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ABSTRACT

The Search for Elevation through Education and Knowledge (STEK) experience at Queens College has been a hectic and strained undertaking, culminating in a confrontation between black and white students which gained national attention. The white community at Queens reacted negatively towards SEEK students, faculty, and counseling staff. The frustration of the black and Puerto Rican community was the result of almost three years of coping with racism, hadgetary mismanagement, and a dearth of black courses and teachers, and was aggravated by organizational changes which were seen as a move to destroy the SEEK program. This led to the formulation of the black and Puerto Rican Student-Faculty-Counselor Coalition. The Coalition outlined proposals designed to improve the quality of education. Demonstrations were planned to force the college to negotiate in good faith, but most of the efforts to improve education were frustrated. Black educational complexes are the only alternative to poor education of black people. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (Author/Dh)



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The SEEK Program: A SEEK Student's View

by Jackie Robinson

Jackie Robinson was a member of the SEEK program at Queens College, C.U.N.Y. graduating in the summer of 1970. He received summer scholarships to the University of Madrid and Liberia and Ghana and worked as a Research Assistant at the Institute.

The City University has historically always been a haven for middle-class white students. I can vividly remember being told that City University rated jury below the Ivy League schools. Queens College, City College and Brooklyn College were New York's answer to Harvard, Yale and Brown. Thus, to maintain high standards, the entrance into the City University senior colleges were usually difficult, particularly for "minority students". Despite the fact that a larg. Black community is about 20 minutes away from Queens College, there still existed a bare minimum of black faces on the campus (some 800 out of 27,000).

New York State attempted to ameliorate this wretched condition by the creation of the SEEK program (Search for Elevation, Education and Knowledge). The program officially began in 1966 with approximately \$1 million from the State Legislature. Its aim was to assist minority students from poverty areas of New York City to gain admission to the City University.

Realizing that many of the students coming from black and Puerto Rican communities were "educationally crippled" primarily because of the poor quality of the education and teachers found in the Black and Puerto Rican communities, the conceivers of the program envisioned SEEK as a panacea to cure the educational deficiencies of blacks and Puerto Ricans and to produce students capable of handling "college level" work, and thus eventually obtaining a college degree.

The SEEK program was initiated as separate entities in three senior colleges: City, Brooklyn and Queens. The centralization of SEEK began in 1967; and by 1968 the program had spread to seven senior colleges and several community colleges within the City University. The program had grown from a few hundred students to more than 4,000 by 1969. The unique features of SEEK include tutorial aid for students who show deficiences in Math, English, Science, or any other course the student may have difficulties with Stipend checks provide the students with much needed financial aid, and the classes are kept small to facilitate the learning process.

Students for the program are recruited from black and Puetto Rican communities and schools from high school age until they are in their 30's. They are admitted with



any type of diploma—general, academic, vocational or equivalency certificates. Usually, those accepted into the program, on the basis of their high school performance, would not have ordinarily been admitted to college. Books, student fees, and educational supplies are paid for by the program.

The ethnic composition is mainly black and Puerto Rican (70% Black and 20% Puerto Rican and 10% other — white and Chinese). In addition,

"by June 1969, the City College program had admitted 109 SBEK students to regular status as candidates for the baccalaureate degree. Semester by semester, the number of SEEK students achieving regular status has increased. At this rate, the program, should produce a graduation rate of 35-40% of its entering classes. This percentage must be compared with the general graduation rate throughout the nation of 50% of those who enter college. In short, the SEEK students, none of whom was really eligible for college,have a surrival rate which will be 80% of that of all college students throughout the country."

However, what was officially placed on paper to be the goals and the achievements of the incongruous program and the rhetoric being espoused by the University administrators about helping blacks and Puerto Ricans obtain a college education and what was actually happening in SEEK, particularly at Queens College, were two phenomena.

The SEEK experience at Queens College has been a hectic and strained undertaking, from the first time black and Puerto Rican students entered Queens culminating with a physical confrontation between black and white students which gained national attention. The white community at Queens reacted negatively towards SEEK students, faculty and counseling staff.

In the Spring of 1967, the official Campus publication, *Phoenix*, reported that SEEK students held an orgy in one of the student houses off-campus. The "orgy", reported by a white woman who lived across the street from the student house, was nothing more than a student party held early in the evening.

