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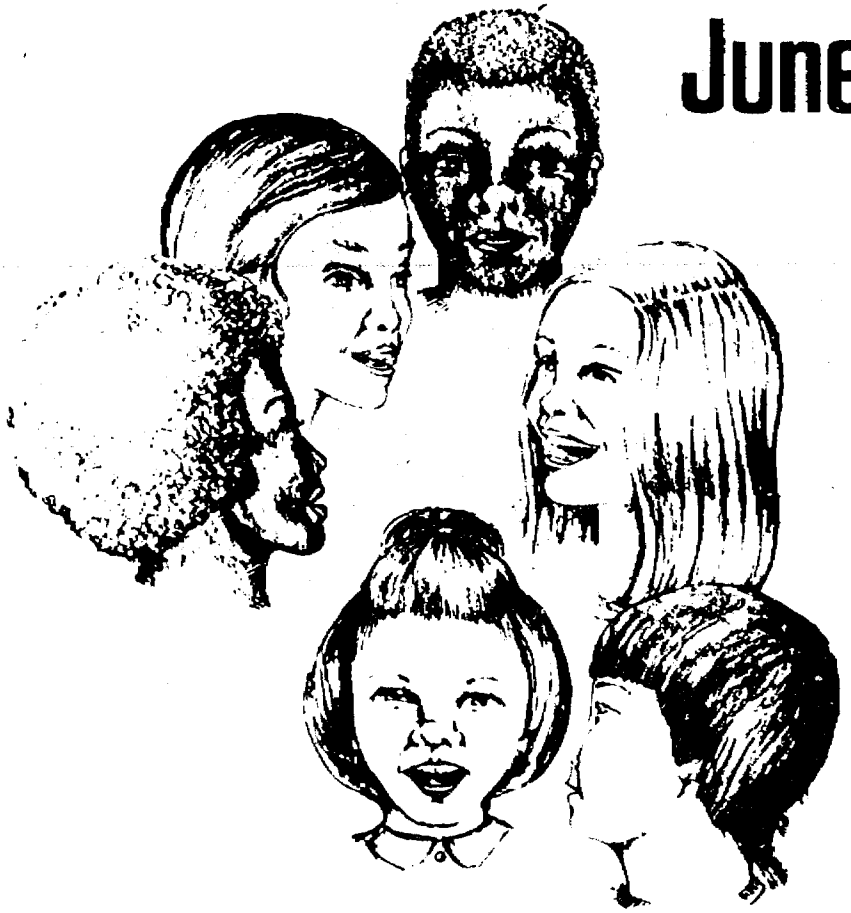
ABSTRACT

The workshop produced three speeches which form the three parts of this document. The first, "Children's Materials and the Black Experience" by Augusta Baker, discussed many children's books and how they relate to the black child. The second speech, "What the Appalachian Child Brings to your Classroom" by Rebecca Caudill, discussed the special educational and social situation of Appalachian children. Finally, June Jordan in her speech, "Black English: The Politics of Language", described Black English and advocated its acceptance in schools. (WH)

Workshop Proceedings

The Media Program and the Utilization of Instructional Materials for Minorities

June 12-13, 1973



Division of Library Development and Services
Maryland State Department of Education

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS
The Media Program and the Utilization of Instructional Materials for Minorities
1973

Edited By:

David R. Bender and Rosa L. Presberry

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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I submit the proceedings from "The Media Program and the Utilization of Instructional Materials for Minorities Workshop." The experiences of the workshop defies the written word; the real success of the workshop remains, however, something of a private sharing. Nevertheless, I hope that this report will convey something of the more public exchange that took place during those two days.

The speeches demonstrated that each child must be provided ample opportunities to explore all kinds of ethnic literature. Your careful reading is invited. Not only will you find each speech informative, but you will also enjoy the style.

I hope that you will consider these suggestions so that you will exercise more sensitivity in choosing media about Blacks, Chicanos, Indians, or whatever ethnic background you may be serving.

I would like to thank the many people who helped in the preparation of this workshop. Unfortunately, they are too numerous to be singled out by name, but I would like to give special thanks to David R. Bender, Assistant Director of the Division of Library Development and Services, for his advice and encouragement.

Sincerely,

Rosa L. Presberry

Rosa L. Presberry
Specialist, Special Programs

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Children's Materials and the Black Experience

Augusta Baker

I would like to share with you some thoughts about the "Black Experience in Children's Books," but before I do, I would like to talk about our attitudes towards Black children and other minority groups. I feel very strongly that all the bibliographies in the world, all the books published on the subject, all of the conferences and workshops we attend mean nothing if we do not examine deeply our own feelings and prejudices. Our attitudes toward others are of the utmost importance. We cannot work constructively with Black children if we consider them inferior, second class citizens. How we truly feel about others is a private matter to be explored and examined by ourselves. We must decide about our own attitudes.

One of the finest books written on the subject is Ann Nolan Clark's Journey to the People: The recollections of an inspired educator and writer's experiences teaching Indian children. Mrs. Clark spent the greater part of her professional life working with American Indian children whom she loved and respected. You know her as the author of a number of children's books, especially In My Mother's House. Annis Duff said, "The publication of this book in 1941 was a literary landmark; it was the first children's book written about Indian children of the American Southwest from the viewpoint of the Indian children themselves." I consider Journey to the People of equal importance in its discussion of people's attitudes toward those with cultures different from their own. Where Ann Nolan Clark refers to American Indian children, we

have only to substitute the minority in which we are interested, whether it's Blacks, Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Japanese, or Chinese. I would like at this time to share with you the first paragraph of the book. Just listening to it will give you a real feeling for the entire book. Her first chapter is titled "Cultural Differences."

