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By-Edwards, Gordon

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Ineffective universities and school systems face expanding black ghettos, migration from rural and Southern areas, and the exodus of whites from the inner city. Between 1954 and 1964, in New York City, the Negro and Puerto Rican school population rose from 29% to 50.5%, yet the majority of the teachers remained white and the system did not try to meet the needs of the new population. An attempt to vest interest in the community of Ocean Hill-Brownsville failed. The Buffalo Storefront Experiment financed under the Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965 was designed to provide two-way communication between the institutions and the community. Services offered included: high school equivalency instruction, remedial reading, tutoring, and computer education. The steering committee composed of local participants with upward mobility, the director and his staff, concentrated on meeting the needs of the community. "The University of the Streets" offered classes such as: Small Business Management, College Mathematics, Black History, and The Legal Problems of Ghetto Life. At least three lessons have been learned: start small and do not make promises; try to get maximum community participation; do not plan ahead of the community policy makers. (nl)

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE GHETTO

By:

Gordon Edwards, Director
Office of Urban Affairs
State University of New York at Buffalo

For:

National League of Cities
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THE UNIVERSITY AND THE GHETTO

"The universities must turn toward the problems of the urban society and provide service to the cities, the lower classes and the poor."

Clark Kerr, Chairman
Carnegie Commission
on the Future of Higher
Education

"Unless the university involves itself in service, eventually it will be ignored."

Charles Abrams, Chairman
Department of City Planning
Columbia University

America's foremost educators and urbanologists are "up tight" about the future of democracy and the American education system. Many fear that, "America is moving towards two societies, one black and one white -- separate and unequal."[1/] The rapidly expanding black ghetto has had a profound impact on cities and educational systems. In ten major American cities, the ghetto, as defined by race, is predominant. Washington, D.C.; Gary, Indiana; and Newark, New Jersey; are already over 50% Negro. If recent trends continue, ten more cities will have a black majority by 1984.[2/]

1/ Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, March 1, 1968, Government Printing Office.

2/ Ibid., New Orleans (1971), Richmond (1971), Baltimore (1972), Jacksonville (1972), Cleveland (1975), St. Louis (1978), Detroit (1979), Philadelphia (1981), Oakland (1983), Chicago (1984).

The cutting edge of communications between the black community and the white community, is the riot or demonstration or disturbance. The whites read the message of the riots to mean that blacks wanted a bigger slice of the good life -- the American dream. That blacks wanted more and better jobs, education and housing. Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver said it like it is, "We cannot accept anything less than that black people, like white people, have the best lives technology is able to offer at the present time. Black people know what's going on. They're aware of this country's productivity and they want in on the good life."3/

This reading was correct but the method of correcting the injustice of the past is equally important. The blacks were not only demanding a larger share of the Nation's resources, they wanted a larger voice in determining how these resources were to be used. They wanted self-determination, they want to create black institutions and black businesses and they want to own and operate them. There was a deeper concern about "getting ourselves together." Nowhere was this more evident than in education.

3/ Interview with Eldridge Cleaver, Vol. 15, no. 12, p. 90. PLAYBOY, December 1968.

The shift in urban population from black to white has had a dramatic impact on the control of educational policy, teacher hiring practices and curriculum. In the Fall of 1968 the New York City school system was paralyzed by teacher strikes. The cause of the turmoil was black power, black self-determination and the breakdown of a traditional school system which was not relevant or responsive to black needs or demands.

In 1954, 29% of the elementary school population of the city was made up of Negro and of Puerto Rican children; a decade later the figure was 50.5%, and today it is even larger. This rapid change in the racial composition of the schools is the product of city immigration by Negroes and Puerto Ricans, and of whites leaving: net white emigration between 1955 and 1960 was 365,000, an average of 200 every day. The vast majority of city teachers are white. The increased number of deprived black children happened in a city school system that was broke and inflexible and incapable of responding to the challenge. Even before the public schools went black, many middle-class New Yorkers took their children out of the public schools, and put them in private schools.

As the number of black children increased, the school system did not change to meet their needs. Tensions grew. In an effort to reform the system from above, the city decided to make demonstration models of certain school districts including the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Bedford Stuyvesant in Brooklyn. Here authority was granted to community school boards, partly chosen by the mayor and a central education agency. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville demonstration failed when the governing board tried to get rid of white teachers which it felt were not sympathetic to the community or black control. The teacher's union resisted such firings and closed down the city's school system. The moribund beauracratic system was too slow to change and the agonizing adjustment to the new realities could come only through the confrontation of the white dominated United Federation of Teachers and the New York City School System. A confrontation by black people demanding control of their schools and relevant education for their children followed.