Nevertheless, the white faculty and student body did not hesitate to object to the small influx of black and Puerto Rican students who they automatically labelled as "inferior". Some students, who displayed extraordinary academic ability, were given low grades by racist Queens College faculty members because black students in the epinion of the faculty were not supposed to achieve high academic standards at the College.

Queens College, in general, never made the blacks and Puerto Ricans feel welcome



¹ This information was taken from a prisonal unpublished document of the Board of Higher Education, City of New York.

at the College, it was as though their private domain had been invided. Some students became disillusioned with this blatant racism that was evident at the College, and as a result, they decided to leave the College.

In the SEEK program itself there was a strong desire for more black and Puerto Rican instructors. Many of the white instructors were viewed as paternalistic, and many enlisted into the program with missionary attitudes towards the students. When the students complained of the small number of black and Puetto Rican instructors, they were told by the director that it was difficult to recruit black instructors. (When a black student organization, "Black Concern", approached the College, through the Dean of Faculty's office, about hiring more black instructors the College reflected similar sentiments.)

Because of these and other reasons, the drop-out rates at Queens College were among the highest in the City University:

"The withdrawal rate of students in the Queens SEEK program was 34.1% for the students entering 9/66; 35.% for the class entering 2/67; 35.5% for the class entering 9/67." (Figures compiled during Spring, 1968).

Thus, the frustration of the black and Puetto Rican community at Queens College was the result of almost three years of coping with racism, both conscious and unconcious, from Queens College administration, faculty, and students. The SEEK program was inconvenienced because of budgetary mismanagement and a total dearth of courses and teachers that dealt with the black experience. Consequently, the situation at Queens was only aggravated by a decision by the City University resolving that SEEK at the various college become a department, thus incorporating the SEEK program directly into the College structure.

The black and Puerto Rican community at Queens regarded this step as a direct affront because of the history and nature of Queens College in the past. They viewed this as a move that would totally destroy the SEEK program, because it placed greater control and decision making power in the hands of the very people who were so strongly against everything that SEEK represented to black and Puerto Rican students.

This more made by the City University to make SEFK a department in the College prompted the solidifying of forces between the existing black and Puetto Rican organizations to deal with the problems that had reached crisis proportions. It was decided that each black and Puetto Rican student organization send its president or chairman



¹ Proposal To Save and Strengthen the SEEK.

along with its black faculty and counselor representatives. Thus the black and Puerto Rican Student-Faculty-Counselor Coalition was formed. With a cross-section of the student leaders, faculty and counselors there would be a large student representation, and teacher and counselor involvement was assured.

The primary goal of the Coalition was to create a viable and strong program that addressed itself to the educational needs of the Black and Puerto Rican people. One point that cannot be contested is that the SEEK program at Queens College was not serving the educational needs of the students it was created to serve. Therefore, the Coalition outlined proposals that were designed to improve the quality of education that was definitely lacking in the program. Among the most important were:

- (1) Enrollment must be re-opened to all students with a high school diploma or its equivalency. That is, not only recent high school graduates but Brothers and Sisters right off the street.
- (2) All SEEK students must be allowed to take a full course load (of SEEK courses) with at least 12 credit hours per semester.
- (3) There must be more Black and Puerto Rican teachers in the program because they are better able to relate to students and their needs as they provide a positive visible model.
- (4) Emphasis must be placed upon giving students courses that are relevant to the Black and Puerto Rican experience as opposed to the white experience alone.
- (5) There must be more student-faculty participation 73 bona fide members on all levels and phases of the SEEK program will be open and above board.

All of the above were dependent upon two important prerequisites: (1) the removal of the director of the SEEK program who was white and replacing him with a Black director and (2) nothing less than complete autonomy for the SEEK program at Queens. One point that must be made clear is that the Coalition was not demanding the resignation of the director primarily because of skin color. This charge was repeated by all of the major newspapers in the City, and it was intended to distort the real issues involved. The director was judged based upon his merits, his color was secondary, his record spoke for itself.

The following reasons were documented by the Coalition why the immediate resignation of the director was demanded:

(1) "During the holidays of the 1967-68 school year students were asked not to

Processal To See and Superches MEX 12-19-68. The proposal counties two Position Pages and a Measurendum
make pages and based by the Stack and Pages all them Product Pages Counties."