> I was once asked to talk to a group of librarians about the culturally disadvantaged children who stand before the books on their bookshelves and walk through their libraries. I thought about this topic for a long time and decided, at last, that I could not talk about culturally disadvantaged children because I do not think of them in this way. I have spent my adult life working in one field or another with children of different minority groups, but never have I thought of them as disadvantaged culturally. Rather, I think of them as children whose culture patterns differ from my own. In my thinking the word "culture" does not mean the educational standard of my group but rather the behavior patterns of any group.[1]

She speaks of the need to respect other people's traditions and customs for each group has its own.

> Our white American culture has a tendency to set up its traditions and cultures as the norm, the principle of rightness which guides and regulates acceptable beliefs and acceptable behavior. Strange traditions and customs, especially those of other races, we tend to dismiss as peculiarities or superstitions. This feeling of our group makes impenetrable barriers to harmonious relationships with others. These barriers must come down, and each member of each group must do his part to bring them down.[2]

I would recommend that we all read this book and think seriously about what Ann Nolan Clark is saying to us. A little soul-searching will help us to think clearly on the subject of prejudice and discrimination - and culturally different children. I would also like to talk about the Black child and how to reach him through books.

[1] Clark, Ann Nolan. Journey to the People. New York: Viking Press, 1969, p. 18.

[2] Ibid. pp. 27-28.

First, we must remove the labels from him. Fortunately when I came to The New York Public Library in 1937, the educators had not begun to categorize children. We didn't have "culturally disadvantaged" children - they could read or they couldn't read. It was our business to make them like reading. Anne Carroll Moore, our Head of Work With Children, told us, "Get out there and inspire and motivate those children who can't read." We knew there were reasons for their lack of interest in books and reading. Many of these children were not exposed to books and art in their homes. Their parents were too busy earning a living and too tired to share books at night, so we librarians had to substitute for the parents. We told stories, we read aloud, we shared books whenever the opportunity presented itself. Motivation was our key word. We felt that these children were not a breed unto themselves, but rather, capable of responding to good books and stories if given proper understanding and properly motivated. But we must believe that these boys and girls do have potential and that they are not so "culturally disadvantaged" that they cannot respond to the best. Give them something to reach for rather than coming down to their level.

It is important to respect their cultural differences and not be patronizing. You have failed if you see yourself as the one who brings a "great something" to these "poor little underpriviledged children." You are doing them a great disservice with this pat on the head. These children's cultural patterns are different and they will respond to respect rather than a "social worker's approach." Such a respect for different cultural patterns will help us to understand the children as we work with them. I feel this is coming out a great deal in the new books that are published on the Black Experience.

June Jordan is going to talk to you about Black English. She has written an excellent article in the May, 1973, issue of School Library Journal. Black English is a manifestation of a culture pattern, one which we have been inclined in the past to look down on and work hard to change. Now there are those who point out that one's speech pattern is part of one's cultural pattern. Who are we to say that the child who says, "I be going down the street" must say "I'm going down the street." Young Black writers of today are able to put down on paper the rhythmic speech of Black folk. Arna Bontemps captured this in his early books, and such writers as Lucille Clifton and John Steptoe are using it today. Read Stevie aloud and you will get the difference between a regional pattern of speech and dialect. Dialect is stereotyped, author-created speech, such as one finds in Joel Chandler Harris' stories. It is old-fashioned, out of date, minstrel-type speech. I believe that it takes Black writers to capture the real rhythmic speech patterns of their own people.

There are those who feel that only Blacks can capture the true Black experience. This is the difference between Steptoe's Uptown, Deveaux's Na-ni and Keats' Snowy Day. Keats' books, like Steptoe's Stevie, have universal themes while Deveaux and Steptoe reflect the Black child's special experiences in the inner city. Both types of stories have their places in the child's reading. Jack Keats' stories about Peter and Willie and Amy are greatly loved and children don't question the author-illustrator's skin color. All of these stories could happen to any child and any child can relate to them, regardless of whether he is Black or white. Speech patterns and illustrations must be true to their characters and their locale. It is important

that we share these books with our children and make them exciting and inviting.

How do we do this? First of all, we buy the books and put them on the shelves for all children, regardless of their race. "The children coming to my library are predominately white, so I am not going to buy all these books on the Black Experience. I have a limited budget." Don't sell yourself on the idea that you only buy books on the Black Experience for Black children. I have often said that if I had only one copy of such a book, and I had to choose between giving it to a Black child or a white child, I would give it to the white child. The Black child is exposed to the Black Experience every day, whereas this book may be the only introduction to Black people that the white child has. Don't cheat the white child out of his experience, even if it is coming through a book.

Having bought the books don't devote the rest of your life missionary-style, to the use of them. Be natural and relaxed and make the books exciting. Don't go after the children with a sledge hammer in one hand and the book in the other determined to force them to read the book at that particular moment. This brings out natural reactions.

"Well I won't read it."

"Just try and make me read that book."

"I'll not touch it now. I may come back a few days later when you aren't looking and take it out."

Because you are frustrated, you say to yourself, "Well, it just goes to show, they are not interested in this material, so I won't buy any more." You have pushed too hard. Just be as natural and as relaxed as you would be if you were "selling" Little Women.