After the riots in Watts, (Los Angeles), the children were reluctant to return to school. They said, "Why should we go back to school and interrupt our education"? As educator Marshal McLuhan has observed,

> "Our 19th Century school and college systems, based on fragmented subjects and classified data which derive from the old hardware environment, cannot relate to the new integral electric environments of information."

Unfortunately, as Stephen Carr and Kevin Lynch have observed,

> "Schools are conservative institutions normally closed to the world around them and obsessed with the training of 'skills.' Formal education looks to the filling of career slots, certifying performance by a succession of numbers, grades, and diplomas. For the poor, and especially for the black poor, schools fail to do even this much. For many, as Peter Drucker points out, schooling has become a way of filling time, sometimes a way of staying alive, more often a way of postponing entry into work. In a more reasonable society, time has other uses."4/

In the city of Buffalo, New York, the State University of New York at Buffalo developed a storefront education experiment as an attempt to provide an alternative educational opportunity to the formalized school system. The storefronts were designed to overcome some of the hang-ups of the traditional education systems.

The Buffalo Storefront Education Experiment

There were riots in Buffalo's ghetto in July of 1967 and again in April of 1968 after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Many stores were fire-bombed along Jefferson Avenue, the main street of Buffalo's ghetto. One storefront operation was not burned. It was the Woodlawn Education Information Center sponsored

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4/ DAEDALUS, Fall, 1968, Vol. 97, No. 4, pp.1277-1278.

by the State University of New York at Buffalo together with seven other colleges in the area.[5/] The concept was simple; to "hustle" or sell education the same way the old storefront churches hustled religion, right on the street where the action is. Ghetto residents had learned that the small Jefferson Ave. store was a place where they could obtain accurate, honest information about education, jobs and a variety of other problems. It was one place where hostile blacks and bewildered whites talked to each other with no punches pulled.

The center was headquarters for people who wanted to "cool it," to find an alternative to violence. It was for people more concerned with building the future than burning the past. The blacks respected the center because it was theirs. It was the only educational institution in the ghetto operated by blacks for blacks. President Martin Meyerson expressed the university perspective as, "The storefronts were designed to provide a two-way channel for communication and information between the institutions and the communities in which the centers are located. They provided a meeting ground for the development of communication and understanding of the problems of ghetto life." By the end of 1967, three additional storefronts were opened. One in the grim First Ward ghetto of Lackawanna, ancther in the Niagara Falls black community and a third in the Buffalo ghetto.

5/ The consortium included Canisius College, D'Youville College, Erie County Technical Institute, Niagara County Community College, Niagara University, Rosary Hill College, State University College at Buffalo and State University of New York at Buffalo.

The Storefront Education Centers developed in response to demands for education and service programs. Essentially they were an innovative experimental program and facility designed to demonstrate how the resources of the universities and colleges in the region can help people in the ghetto help themselves. They were financed by a series of federal grants under Title I of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The following are examples of education services offered:

High School Equivalency instruction. In response to requests for an informal type of high school equivalency program, small classes were organized. This program was instituted only after efforts toward placing those desiring it in the school system's regular equivalency classes had failed. Those regular classes are, of necessity, more structured; the storefronts' classes were informal and allowed the students to work at their own pace. While this was an indirect criticism of the school system's existing program - that of the storefronts was organized merely to serve those who could not, or would not, take advantage of the other program. Even more important, the school system initiated its own storefront education system some two years later.

Remedial reading. With the cooperation of the Community Aid Corps, a student group on the campus of the State University of New York at Buffalo, plus volunteers from most of the other member institutions of the Cooperative Urban Extension Center, remedial reading instruction was offered to many ghetto youngsters who had fallen behind their grade level. The 120 student volunteers worked under the supervision of a professional remedial reading instructor.

Tutoring. Some 130 student volunteers, from the cooperating institutions, provided individual tutoring for ghetto men, women and children.

Computer education. This program trained some 35 ghetto residents in the basics of computer programming. This preliminary training has permitted a number of them to go on to more advanced programs at Erie County Technical Institute, or to on-the-job training.

The first project director was bright, energetic and committed but unfortunately a white PhD. from the State University of New York at Buffalo's school of education. At the outset of the project on January 1, 1967, Dr. Frank P. Besag said,

> "It is not the place of the university and colleges to tell the community what is needed but rather that the university and colleges find through interaction with the community, what contribution can be made and then seek, in conjunction with the community, to fulfill the needs."