- pick up their checks unless they "really needed them." Students agreed to Mr. Mulholland's proposal for working out this crisis. However, neither the students nor any other member of SEEK were told what happened to the funds in the first place which brought about the crisis.
- (2) In Spring, 1968, students were asked to accept a cut in their stipends in order to help Mr. Mulbolland belance his budget.
- (3) School was forced to close two weeks early in Spring, 1968 because there were no funds available for student expenses.
- (4) He had been dishonest in his dealings with students and faculty. Mr. Mulholland told the faculty of SEEK in an official staff meeting, which was the only meeting called this semester, that SEEK might be absorbed into the regular Queens College structure. When confronted with this fact Mr. Mulholland, Dean Hartle and President McMurray considered the report of the absorption a "wild rumor."
- (5) He has grossly distorted the operation of the program to the Central Office of the SEEK program. He claims that the program is a success yet statistics show otherwise.
- (6) He has misrepresented the policy of the Central Director of SBBK with respect to professional qualifications requisite for employment, salaries, and contracts.
- (7) The entire administration and clerical staff is still completely white. This in-ludes the Assistant Director for Faculty, Director of Counseling, and Director of Tutoring. There are no black or Puerto Rican secretaries not other clerical staff.
- (8) An "overwhelmingly" white staff has taught SBEK students since the program's Inception. He has refused to hire any Puerto Rican teachers.
- (9) SEEK students had to confront Mr. Mulholland in order to get the few Black teachers we now have. As soon as they were hired (September, 1968) plans for submerging the SEEK program were immediately formed.
- (10) Mr. Mulholland has failed to effectively communicate with SEEK students and faculty. General student body meetings were called only during a crisis and by the SEEK student government. He has not held general faculty meetings to discuss matters concerning the program.
- (11) Mr. Mulholland has attempted to obstruct communication and cooperation between the counseling staff and the Central SEEK office.



- (12) Mr. Mulholland deems it necessary to call meetings when a crisis arises.
- (13) Mr. Mulholland has consistently and arrogantly obstructed the effective functioning of the counseling program.
- (14) The tutoring program has been ineffective. Mr. Mulholland, though aware of this, has done absolutely nething to correct it. There has been no clarification of the processes of acquiring a tutor. Students seeking tutors have often been given the run-around.
- (15) Black teachers are arbitrarily harassed by having their book lists cut by the bookstore which has no financial authority over this matter.
- (16) Mr. Mulholland recently attended an African-American curriculum conference at Atlanta University. He refused to take black teachers when they requested to go. In fact he did not tell these teachers of this conference until confronted by them. He has failed to make a report of this conference to the faculty or students.
- (17) Mr. Mulholland has instigated and precipitated mass panic and hysteria among students by conveying vague and distorted information regarding the assimilation of SEBK into Queens College.
- (18) Since the present crisis Mr. Mulholland and his staff have closed down and evacuated the SEEK offices and refused to perform certain vital administrative functions."

It was an open insult to have a white former probation officer heading an academic program of which 90% of its students were black and Pueno Rican. The Coalition was repeatedly attacked verbally for demanding the resignation of the director. Members of the Queens College academic community took every opportunity to label the Coalition as a tacist organization and they sought to obstruct the activities of the Coalition as much as possible.

It seems only natural to the Coalition that a program geared primarily for minority students should have a minority member as its director. Moreover, the Coalition reasoned, a predominantly Black and Puerto Rican program should have a visible role model to emulate instead of continuously having to see whites in position of authority and leadership.

The position of the Coalition on autonomy was crystal clear: Since the SEEK program was composed mainly of blacks and Puerto Ricans it should be controlled by blacks and Puerto Ricans, not by the College or appointed officials of the College. The plan of

Proposal To Seve and Sureagues SEEK.

the Coalition therefore, was to have the program under the complete control of the Black and Puerto Rican community at Queens.

The white director resigned. A black director appointed by the Coalition and accepted by the College was chosen. He was a tenured education professor who was to zerve as interim director until a permanent director was found. The professor chosen had shown great empathy for the goals of the Coalition as outlined and he displayed a willingness to cooperate in helping the Coalition to create a program that served the notifs of the students. (Parenthetically, all of the major administrative actors in this drama no longer are with college: the original SEEK director, Dean of Faculty, and the President).