Give the best book talk or tell the best story you can. Transfer your enthusiasm and delight to the boys and girls by telling them you have found a wonderful book on Harriet Tubman. You have an integrated group - Black Johnny and Sally and a few others - with the rest of the class white children. When you begin to talk about Harriet Tubman, you speak directly to the Blacks in the class because you are anxious for them to get a sense of pride. As you pick out these Black children, the rest of the class looks at them and they become very uncomfortable. You are anxious that these Black children read the Tubman book so at the end of your book talk you immediately press this and other Black books on the Black children. They resist because you have made them, and the white children as well, self-conscious. "Well, Sally, since we have only this one copy of Harriet Tubman, I'm sure that you would like to read it first, wouldn't you?" "No." Now your reaction is that Black boys and girls are not interested in books about the Black Experience, but you don't recognize the fact that you misused the book by turning it into a spotlight on the Black children. Don't pursue the children. Make the books accessible, have attractive exhibits, inspire the children as well as you can - and then relax. They may come back for the book two or three weeks later. It is important to get them the materials and to get them to use the materials wisely by having as many programs as possible and by being as relaxed as possible.

These are just a few random thoughts which have come out of my experience in using books on the Black Experience. I would like to close by sharing two books which I especially like. The first is Na-ni by Alexis Deveaux published by Harper and Row. She was discovered by the same editor who gave us John

Steptoe and Ursula Nordstrom. You will recognize her as a leader of the publication of fine children's books, especially the realistic and the different. She has long been a pioneer in the publishing of Black experience books in the 1930's and 1940's. It was she who published Margaret Wise Brown's Brer Rabbit, still the best edition of the Uncle Remus stories - modified dialect and straight animal tales without the plantation locale, Ursula Nordstrom recognized the talent in this young Black woman and published this extremely realistic, sensitive story. Though it is in the format of a book for young children, I think it is more for the middle-aged child. The second book I wish to share is Walter Myers', The Dragon Takes A Wife, published by Bobbs-Merrill. Walter Myers is a Black author who is also a senior editor at Bobbs-Merrill. The beautiful illustrations are by Anne Grifalconi, author-illustrator of City Rhythms.

What the Appalachian Child Brings to Your Classroom

Rebecca Caudill

Only a few days after Mr. Bender invited me to meet with you today and to share with you some of my Appalachian background and my knowledge of Appalachian children, I received a letter from a librarian in a junior high school in Cleveland.

She wrote, in part: "Ours is an interracial school, with the majority of students being Appalachian whites. We have done much research in the black area, the Puerto Rican area and other ethnic areas, but we have next to nothing in the Appalachian area.

"We were recently given a grant to gather as much information as possible for student use. The name of our project is 'An Appalachian Self-Awareness and Self-Pride Experiment.' The program is designed to give the Appalachian white a sense of pride in his heritage and in his origin. But because of the Appalachians' constant migration there has been very little material that is available.

"Our kids are deprived of many things. Consequently they are filled with social, cultural, and identification problems. They are desperately in need of an example to follow, of someone to look up to. . . . They are also facing constant struggles -- for survival, for raising themselves above their environments, and to realize the value of their worth. . . .

"We are trying to get the program underway as soon as possible. It is one of the first such programs that is being tested in Ohio. . . .

"Since you were born in the South and have written many books about the South, I thought you might have some suggestions on what measures we can take to succeed in this program. . . . Any comments or ideas you may have to offer will be greatly appreciated."

I presume that many of you who are participating in this workshop are faced with problems similar to those outlined by the Cleveland librarian. I presume, too, that, like her, you are looking for answers to these problems and for instructional materials you may find useful in giving to whatever minority group you serve help in facing "their constant struggles for survival, for raising themselves above their environments, and for realizing the value of their worth."

This is a very large order -- larger certainly than I can fill. But I hope that by drawing on the experiences of my own Appalachian childhood and on later experiences with Appalachian people in many different situations, I may give to you a better understanding of the problems you face, and, hopefully, point out some ways in which you may be a helpful guide to the particular Appalachians you serve.

Let me point out in the beginning that there are Appalachians and Appalachians, and that they differ one from another as much as some Baltimoreans may differ from other Baltimoreans. At the same time, it is certainly true that those Appalachians you have found on your doorstep in the last two decades have come, by and large, from homogeneous backgrounds and present to you, to your schools, and to your communities problems that are striking in their similarity. But let me again point out the vast difference between some Appalachians and others. One boy, "educated" in a mountain high school, may enter your junior year unable to read, let alone comprehend what a printed page puts before him.

Another, the same age and "educated" in the same mountain school may write a letter, as one boy actually did write a letter to my husband. In the first sentence the boy is discussing the possibility of attending a summer session at a private academy in the East.

"It would be a wonderful school to attend," he wrote, "even for a summer. A summer course called 'Twentieth Century Concepts' is especially appealing to me.

" I have finished reading Gibbons' Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire now -- long ago. Once having started, the drama of the story held a strong fascination for me and I could not put his books down until I had finished all them. His style was a bit dry, though.

"Now I am reading Will Durant's The Reformation, the sixth volume in his famous series, The Story of Civilization. Some day I shall read the first five books. Last week I finished his first work, The Story of Philosophy."

I am not a teacher nor a librarian, and I have not kept abreast of all the wonderful new media devices available to you who deal with Appalachian children. You will remember the Cleveland librarian referred to them as "Appalachian whites." There are very, very few that are anything but white, and among them are more Caudills than I like to think. Moreover, so far as I have been able to determine, we are all akin. I think I can serve you best by sharing with you what I know of the background of the children, to explain to you the best I can why they are as they are, and why they behave as they behave.

