the South. He did this by laboring the distinction

between "de jure" and "de facto" segregation. Time magazine, in its March 9, 1970 issue (before the President's report) opined, "By slowing integration and especially by opposing busing, President Nixon is taking a hugely popular position." It also noted, "So far, the President has pulled back on effective voting rights for blacks and moved modestly on equal employment efforts. There is no sign of a drive against segregated housing." The emanations from Washington are clearly in the clutches of racist middle America.

3. At the same time, the present mood of America has created the atmosphere for escalated repression against Black people, and indeed, has largely condoned the killing of middle class white students at Kent State. Augusta, Chicago, and Jackson State demonstrate that the police and military forces feel that they have a clear mandate to shoot down unarmed Black people. It is not likely that the "lesson" of Kent State will be repeated, but we cannot be so sanguine about the others. So-called gains by Black people within the system are likely to call forth more anti-Black feelings as in the case of the violent white reaction to the election of Brother Gibson as mayor of Newark.

4. The Black Studies movement has caused the educational establishment to escalate its education repression of Black students. The initial reaction was to declare that there is no such thing as Black Studies, but they have now begun to co-opt and define these programs at all levels. Several techniques

of consolidating white control are being used at the pre-college level. Some are; A) promoting massive in-service and summer programs to train white teachers of Black studies. (Principal funding for this is coming from the Office of Education), B) pushing the "ethnic studies" concept of "minority" groups, thus absorbing the Black experience into an amalgam of Indians, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Asians; and even in some cases, Appalachian whites, C) moving ahead on desegregating public schools in the South with the consequence of massive firing and demotions of Black principals and teachers and placing Black students with racist school administrators, teachers, and students. (According to the NEA more than 5,000 Black principals and teachers have been fired or demoted since the 1954 Brown decision. Also, recent testimony by Black students before a Senate committee indicated that in many "desegregated" schools the Black students are given separate Black teachers, lunch periods, and in some cases, school bells!), D) development of "grantsmanship" programs for research and experimental programs for Black education by the federal government and private foundations. The vast majority of this money goes to white universities and research and/or educational consulting firms. Only those Black firms which are solidly in the camp of the white educational establishment receive substantial grants. Kenneth Clark's Metropolitan Applied Research Center, which is involved in promoting integration receives annually hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Ford Foundation

while the Atlanta University Complex of 6 schools received last year 40 thousand dollars from Ford. These grants have become a significant component of educational economics in the past few years, particularly in the areas of research and teacher training.

5. The Black educational crisis has surfaced some of the contradictions in the Black community. A gap has been created between students who are no longer interested in integrated education and parents, teachers, and other Black people who are still tied to traditional educational goals and still have faith in white authorities. However, significant constellations of Black people are emerging in the fight for community control and the development of community schools. Black middle class parents are in the forefront of many efforts to set up independent pre-schools and primary schools. Such is the case in places like Atlanta, Chicago, Syracuse, and San Francisco. In the case of the Catholic schools which are being turned over to the Black communities in places like Milwaukee and Boston it is the working class Black parents who predominate on the community school boards, which also include teachers and students. In the successful attempt at community control of a public school in Washington D. C. (Morgan Community School), working class parents are a majority of the board.

In the South, a rift is developing between Black students, who, in desegregated schools, are facing a more intense form of educational racism than they did in separate schools and teachers and parents who are voting to merge their associations with the white groups. While the students are embattled in racist institutions (the Urban Research Corporation reports that while high school student disorders in general are declining, those involving Black students are increasing, especially in the border and Southern states undergoing desegregation) the Black teachers are joining the whites. (Michael J. Schultz, a white teacher, who has done a study of the NEA and the Black Teacher, reports that in the case of the merger of Black and white teacher associations in Florida, Virginia, Texas, Tennessee, and South Carolina, ". . . in all cases the white affiliate remained dominant.")

Black PTA's have also recently voted to merge with white parents' groups.

Thus, the awakening is yet to come for many of the middle class Black teachers and parents in the Southern states.