With the institution of the Personnel and Budget (P & B) Committees the Coalition brought faculty and students into direct decision making positions. Each subject area had a P & B Committee (Math, English, Contemporary Civilization, Communications Arta and Science, Counseling, etc.) that was comprised of instructors from each subject area and students, both elected by their peers, and one person from the administrative staff, who was to serve as an ex-officio member.

The greatest criticism and attack came as a consequence of the changes being brought about as a result of the Coalition's creation of the P & B committees. For the first time in the history of the City University students were given a voice in the administration of their education and in policy making. What is more, black students, faculty and counselors were assuming complete control of their education and the educational processes.

Among the functions of this united black and Puerto Rican body were:

- (1) The authority to devise all administrative procedures and make all policy decisions.
- (2) The appointment and dismissal of SEEK administrative personnel.
- (3) Determining the sources and proper allocation of funds.
- (4) The power to select, evaluate, appoint and dismiss all faculty and counseling personnel.
- (5) Black and Puerto Rican teachers and counselors shall determine the curriculum, and devise, compile and administer academic tests.

In general, the Coalition was responsible for revolutionizing the SEEK program so as to make it more relevant to the needs of the students. However, once one realizes the scope of the task undertaken by the Coalition one can readily see the difficulty involved

Proposal To Seve and Strengthen S.EX.

in having a white institution such as Queens College or the Board of Higher Education accept such farreaching changes in the education of minority students. The changes the Coalition was fostering were specifically designed to raise the level of consciousness of black and Puerto Rican students and stimulate them to get an educational experience that had meaning for them and their communities.

This point is clearly emphasized in the curriculum proposed by the Coalicion. One of the charges brought against the Coalition was that "The main problem is the Coalition's demand to abolish remedial work. The educational reality, however, is that without such work, SEEX students cannot possibly do well in College." Nothing could be further from the truth.

What must be understood is that the SEEK students were burdened with non-credit "remedial" courses. In the pre-coalition SEEK era students took remedial English, for example, for two semesters. In some instances the second English course was a repeat of the first one. It was intended to improve the student's writing and knowledge of English Literature. In reality, however, what happened was that students were spending five and six hours in remedial courses for no credit and similar courses were being offered by the College for credit and half the class hours (3 hours instead of 6) were required.

It must also be understood that for many students the work was not "remedial". Much of what was being taught was new material that some students had never had, the work was therefore new and not remedial. What the Coalition was opposed to was that SEEK students would spend a year to a year and a half taking non-credit "remedial" courses and after that period they had from 0-3 or 5 credits. (A fact finding committee from the Board of Higher Education documented that Queens SEEK students had accumulated less credits than any other college in the SEEK program).

At the rate Queens SEEK students were proceeding, it would take from 6-7 years to have hoped to get a degree. Hence, the Coalition proposed that students be given 12 credits per semester and some of the courses originally designed as "remedial" non-credit courses were taught for credit. An outline of curriculum follows:

(1) Mathematics — SEEK students will receive 3 credits per semester for mathematics E 70-71. It will be taught under SEEK auspices. This course will satisfy the Mathematics 5 requirement. Students planning to major in mathematics at Queens College should then be admitted to the next advanced mathematics course. This course is not a repetition of high school mathematics; our students have never had it since 10th and 11th year mathematics

Sciomon Resnick, "Black Power and Education: The SEEK Experience at Queens College", Community Issues, Institute for Community Studies, Queens College, C.U.N.Y.

are required only if students receive academic diplomas. Most SEEK students do not have academic diplomas. Of the entering class in Spring, 1968 only 8.5% of the SEEK students at Queens College who were full-time students graduated with academic diplomas.