Certain forces, working in conjuction, have made Appalachian children what they are. And what they are is different from what any other ethnic group is. These forces are history, geography, and economics.

Where the ancestors of your Appalachian children, the first Appalachians, came from, and who they were, are moot questions. Levi W. Powell in his book, Who Are These Mountain People, writes: "The settlers in the wilderness and forests of the mountain highlands were descended mainly from rural Englishmen who came voluntarily to America -- not generally under the influence of political or religious persecution, but with a view to improving their condition as tillers of the soil. It was doubtless on the whole a selection of the best blood in Mother England. None but the vigorous, the enterprising, and the hopeful undertook such a change of life in those days. From these people, after a century or more of development in Virginia, a second selection was made to found the New Virginia of the West in the highlands of the southern mountains."

Harry Caudill in his definitive book, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, ascribes to the Southern highlander a far different origin. His forebears, says Harry, were not the landed gentry of England. They were, instead, orphans who roamed the streets of the cities and greater towns of Britian which, unlighted by night, swarmed with footpads, pickpockets, thieves, robbers, and prostitutes, and were "nauseous hell holes of crime and venality." To these orphans were added the inmates of debtors' prisons who festered away in filth and wanton neglect.

This motley group of persons, according to Harry Caudill, were granted a reprieve in the form of indentured servitude proffered by plantation owners of Georgia and the Carolinas. These plantation owners had introduced tobacco to Englishmen and Europeans and later could not import enough slaves to supply the insatiable demand for tobacco, which they had created, and for cotton, which they also grew. So they sent agents to England "to paint glowing pictures of the wonderful new world waiting beyond the Atlantic, where the weather was sunny, and

where men might perform honest labor under wholesome conditions." The result was a series of Parliamentary acts "making it possible to transport street orphans, debtors, and criminals to the New World," their transportation to be paid by the planters, their term of indentureship usually seven years.

"And so for decades," writes Harry Caudill, "there flowed from Merry England to the piney coasts of Georgia, Virginia, and the Carolinas a raggle-taggle of humanity -- penniless workmen fleeing from the ever-present threat of military conscription; honest men who could not pay their debts; pickpockets and thieves who were worth more to the Crown on a New World plantation than dangling from a rope, and children of all ages and both sexes, whose only offense was that they were orphans and without guardians capable of their care."

Somewhere between this grandiose claim of Levi Powell and the ignominious counterclaim of Harry Caudill lies the truth, but I suspect that Harry Caudill is much closer to the truth than Levi Powell. At least, I have never known an Appalachian who could trace his ancestry beyond the arrival of a great-great-great grandfather on the shores of the tobacco and cotton producing states.

My own great-great-great grandfather, Stephen Caudill, Sr., arrived in America from Scotland in the year 1763. In my ancestry are Meades and Metcalfes, Browns and Adamses, Eldridges and Cornetts. But beyond knowing their names and that they arrived in this country from England or Scotland, I have no further knowledge. Of ancestry on my mother's side, I know even less, since the family bore the undistinguished name of Smith. Such, then, is the history of the Appalachian child.

It was in the 1770's that these immigrants, freed of their indentureship, moved away from the tidewaters and the plantations. They were seeking land

where they could be really free. In the Appalachians, which up to that time had been traversed by only a few explorers and hunters, they found land for the taking, and they took it. True, only a relatively small portion of it, the bottoms lying along the many creeks and rivers, was valuable for farming. But game abounded in unimagined plenty, and the steep mountains were covered with virgin timber of a size to awe any onlooker. It was a wild and rugged land, but a land of indescribable beauty. So these former Englishmen claimed the rich river bottoms and the mountainsides, cleared patches of land, raised crude cabins, planted corn and potatoes, hunted deer and buffalo and lesser game, and settled down to a good, if rigorous, life. And they begat many children.

During each generation, upon the death of the patriarchal landowner, the land was divided among the children, even down to the fifth and sixth generations, so that eventually each so-called farm, in most cases, contained only a few acres of land, much of that untillable. Farther and farther up the hills and back into the hollows, families were pushed to make their way the best they could. Isolated in mountain coves and hollows, cut off from the rest of the world that today goes rushing by on super highways, many Appalachian children today are ignorant, except for what they see on television, of the existence of life beyond the mountain ridges. This is the geography of the Appalachian child.

When the mountain family reached the third and fourth generation phase, another transformation, that profoundly affected Appalachia's children, took place in the Kentucky hills.

Late in the 19th century, it was discovered that Appalachian Kentucky was rich in coal deposits. At the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in

1893, a Kentucky mineral exhibit was arranged and displayed by one Colonel M. H. Crump of Bowling Green, Kentucky. At the end of the Exposition, Colonel Crump wrote an enthusiastic report to the Inspector of Mines.

"This exhibit," he wrote, "attracted great attention, and was excelled by no state in the union, and was only equalled by West Virginia in its quality and excellence. . . . More than thirty awards, carrying medals and diplomas, setting forth the various qualities of the coal, were received. In cannel coal, it far exceeded any other state. . . . No less than 50 papers from Maine to California, reproduced the . . . description. Not less than 400,000 visitors passed under the arch and inspected, more or less critically, the exhibit; of these, more than 75,000 left their names upon the register."