6. Another aspect of the educational crisis as it affects Black students is that it is beginning to take on more and more characteristics of a "commodity" to be bought and sold in the "free market" manner of the business world. I have mentioned the development of educational technology, and "grantsmanship". There are two other developments which are

significant in that Black children can very likely be the guinea pigs. The first is the practice of school systems contracting with educational research and/or consulting firms to take on specific jobs (as, using educational hardware to improve the reading level of a class) and basing pay on results achieved as measured by standardized tests. It is clear that the definition of teacher has been considerably modified in these schemes. Teaching is no longer seen as a relationship between persons, but rather, as a service or commodity to be bought. This new teacher is basically a technician, and need not have any social vision beyond that of a computer programmer. Black people should weigh carefully whether this kind of mechanized instruction is a service to their children and the struggle for liberation.

The second development is the use of drugs to control behavior problems in children. There have been experiments carried out on primarily white children in Omaha, Nebraska and the propaganda machine is being tooled up to create acceptance of this means of control. The assertion is being made that possibly the majority of behavior problems in children have neurological rather than social origins, thus they are subject to treatment by drugs. It is not paranoid to suggest that a concerted move might be made to introduce this into Black schools, which are defined by the system as being chronic behavior problems.

These few points are by no means exhaustive in describing or analyzing the crisis in education for Black people. They do

suggest, however, that this Black crisis is related to the overall national crisis which reaches to the structural foundations of the society. They also suggest some of the repressive measures that can be taken against Black people in the attempt of a racist society to right itself. For certainly if the country can condone repression of whites, black folk are in for a massive assault. Thirdly, they suggest, that the kinds of contradictions which have emerged in this crisis, if analyzed correctly, and acted upon by a collective Black force can begin to help lay the ground work for the ultimate liberation, of the Black world.

It is with these considerations in mind that the following items are put forth to be included in a Black Agenda in Education for the 70's. They include three rough categories as follows: A) research and analysis, B) communication, and C) models for vigilance and organization.

1) Research relating to Black Education. Two kinds of research are needed. First is historical research on Black education, including African and Caribbean developments. (See Vincent Harding's paper for suggested specific areas). Second is research on contemporary aspects of the organization of schools and school systems. If we are to move toward community control and the effective running of our own schools, there are certain things we must know about how the present system operates and about our own available resources. Therefore, we need to know something about such things as the politics of public education,

the structure of school financing, extra-school educational facilities in the black community, local school boards and boards of education, legal parameters in public and private education, Black teacher training programs, differences in southern and northern education, and so on.

These are areas that Black graduate students, as well as teachers and professors of education should be encouraged to investigate.

2) A comprehensive Black Education Inventory of people and resources. Such an inventory should be done because we simply do not know what is out there that might be organized to deal with the problems. We, and other Black organizations have learned much of what we know about Black educational resources in a random and sometimes accidental manner. This process needs to be systematized if it is to be of any value in the struggle. This means a massive collection and organizing effort. We should have information on; (a) Black professors of education (teacher trainers), (b) Blacks in government agencies related to education (HEW, etc.), (c) Blacks in positions of authority in teachers organizations (d) Black legislators and public officials, (e) Black studies programs, (f) Black grad students in education, (g) Black private and community schools, (h) Black folk with expertise in various areas related to education and community service, (i) churchmen.

Perhaps IBW should be assisted in becoming a repository of such an inventory.

3) A Communications network among Black educators and activists. It is important that Black educators and activists in different parts of the country be in communication with one another to exchange ideas and lend support where it might be needed. It might also be useful when it is necessary, to have a national Black voice be heard on matters affecting Black education, and such a voice should be heard constantly.