- (2) English All English courses will be credit courses. English 01 was designed to be remedial. These classes, in fact are not since students are taught writing skills which they were not taught in high school. Regular Queens College students who take 01 courses are required to take only 3 hours, while SEEK students are required to take 5 hours. The courses English 01 and English 1 will include grammar since students need knowledge of grammar not only for competency in English but to enable them to deal with foreign languages.
- (3) Contemporary Civilization CC 3 and CC 4 are elective courses in Queens College but are required for SEEK students thereby using up 6 hours of elective credit. Both courses were designed as testing grounds for students' reading and writing skills and to analyze their own environments. CC 1 and CC 2 are required by Queens College. These two courses deal only with western philosophy and history. CC1 and CC2 will be taught in the first year as a comparative history of western ideas to African, Latin American, Caribbean philosophies with special emphasis on how these relate to the present social structure.
- (4) Science SEEK students are not allowed to take science during their first semester at Queens College. During their first year students should be introduced to ccience so that they may decide if they want to work in this discipline. SEEK will offer all basic science courses to satisfy the Queens College requirement. Biology 10; Chemistry 9 and 10; Physics 10; and Geology 1 and 2. Science majors taking these courses will then be admitted to the next advanced course.
- (5) C.A.S. SEEK students have always had great difficulty in this course. A higher percentage of SEEK students fail or receive low grades in this course than in any other course. The teachers and the teaching of this course will be carefully investigated. The basic content of the course as described in the Queens College Bulletin would remain unchanged.

The CAS requirement may be satisfied by a course in Film Communications. The course will be concerned with the art and techniques of visual aids using the tools of film communications for specific ends -- Documentary,

Training, and Educational films. There will be a laboratory component in which short films will be made.

An elective course will be offered in Advanced Film Communications principally concerned with making Documentary, Training and Educational Films. Film will be used as a tool of communications for specific ends.

(6) Languages — The following languages will be taught:

Spanish 1 and 2

French 1 and 2

Yoruba (5 semesters)

Swahili (5 semesters)

A Spanish 1 course will be taught for Spanish speaking students with emphasis on writing skills just as English 1 is taught to English speaking students Spanish 1 for English speaking students will emphasize oral skills.

- (7) Art The curriculum of the Art Course offered within SEEK will be determined by the BLACK AND PUERTO RICAN STUDENT FACULTY-COUNSELOR-COALITION. The art requirement for Queens College will be satisfied by either of the following courses:
 - I Introduction to Art
 - II A Survey of African, Latin American, Caribbean and Afro-American
 - III Art Workshop Course—Queens College art workrooms should be opened to SEEK students. They have not been to date.
- (8) Music All music courses will emphasize Black and Puerto Rican Music. Queens College requires students to take one semester of music for 2 credits. This requirement will be satisfied with either of the following courses: Music 5 will be taught by SEEK teachers with emphasis on black and Puerto Rican music. Drumming and Dancing both such an integral part of this music tradition will be included in this course.

Music III and IV are courses offered for students who have a knowledge of music. They are courses in music literature and style.



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Music I and II are courses in music appreciation that essentially involve listening and analysis of styles.

(9) Honors and Advanced Courses will be offered within SEEK.

THE CURRICULUM OF THE COURSES OFFERED WITHIN SEEK WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE BLACK AND PUERTO RICAN STUDENT-FACULTY-COUNSELLOR-COALITION

The Coalition never denied that some of the black and Puerto Rican students did not have "severe educational handicaps" as suggested by one critic. The Coalition designed the revised curriculum for the purpose of ameliorating these "educational handicaps". If the proposed curriculum is examined carefully we will also see that one of the purposes of the revised curriculum was to stimulate and motivate the interest of the student, and not just have the student learn to write or read faster. The purpose of the revised curriculum was to make the material interesting and relevant to their own experiences.

Without complete autonomy the outlined proposals were impossible to implement. Members of the Coalition realized that the resistance from the College, the Board of Higher Education and courts combined would render most of the gains and innovations accomplished completely useless. In order to force the College to begin to negotiate in good faith the Coalition had planned demonstrations and disruptions of the regular functioning of the College. There was no occupation of buildings. It was felt that occupation of buildings would have been an open invitation for the police to demonstrate why they are "New York's Finest".

As a result of the long and hard struggle waged by the Coalition to secure control of the SEBK program the College refused to relinquish its authority over the program and they continued to use their power to sabotage any efforts to better the program.

The College obtained a court injunction barring any form of demonstration on the part of black and Puerto Rican people on Campus. The injunction also forbade any gathering of students in groups of 3 and 4 (our rights to assemble were r nied). Moreover the college administration fired a Black math instructor who provided the Coalition with strong and forceful leadership.

The Board of Higher Education passed an edict which placed greater control of the program in the hands of the College. Therefore, most of our efforts to better the quality of education for blacks and Puerto Ricans were frustrated by the united actions of these racict institutions.