Among the 400,000 people Colonel Crump counted as passing under the arch were men with shrewd eyes and fertile imaginations. Shortly thereafter exciting information now and then passed by word of mouth among the kinfolks living in the coves and hollows: "One of them city fellers is around, I hear." Everyone, immediately upon receiving the words, knew what the city feller looked like and what his business was. His business meant money in their pockets, and to a people who managed practically all their meager worldly affairs by means of barter, money was a magic, an almost too-good-too-be believed concept.

And where did these city fellers come from? From London. From Boston. From New York City. From Philadelphia. From Cleveland. From Chicago. And, -- excuse me, I'm only quoting the record -- from Baltimore.

And what did a city feller have to offer these people, isolated for generations from the world outside their mountains? He was just out looking

over the land, he told the mountaineer casually. He had in mind buying up some of it, if the price was right. Well, not the land, he explained casually. He was only interested in rights to the timber on the land, or to the coal under the land. The surface would belong exclusively to the mountaineer. The mountaineer could go right on living as he had always been living. He could continue to plant his crops on his acres and to harvest them as he had always done. The only difference was that now he would have some cash money in his pockets.

Under the spell of the outlander's affability and charm, the mountaineer saw sudden visions of new shoes for his brood of children, or a new rifle, or a store-bought dress for his wife, or perhaps even a level bluegrass farm on the other side of the mountains, such as he had heard tell of.

Knowing nothing of the worth of his possessions -- he hadn't seen Colonel Crump's exhibit in Chicago -- he was led to bargaining away stately tulip poplar trees, many of them a hundred and fifty feet tall, burly white oaks five feet in diameter, red oaks, black oaks, chestnut oaks, hickories, buckeyes, basswoods, mountain and hard maples, black gums, ashes, cedars, pines, hemlocks, and chestnuts for anywhere from forty to sixty-five cents a tree.

From timber rights the agent turned to mineral rights, for which he offered the paltry sum of fifty cents an acre. Then and there was drawn up that astounding document known today as the long-form or broad-form deed. This deed gave to the corporation, represented by the agent, exclusive right not only to the coal but also to every sort of mineral that might be lying underneath the soil. It gave the corporation the right to do as it pleased with the timber on the land; to build railroads, tram roads, and haul roads through the farmer's property; to drill for oil and gas; to use, divert, dam, and pollute water courses; and

to dump, store, and leave upon the land any and all muck, bond, shale, water, or other refuse. And the deed specified that the corporation was, through the signing of the deed, released from any and all liabilities or claims of damage occasioned by the exercise of all these rights and privileges.

What these deeds were careful not to mention was the "privilege" retained by the mountaineer, his heirs and assigns forever to pay the taxes perpetually on his property, taxes being levied on surface land only, and none on whatsoever of riches that might be extracted from below the surface.

It staggers the imagination -- I believe boggles is the word now in vogue -- even to attempt to ferret out the damage done to the mountaineer, his family, and his heirs through these transactions. Added to them since 1950 has been the strip mining of coal, a process of extraction never dreamed of when the broad-form deeds were signed, but, nevertheless, claimed by the coal companies as legal under the deeds and upheld by state legislatures. As a consequence, the mountains, particularly of Kentucky and West Virginia, have been raped and left naked of their now third-growth forests, their streams polluted with acids, their farmlands and even their homes covered with boulders and trees uprooted by the huge bulldozing process.

For seventy-five years, coal has been the one commercial commodity of East Kentucky and West Virginia. I am not familiar with the West Virginia law, but, until 1972, millions and millions of tons of coal were removed from the mountains of Kentucky while Kentucky received from the coal companies not one cent in the way of a severance tax. At the same time corporate profits amounted in some instances to 61 percent per year. This, then, is the economics of Appalachia.

What's wrong with Appalachian children? In a very real sense, for 75 years they have been subsidizing the children of the industrial north and east while they have gone without.

After many years of prodding by concerned citizens and in spite of the highly-skilled and highly-paid lobbyists for the coal companies who have always controlled the county court houses and the state legislature, a law demanding a severance tax of 4 percent of the gross value of the coal severed or 30 cents per ton, whichever is greater, was passed by the Kentucky legislature in 1972. In the twelve-month period ending April 1973, this tax amounted to $36,126,000. It was paid into the State's General Fund and is expended by the state without any particular portion being allocated for the Appalachian counties from which the coal is taken.

Since the monies that pay for schools come from taxes on real estate, and since the real estate, owned by Appalachians, is minimal in value, and since the coal companies who, until recently, have been able to control politics and so keep their own taxes at a minimum, Appalachian schools must operate on a financial basis that is skinny indeed. In Harlan County, Kentucky, a teacher with an AB degree but no experience receives a yearly salary of $5,703. A teacher with a Master's degree plus 30 hours and 11 years of experience receives a salary of $8,535. These salaries are from 25 to 33 1/3 percent lower than the national scale for teachers. It is reported that Kentucky ranks 47th in the nation in the matter of teachers' salaries.

A few years ago a five-year survey was made of all graduates of the Department of Education at Eastern Kentucky State University in Richmond. It was found that all "A" and "B" students were teaching in Ohio or Indiana, and all grade "C" students were teaching in Kentucky.

Statistics show also that 90 percent of Harlan County teachers are native to the area while only 10 percent come from the outside. In fact, some Eastern Kentucky colleges extract from their students a promise to return to their mountains to serve in their chosen professions, and most of them choose to teach.

The overwhelming preponderance of native-born teachers is due, in part, to the fact that the teacher may live at home and, therefore, need not pay for room and board out of her meager salary. This situation is a comfortable one for the mountain children. The teacher is one of them. She is no doubt akin to many of the children she teaches. At the same time, she inevitably perpetuates the culture in which the children live and exposes them to little that might prepare them for life in the larger, more demanding world outside the mountains.