Dr. Besag's rejection of worn out paternalism was not just fashionable rhetoric, as was the case with many federal poverty programs which call for "maximum feasible citizen participation." He made it work. It was the old American philosophy of pragmatism. What is impressive is that the storefront project adhered to the policy in practice. The device for achieving this objective, this citizen participation, was the steering committee. The steering committee grew out of the active involvement and interaction of neighborhood residents.

The steering committee was essential to the success of the project. Mainly through the mechanism of the democratically constituted steering committee, the director and his staff scrupulously maintained a posture of meeting needs expressed by the community. The steering committee was in the opinion of its members, (who were residents of the neighborhoods surrounding the centers), a body which makes policy decisions subject only to the limitations of budget which was the responsibility of its parent organization, the Cooperative Urban Extension Center, which represented the colleges and university. As one member put it, "The steering committee really runs the program. That's what makes it good, not like other agencies somewhere else. When outside people run things you're a flunky or a fool." Another remarked,

"Sometimes we don't agree with the director and when we don't we can put him down." On balance, however, some members felt that there was "too much red tape; the policy goes through too many hands." But significantly, there was no feeling that decisions made by the steering committee were frustrated or distorted elsewhere, only that the committee would welcome a greater ability to implement autonomously its decisions, including those of a financial sort. In time, this objective was achieved and the administrative network was rationalized to give the steering committee, later reconstituted as the Board of Directors, even greater decision-making powers.

In retrospect, the composition of the steering committee turned out to be the key to achieving a successful community orientation, and "maximum feasible citizen participation." Many programs have floundered because of an effort to select staff members from among the hard core, urban poor or rural migrant peasants who are emotionally unprepared to make a constructive contribution; perhaps being either too hostile or too apathetic or too diffident for such participation. Or, even more important, the citizens were never given any decision making responsibility. The citizens were never represented in the "power structure." They felt their views were not expressed. As Eldridge Cleaver said, "Remember how the War on Poverty looked on paper and how it worked out? You may recall that of

all the organizations around then, it was CORE that rushed in most enthusiastically to embrace that delusion; in some cities, they formed a large part of the staff. But they didn't have the decisive control, and that's where it's at."6/

In this case those selected were men who lived in the neighborhoods but were upward-mobile. They owned small businesses, (like a dry cleaning or a butcher shop), a skilled trade, (such as barbering or crane operating), or were in a profession like the ministry or school teaching. These men had a combination of personal strength and optimism, and continuing involvement in the community which made it possible for them to speak as respected black leaders, not "Uncle Toms." There were often overtones of alienation and hostility but generally the attitudes of these men were as individuals whose approach to American society was positive and hopeful, based on their own personal experience of "making it."

Having initiated the project and carried through its first year of operation, Dr. Besag was replaced by a "black brother;" Robert Hawkes, a professor at State University College of Buffalo, thus, symbolizing the desire for black control of the project and setting the stage for the development of the Jefferson Education Center or the "University of the Streets," as Dr. James Moss, a black Sociologist from SUNY/B tagged it.

6/ Interview with Eldridge Cleaver, Vol. 15, no. 12, p. 91. PLAYBOY, December 1968.

The University of the Streets Concept

Early in 1968, the steering committee and the new project director, Robert Hawkes, decided that the project needed more elbow room and that the university and colleges should make a greater contribution and commitment by providing relevant courses and classes in the ghetto. A larger amount of federal assistance was requested and granted, largely due to the success of the storefront projects.

The "University of the Streets" contained; 3 offices, 4 classrooms and a small auditorium where dances and other community get-togethers were held. Classes reflected both basic skills and the black experience, such as; Small Business Management, Accounting & Financial Analysis for Small Businesses, Beginning Shorthand and a related Charm & Grooming class, College Math, Computer Programming, Laboratory Technicians, Maintenance training, practical salesmanship and others. Black experience courses included: Philosophical Analysis of Revolution, Black History, African History, Legal Problems of Ghetto Life, Constitutional Law and Civil Rights and A Series of Courses in the Sociology of the Ghetto.