The Queens College experience has been an invaluable one, from the standpoint a student, a future educator, and a Black man. What my four years at Queens has forced me to realize is that however hard Black people struggle to bring about educational reform within white institutions it is to no avail. The Coalition spent months of careful planning in the attempt to create a strong and viable program for Black and Puerto Rican students. Yet, in a matter of days Queens College, the Board of Higher Education and the legal system had rendered most of our efforts impotent. Programs such as SEEK are designed to serve specific purposes: To integrate predominantly white institutions and to ease the guilt feelings of some whites who realize that Black people have been defeated educationally. In all too many cases the needs of the students are rarely taken into consideration.

The whole concept of education must be changed for Black people. And the only way this can be done is to create Black educational complexes which address themselves to the needs of Black people. Educational institutions (elementary, secondary and higher education) must be erected, evaluated, and perfected by Black people. Programs such as SEEK are only weak attempts at rectifying the educational wrongs committed against Black people.

Black educational systems must be instituted to provide identity, purpose, and direction to Black people. White institutions have only succeeded in distorting our values and superimposing alien and white values upon Black minds. For the most part, education for Black people has only prepared them to accept white collar positions that inevitably make them lackeys to a Judeo-Christian society. Negro institutions such as Howard and Fisk are no exceptions, for they are mere facsimilies of white colleges.

Black students must begin to use their education to provide direction to their people. Programs such as SEEK will only do what other white institutions have done, that is, prepare students to become middle class value oriented.

Since most Black students have no alternative but to attend white institutions, we must be able to extract the technical information available and use it as a tool to create our own institutions that will be able to disseminate information and knowledge to the Black masses.

This can only be done on a limited basis because the educational system is in such turmoil that even white kids are not benefitting from it any longer. And it was created for their benefit, and not our. Then what do we do, as Black people, trying to hang on to an educational system that is obsolete and doesn't even begin to touch on the problems of black people?



Black schools must be multi-dimensional. They must be used to educate black people to the contradictions inherent within the "American Dream", and we must be able to use black Schools for spiritual development and to provide political awareness, serve as a socializing agent and raise the level of consciousness in the black community. Since black people have problems of police harrassment and brutality, they suffer from inhuman living conditions and exorbitant rents, our schools must be geared to deal with these problems as well as provide technical knowledge to complement whatever additional skills may be needed to address ourselves to the educational needs of Black people.

Thus, the educational needs of black people are radically different from the traditional education sought by most white students. Black people have to use their schools to attack the bastions of white racism and relieve black people from the necessity of becoming parasites who leech upon poverty programs and welfare instead of seeking independence from their former slave masters. If we look at black populated areas such as Jamaica and Trinidad, for example, we can see how these and other Caribbean governments allow people to exist as neo-slaves to tourists. Their entire economy is built around tourism.

When they are educated their school instructs them on how to be good servants to the European and Euro-American tourist. These Islands of the Caribbean have predominantly tourist economies. Or take Liberia, for example, where the government is more concerned with giving the students an "American education" than they are with providing students with knowledge of their indigenous past.

We in the Coalition recognized these truths. We have witnessed how black people in America have only been educated to serve the interest of white America. This is why we opposed the concept of "remedial" work, as much as we needed to get students to know and understand the political, social and economic problems Black people face. What was more important was what students learned and how they implemented that knowledge to aid in the liberation of black people.

For these reasons, I think that black educational complexes are the only alternative to poor education of black people. To depend on white institutions, is only to continue to allow ourselves to be miseducated. Though black people have attempted to control their various communities they have not succeeded because they did not have ultimate decision making power. Take for example what has happened to the community control projects in Ocean Hill-Brownsville and at I.S. 201. Once black people began to take steps

Walter Rodney, The Groundings With My Brothers, The Bogle-L Overture Publications, London, 1969.

to assert their authority over the school in their community the Unions, the City and the State destroyed the effectiveness of the Experimental Districts. Once again black people lost in an attempt to control their own lives.

If our schools are not controlled by us then we can never hope to improve the education of our people. Black people contribute close to \$30 billion to the American economy annually. If we were to boycott various industries for one year we would be in a position to finance many of our own schools. Programs such as SEEK will no longer be needed. We will be able to build our much needed schools.