The great wave of emigration out of the mountains came during World War II when there was a crying need for workers in war industries. Statistics vary, but, according to Robert Coles who has studied Appalachian children and written extensively about them, during this period more than 1,000,000 persons left the southern Appalachian region and moved themselves and their families to the industrial cities north and east of them. Ohio has absorbed the greatest number of these, Indiana the next greatest.

As I have stated, there are great dissimilarities among Appalachians. But more prominent are the similarities.

First, Appalachians are noted for extremely close family ties and a strong dependency on their kin.

In most industrial cities where Appalachians have been drawn, you will find them clustered in one particular area, many of them related by blood. At the beginning of the exodus from the mountains, the mountaineers readily

found work in Cincinnati, the industrial city nearest them. Foremen in factories and plants found them, though unskilled, able and eager to learn, hard workers, thoroughly dependable, and willing to work for smaller wages than Ohioans demanded. Naturally, when a vacancy occurred, word was passed to the Appalachians, who immediately alerted their kinsmen still in the mountains, to come quickly. In some factories as many as 40 Appalachians might be working, and all of them related. The only trouble the foreman had was when great-aunt Letitia back in the mountains became ill, all his workmen took off in a body to go back to the mountains to see her since she was related in some way to everybody. This meant the entire operation of the factory had to close down until the workmen decided to come back.

One transplanted, lonely, old woman declared she was pining away for a hill or a kin up the road.

A second similarity is the Appalachians' love of their mountains which they never relinquish nor outgrow. It is a traumatic experience to transplant a child from the hills and the hollows, glorious at any time of the year but especially so in the spring when service trees, dogwood, redbud, wild azaleas, mountain laurel, rhododendron, and lady slippers are in bloom and in the fall when the whole earth looks like a vast Persian carpet spread on the mountains -- it is a traumatic experience to transplant a mountain child to a city apartment in the slums where he never sees the sun and to an asphalt jungle that serves as a school playground.

A young man of my acquaintance, from Harlan County serving in the army, was killed in a motorcycle accident in California. A buddy wrote to his mother: "I have seen him cross the street just to stand under a tree."

It is the dream of many Appalachians caught up and hemmed in by city streets to save up enough money to go back to the mountains, to buy themselves a little farm in the land of their ancestors, to live out their lives there, and eventually to be buried in some lonely graveyard in Appalachian soil. Even some children grow up with this in mind.

If that seems strange to you, it seems no stranger to me than a statement made by former mayor of New York, Robert F. Wagner, in an article in a recent issue of The New Yorker.

Mr. Wagner was asked by his interviewer, "Do you ever think of living any place else?"

"Well," said Mr. Wagner, "I think we all think, once in a while, wouldn't it be nice to be able to retire and live in the South or the Caribbean, or some place like that. And when you get tired sometimes you think that would be great. I think that would be great -- and I think I could take it for about a month or two at a time. But I'd always want to come back to New York."

Why, for pity's sake, should anybody want to spend the rest of his life in New York City?

A third characteristic of the Appalachian is his conservative, prudish, puritanical, fatalistic, fundamentalistic religion. Whatver happens, be it ever so evil or so tragic, is God's will. But I am not sure the Appalachians of these days could make it through life without that belief to sustain them. As one mountain minister said of them, "They live so close to the bone, so close to death, so close to the sky." Teachers who attempt to open the minds of their students to new concepts and ideas draw, in some instances, a tragic response. One teacher in a junior college in Harlan County told me he had students --

good students -- who left college rather than consider the fact that one might read poetry about such intimate subjects as a man's relation to his wife, regardless of the aim of the poem or its purpose, simply because their religious orientation was such that poetry of this sort couldn't be tolerated.

One young teacher I knew in the same college succeeded in opening up the minds of his students to the extent that many of them wrote poetry questioning the religion of their fathers and posing different religious concepts. Some of these poems found their way into the local newspaper with the result that the young teacher had to pack up and leave town in a great hurry.

Another student, described by her teacher as very sincere and hard-working, found the tension aroused by reading Darwin's Theory of Evolution so unsettling that her mind became deranged and she had to leave school.

Naturally, Appalachian childrem imbibe the religious beliefs of their parents. On migrating to the city, they come in conflict with unsettling ideas that sorely disturb them in their school work.

A fourth characteristic of the Appalachian is his tendency toward non-verbality. Perhaps he does not talk because he has so little to talk about. He may have a television set in his home, but nauseous soap operas and violent movies provide him with little to talk about. He seldom has a newspaper in his home, and books are a rarity. Children in such homes do not hear their elders defining problems, asking questions, weighing alternatives. Never hearing the language of problem-solving, they never learn its techniques. Nor are the children encouraged in the home to learn to read. Many of them who, by some strange system of grading get to college and may be intellectually capable as far as reasoning is concerned, are pushed to the edge of desperation to read

through their assignments. The Department of Education in Kentucky reports that approximately 40 percent of the elementary children in the 49 Appalachian counties of the commonwealth are enrolled in remedial reading classes.

When the Appalachian child enters your school, it is likely he comes from a little world of his own where his experiences have been intense but not extensive. In his learning, particularly in his learning to read, he needs some subject matter to which he can relate. Dick and Jane did nothing at all for the Appalachian child. When the teacher teaches something that has a bearing on the world in which the child is living, it matters. When the teacher leaves that, what she says is likely to be dismissed as irrelevant and unimportant.