In Sept. of 1968, the Jefferson Education Center or "University of the Streets" was officially opened in a renovated old industrial plant on Jefferson Ave. The run-down condition of the building and lack of physical amenities turned out to be irrelevant. What was important was that it was a black institution. It was

perceived to be "ours" not "theirs." A black organization had co-opted the white establishment, they were working together as "equals." This was not a "hand-out." This perception and perspective fit into the new black mood of "getting ourselves together." The courses and classes taught there were of secondary importance. The spirit of the place, as expressed through the soul music broadcast over radio station WBFO[7/] to the black community was one of means; advertizing the merits of education -- as a means of "getting your mind together" as well as your soul. One of helping your brother "make it" in a tough alien white world. The message, in short, was one of helping each other "make it" with education.

The Urban Setting

The Jefferson Education Center or, "University of the Streets" is located in the center of Buffalo's black ghetto, known officially as the Model Neighborhood Area, or (MNA). The MNA was designated by the city in response to the federal model cities legislation which provides assistance for creating a plan to improve the "quality of life" in the area.

7/ The SUNY/B campus radio station which developed a "satellite studio" in the Center.

Buffalo was one of the great cities of the 19th Century but by the 1960's it was characterized by a declining economic base; mostly obsolete heavy industry and an out-migration of middle-class whites and an influx of poor blacks, mostly from the rural south. In 1966 the Buffalo metropolitan area had a population of 1,337,000. The city of Buffalo had a population of about 480,000 which had been declining since World War II. It also had a Negro population which had grown rapidly over that same period, from 36,645 in 1950, to well over 100,000 by 1968. This white decline and black growth pattern reflected the dominant trend in big, old, industrial cities.

The economic base is heavily dependent upon primary metals (notably steel manufacturing) and automotive equipment manufacturing, each of which categories employ nearly 30,000 persons. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in research-and-development oriented economic activities. This increase is largely related to the rapid expansion of the State University of New York at Buffalo, the Nation's fastest growing graduate center.

While the city continued to lose population, it was still the major place of employment for industrial and commercial enterprises in the metropolitan area. But the sagging tax base was reflected in the financial situation of the city administration which was rapidly deteriorating, (with firemen

and policemen threatening strikes.)

Slum housing is located in three general areas; in the older central portion of the city, generally spreading eastward in a concentric pattern into the Masten and Ellicott Communities (MNA); within the industrial areas along the lake and the river; and south of the Central Business District, extending south and east through a mixed industrial area as far as the neighboring city of Lackawanna, the home of Bethlehem Steel Company.

In 1960, of the total housing units in the city (177,224), 146,470 were considered sound. 24,363 were classified as deteriorating and 6,391 were considered dilapidated. (U.S. Census figures.) The MNA is the black ghetto. It is characterized by worn out housing and overcrowding. Two thirds of the city's welfare cases are located in the MNA. More than one half of the old-age assistance load is in the MNA and the tuberculosis rate is twice as high as the city as a whole. 26% of persons over 25 with less than 8 years of education reside in the MNA.

Most businesses are owned by whites living outside the MNA. This was one of the reasons these businesses were burned in the riots of 1967 - 1968. It was, in effect, a redress of old grievances. Even some black owned or "soul brothers" stores were burned. The unemployment rate is twice as high as that for the Buffalo labor market as a whole, and for young males it is three times as high. By almost any indices, the so-called

MNA is the largest slum in the region. With continued migration from the rural south, the socio-economic gap between the black and whites is growing rather than diminishing. The broad base of the black community is literally a peasant society. It is suspicious, indeed hostile, towards any changes proposed by the larger community represented by the city and county governments.

The Lessons Learned From the Education Center Experiment

The task of instituting change from the outside by traditional patronizing or "neo-colonialist" methods is made more complex and difficult by; (1) the basic peasant attitude or image of a limited good and, (2) the new black militant "togetherness" ideology found in the ghetto. As Professor George Foster pointed out in an intriguing article in the American Anthropologist;

> "[T]he primary task in development is not to attempt to create the need for achievement at the mother's knee but to try to change the peasants' view of his social and economic universe, away from an Image of Limited Good toward that of expanding opportunity in an open system, so that he can feel safe in displaying initiative. The brakes on change are less psychological than social. Show the peasant that initiative is profitable, and that it will not be met by negative sanctions, and he acquires it in short order.8/

8/ AMERICAN ANTHROLOLOGIST, 67, 1965, Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good, George M. Foster, University of California, Berkeley.

Two black psychiatrists, William Grier and Price Cobbs, have discerned the same phenomenon in the American black culture.