4) Media outlets for reaching masses of Black people. The outlet which immediately springs to mind is radio. There is a large captive Black audience in all parts of the country for the "soul" stations, most of which are white-owned. A strategy must be devised for moving on these stations generated from the local audiences in different parts of the country. We should make contact with the Association of Black D. J.'s for their wisdom and cooperation in this move. A part of this strategy should be to develop the support from the community that thses brothers and sisters will need when the system reacts. We should consider the possibility of "syndicating" a Black analysis series to be distributed to a large number of stations and programmed for regular airing. At a basic level the whites who own these stations should be forced into broadcast service to the Black community or forced out of business. Built into this plan should be a mechanism for immediate broadcast in emergency situations, so that in effect these stations become the "clarions" of the community. We, of course must be prepared to provide the

material for broadcast. Also the possibility of working with Black churches as information outlets should be explored.

5) Development of a periodical publication concerned with broad questions of Black education and suggestions of immediate use to Black educators.

The white folks have Meyer Weinbergs bi-monthly Integrated Education out there and it is effective. It has coopted the field and has sucked in many Black teachers. Such a periodical as I am suggesting would fill the gap in dissemination of ideas and analysis in Black Education to Black educators. We are convinced that there are many Black teachers who would respond to such an organ. Since this kind of publication would be a major undertaking it is not feasible for the IBW to produce it. However it might be possible to generate national support around a publication like Foresight in Detroit so that it can get the kind of input it needs to become that kind of periodical.

6) Encouraging of local or regional groups to act as monitors of Black education. We do not have any systematic means of monitoring local situations in education. As a consequence we are always caught off balance when something breaks and must respond, when indeed we do, in an ad hoc manner. Typically in these situations we have not done our homework and the man is able to run us in circles or we are obliged to turn to whites to

provide technical expertise which means that we are once again in our classical dependent position. Some models should be developed for such monitor functions which can then be made available to other groups which have the resources for it. An essential part of this operation would be researching local education conditions in detail. Another would be putting together the kinds of expertise necessary to make confrontation, such as legal, economic, educational, social service, etc. An important role in this operation could be played by university students, especially the research end of it. Monitoring could also be built into high school curricula where Black people have that kind of control. It could, in fact, form the basis of a social studies program.

7) Promotion of the concept of subsidized summer work in Black communities by Black students. Oppression of Black people does not take a summer vacation. All moves on the education front should therefore be projected as continuous throughout the year. Summer work should be a continuation of the work that was done during the regular school year and not be simply VISTA - type missionary efforts. Serious students and community people can use this time for further organization, consolidation, and research in addition to teaching and meeting other immediate needs of specific situations. This is also the time to get together action programs for the kinds of confrontations that might occur in the fall. Black people must develop the habit of analyzing a situation and planning offensive moves in advance of the action.

Though there is a lull in the summer, the "man" is not asleep. He is getting his program together through his conferences, Institutes, workshops, consultations and what-not. Students should move on their colleges and the government to subsidize these summer programs, and when they move they should have a proposal so as to not get placed in the missionary operations.

8) Calling together periodically a selected group of Brothers and Sisters who can deal with the larger questions of Black education. Obviously, all along the line, we should be addressing ourselves to a Black ideology into which educational programs are to fit. We must try to answer the question, "What function is this education to serve in the struggle for liberation?" We cannot wait upon the definitive answer to that question to start moving, but we will need the continued wisdom of our Brothers and Sisters to help us along the way to whatever clarity we might achieve. Such a group should include people with expertise in education, political organization and theory, economics, history and community organization at a minimum.

There should also be periodic meetings of people who are specifically involved in the operation of schools and other educational institutions. These are the implementers of the process and include administrators, teachers, community organizers, textbook writers, etc.

9) Developing models of community control of Black Education. Out of discussions on a Black Agenda should come some program for the development of such models, perhaps by designating some specific

cities around which to work. The community control concept should extend beyond simply taking over the public schools in a given district to the wider vision of a total community education program involving the schools and other educational agencies and services. The concept of Black Boards of Education which is already being tried out in a few communities, should be given serious thought. Indeed, we might consider projecting this to a national Black Board of Educators, which would coordinate Black education programs throughout the country.

The time has come for Black folks to either think large, or forget it.

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