I have been fortunate to have had an interview with a young Appalachian student at Berea College who, as a child, moved to Chicago with his parents and entered school there.

One point he stressed is that Appalachians abhor being in debt. That, he said, is behind the child's reluctance to accept the teacher and the teacher's initiative in the classroom. If you want the child's cooperation, he stressed, let him do the talking first. The teacher's attitude, at first, should be passive, not active. Once the child is sure the teacher is ready to receive from him, he is willing to try to see what her thing is, and, at that point, the teacher can expect cooperation. The children want to give as well as take. They don't want to be in debt.

Appalachian children, he stressed, grow up independently in the home. They have their share of the work to do, and they must make decisions about it. This is perhaps training for not settling down to something to which they have not given their assent while, on the part of the teacher, it is seen as stubbornness or orneriness.

Discipline in study such as is found in some city schools is foreign to Appalachian children and, when they go from a mountain to a city school, they often feel inferior because this is something they haven't mastered.

Language is a decided barrier. The language of the Appalachian child, soft-spoken, often slurred, contains, to be sure, words carried over from Elizabethan culture. The child often says holp for helped, and knowed for knew. He says yander for yonder, and hit for it, and he often gives his words an Elizabethan pronunciation. But does this make his speech quaint? Quaintness is in the ear of the listener or, as has been pointed out in the case of the Beverly Hillbillies, the sales-managing producer who can only depict a quite drastically different way of life by converting it to a farce. Too often, we ride roughshod over and treat with contempt the specific meanings of specific phrases and their roots in history and culture. We value highly antique furniture. Why not set a class to studying the highly-respectable origins of the words and phrases in the speech of an Appalachian child?

The Berea student told me of his enrolling in a Chicago school. The things that impressed him were not friendliness and a welcoming smile but the size of the building and the noise of so many people, like a hundred radios playing different tunes at the same time. He couldn't understand what the loudspeaker said, and his mother didn't know how to fill out the form that was given her. Maybe, he philosophized, the opportunity the mountains offer to work things out for one's self, by one's self, has a lot to do with the resistance to regimented activity in a crowd.

It was something like this that the old woman, living on Pine Mountain and called affectionately by everyone "Aunt Sal," must have had in mind when she said,

"We'uns that can't read and write have a heap of time to think. That's why we know more than you all."

Maybe, too, it is this aloneness and time to think that gives to the Appalachian often the most uncommon common sense. As an example, I cite the old man who had never been out of the mountains, but who decided one day he wanted to see how his boy in Chicago was getting on. So he boarded a bus and made a trip to the big, sprawling, noisy, dirty city, with its shiny, pretentious Michigan Avenue facade. While in Chicago, he was taken on a tour of Marshall Field's store. At the end of the journey, he declared, "I never knowed they was so many things in the world a body could get along without."

The student pointed out also that, in Appalachia, youngsters hoe fields with the family, draw water, hang out the wash, mop the kitchen. They are needed and depended on, but in the city they find themselves in sharp contrast, a belittling contrast, I might add, to much city culture where the kids are in the grown-ups' way, have no function in the family, and are paid to keep themselves busy and amused.

The student remembers vividly one of this teachers and how noisy and bad-mannered he felt his classmates were. He remembers that the teacher would sometimes put her head down on her desk and, since he thought she was crying, how he felt he wanted to put his arms around her. He wishes now he had.

The role that the parent of Appalachian children in the city play is a significant one in the development of the children. A librarian in an Appalachian area of Chicago reported to me that parents are ambitious for their children and anxious for them to succeed. Success is vaguely defined as "toeing the mark and not making too much noise." Infractions are met with severe reprimands, but

little explanation is given as to why it would be advisable to cease and desist. The parents spend money on new clothes for their children, especially during the early primary grades but, after the third grade, parental interest lessens rapidly.

In the third grade, as I learned from my own children, the horizons of the child's world are suddenly pushed back. In his studies he meets new challenges, encounters new and enlarged ideas, becomes more of a personality in his own right, sometimes in sharp contrast to the notions his parents have always held. He begins to ask questions -- hard questions his parents have never thought about and, therefore, cannot answer. Moreover, third graders begin to take their cues from their peers. Conflicts between parents and children inevitably follow. This conflict, in Appalachian families, often resolves itself in a strange form. After the third grade, the grooming and the clothing of the children deteriorate drastically, possibly as a parental punishment of children who have grown beyond them and, thus, out of control.

Another contradictory pressure among parents who desire to help their children is their fear and resentment of the child who learns to read. Often the parents cannot read, are self-conscious about their illiteracy, and feel threatened and antagonistic because of the child's greater skill. This conflict with parents naturally creates tensions in the child who, in turn, creates problems in the classroom.

In many cases, the parents tend to become more isolated the longer they stay in the city. They are proud and, therefore, ashamed of their ignorance in public. They are reluctant to ask questions of the bus driver, the sales clerk, or the librarian because they do not understand the matter-of-fact, impersonal attitude which is the modus operandi of service personnel in city jobs.

This impersonality, I think, is one of the trademarks of our present civilization, a disheartening, downgrading trademark. We hurry past one another on the street without even looking at one another, let alone smiling or saying "good morning." In his homeland, the Appalachian speaks to everyone he meets, and, even in a noncommital howdy, recognition not only of the presence of the stranger is acknowledged but also something of his worth as a human being. No wonder the mountaineer transplanted to the strange, busy, bustling, cruel, impersonal city strikes fear and a feeling of ostracism in him.