> "The bickering, the sniping, the backbiting so often said to characterize black people in their relationship with one another seems so very much to be the rivalry of siblings. Underlying it all is a feeling that 'you're no better than I.' It is an unfortunate corollary of such a feeling of 'sibship,' but it is probably a small price to pay for the comfort and the web of support provided by a brotherhood." 9/

Even more specifically in the southern context the individual with initiative was seriously handicapped.

> "The brother with property in the South is highly visible and is usually the target for business rivals. What would otherwise be healthy competition becomes under these circumstances a deadly game of defense in which the most he can hope for is to avoid capture. Retaliation is out of the question." 10/

9/ BLACK RAGE, p. 105, 1968. William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs. Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York.

10/ BLACK RAGE, p. 107, 1968. William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs. Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, New York.

The Board of Directors of the "University of the Streets," have demonstrated that initiative is profitable. Not only have they created an institution which gives them pride in themselves -- for black pride is even more of a "gut issue" than black power -- but they have also shown how other well-intentioned but often fumbling white assistance programs can succeed.

While the experiment is still in progress, at least three lessons have emerged from the project; in addition to the major lesson that the university's resources can indeed be used to help improve the quality of life in the ghetto. These three lessons are:

1. Start small and do not make a lot of promises.
2. Try to get maximum community participation.
3. Do not plan ahead of the community policy makers -- let them make the key decisions about the future directions of the education program.

From the university perspective, this last lesson means to "plan backward." That is, give the blacks time to talk over ideas, get them involved and follow their advice, suggestions and demands to the maximum extent possible -- then design the plan.

Viewed from the perspective of the urban ghetto dweller, the university has relevant services and opportunities which are wanted and needed. If the university system is reasonably "open," the feedback into the university can help make curriculum relevant to the critical issues of urbanization, racism and the education needs of black children.

A Non-System Alternative for Black Education

One of the questions that arises is, "Is our present education system suitable for an increasingly stratified social, economic and racial grouping"? If we examine the existing systems and how they serve the ghettos of New York, we can, in my opinion, conclude that the existing urban education system fails miserably.

The massive rural to urban migrations underway around the world have had an enormous impact on education. The ghettos of the United States are "way stations" in the rural to urban migration. The rural to urban migration is a push-pull effect of the rapid decline in farm employment due to agricultural industrialization and of people seeking the "good life," essentially through better job opportunities in the city. The ghetto is a step up out of the rural plantation. The problem, of course, is that more and more people are getting hung up at the "way station."

In the long run, the real problem is how to speed up the process of urbanization through education? That is, how can we make individual, family and communal adjustment to urban living and the good life rather than the debilitating experience of the urban slum? Based on our experience with the storefront information centers and the "university of the streets," the key is educational opportunities and by providing necessary medical, legal and job counseling assistance to permit the individual to fulfill his education potential.

The education system which services the dominant middle-class fails to provide a relevant experience for the ghetto. For all too many, the "way station" is the end of the line. They do not relate, they do not even try to make it in the larger society and the ghettos are burgeoning. What is needed are relevant education alternatives. Our experiment demonstrated that the university can create an innovative education experience in urban slums.

In underdeveloped countries where resources are limited, investments in education services for the poor can have a great impact. In the United States, some hard-headed economists and sociologists have said that we don't need all these federal programs and that the best cure for poverty is money. That what we need is a guaranteed annual income to provide a floor under poverty, through a negative income tax or some variation on the theme of outright support. This may be true, but the

system also fails the human spirit. In addition to security, people need opportunity. Opportunity should have a priority at least as high, and perhaps higher, than economic security. The university, which has traditionally been a stronghold of the rich, must move into the field of community service or face the risk of becoming irrelevant. As Charles Abrams warned, "Unless the university involves itself in service eventually it will be ignored."

A final comment on the university posture is needed at this point. It would appear evident that if the university's service programs are to succeed, it must be willing to subordinate its goals, plans and programs to the local community, or ghetto. The university system must be willing to relinquish control without a concommitant decrease in commitment. The university must be willing to help the community people implement their own ideas, whether it feels them to be wise or not. The university must be willing to permit the community to make mistakes, to grow, find its own way and eventually even to grow independent; to operate much like the Marshal Plan did for Western Europe. The resources of the university should be regarded as a beginning -- a seed planting and cultivating process -- not a continuing program. The experience gained by the university will have value and use in other poverty areas in new ways.

Poverty is not just an income gap. It is the need for a richer culture, for finding new styles of behavior, and new opportunities for achieving individual fulfillment. On the other hand, the benefits to the university can be enormous. The ghetto, and indeed the entire city, can become a school, a college, a university -- a center for learning and growth throughout life.