This fear, and this feeling of inferiority and the reluctance to venture about is undoubtedly passed on to the children who spend all their time at school, on the stoop, or in front of the TV.

Added to this, energy is at a premium because most adults, both male and female, must work long, monotonous hours, often on the swing shift, in factories at great distances from home. They are tired, irritable, and discouraged by their inability to escape this routine because of the general high cost of urban living, further complicated by bills that arrive every month, by credit problems, and by door-to-door salesmen who take advantage of the Appalachian's friendliness. Add to this parental fear of evil, real or imagined, that surrounds their children in the city, and you have an unhappy situation indeed, because these fears, expressed or unexpressed, are infections, and the child appears before you in school ridden with fear.

Take then the damage done by well-intentioned parents and add the damage done by well-meaning but impersonal teachers who carry too heavy a teaching load, and you have left one other group which may, and often does, do more damage to the Appalachian child's ego than both the others together. This group is the peer group.

I think I can explain best what I mean by drawing on my own experience.

I was one of eleven children, nine of whom lived to maturity. We moved out of the Kentucky mountains when I was five years old, the reason for the move was my father and mother's deep determination that we should have an education. Our first move was to East Tennessee, near Kingsport, still in the mountains. After two years, we did what all Appalachians on the move do -- we sought out kinfolks. One of my father's sisters lived with her large family in Middle Tennessee, north of Nashville and just below the Tennessee-Kentucky state line. One other Appalachian family lived in the neighborhood -- two brothers, one a doctor, and the other a very intelligent, very shrewd farmer and his wife.

The cash crop in that farming community was tobacco. At that time, there were no effective sprays against the injurious and insatiable worms that fastened themselves to the underside of the leaves and ate great holes in them, thereby ruining them for market. The only method of ridding the tobacco of them was to turn back each leaf, find each worm, pull it off, and pinch it in two with the fingers.

A one-room country school near the farm my father bought opened soon after our arrival, and on the first day the Caudill tribe was enrolled. I was seven years old then.

At lunch time on that first warm day, we students gathered in a circle on the grass on the playground, opened our lunch buckets, and ate our lunch. While we were eating, one of the boys referred to us as hillbillies. I had never heard the word hillbilly. I had no idea what it meant. But I knew from the scorn in the boy's voice that it meant nothing good, and that, somehow, my brother and sisters and I were, for some reason, inferior to the others. Fortunately for me,

one of my older sisters retorted, "I'd rather be a hillbilly any day than a tobacco worm." That, I felt, put the boy in his place and restored the Caudills to theirs, but what those places were I wasn't quite sure.

Another episode happened the following Sunday, our first Sunday in our new home. During the week before, the superintendent of the Sunday school in a Methodist church that stood on a lonely country road at the edge of my father's farm and his wife called on us and invited us to attend Sunday School. I had never seen a church and I was agog with excitement over the prospect. Accordingly, on Sunday morning, we all donned our very best clothes - even my father and mother who belonged to no church and were not church goers - and walked across the fields to the church. When we filed in and sat down, we occupied two pews -- quite an addition to any Sunday school!

It happened that a young man living in the community was studying for the ministry in some distant city. He was home for a few days and that Sunday he had been asked to preach in the church. I have no idea what his motivation was, whether the hierarchy in the church had decreed this was the day for such action, or whether the overpowering Caudill presence inspired him. At any rate, when the young minister had finished preaching, he announced that the congregation would now take up an offering for the poor whites in the mountains of Kentucky.

I didn't know whom he was talking about. We weren't poor. At least nobody had ever told us we were poor. We were never one penny in debt -- my father saw to that -- even though we rarely ever saw a coin and traded mainly in barter. As a result of this episode, when the service was ended, we filed out of the church and, although our parents allowed us children to attend after that, they themselves were through with such ridiculous nonsense and such crass

superiority. Eventually my father got revenge on the young minister in the very sweetest sort of way. The minister fell very much in love with my oldest sister, and my father wouldn't let him come into the house.

My sister, just older than I, and I were in the same class in school, and until we were ready for high school, we attended each year a one-room country school for the five months it was in session.

I was 12 when my sister and I entered high school, walking three miles each morning into town and three miles back in the late afternoon. We entered the freshman class along with two cousins, a boy and girl. As far as the other pupils in the high school were concerned, we might as well not have been there at all. The four of us were not only ignored, but we were also shunned. I remember today, as distinctly as the day on which it happened, arriving at school a bit early on a very cold morning and joining a group of girls around a pot-bellied coal stove in one of the class rooms to get warm. Soon I noticed one girl standing with her back to the stove with smoke boiling up from her dress.

"O!" I called to her. "You're about to catch on fire!"

She moved away from the stove, then turned and looked at me with the utmost scorn in her face.

"It's none of your business," she said haughtily.

I think that scornful remark probably affected me more than anything else that happened during my four years in high school. It's true the cut has long since healed, but the scar remains. I wanted friends. I wanted them desperately. But I was so afraid of another rebuff that I could make no advances. My naturally warm feelings toward people turned to fear of them, and I went through high school alone and practically friendless, except for my two cousins and one

classmate who, fortunately for me, became my friend. Today, she is still a very dear friend.

Still another incident reveals what damage the loss of self-esteem can inflict on a youngster. We freshmen were seated on the recitation bench in a class called Physical Geography. Outside it was raining cats and dogs. The teacher asked me a question: "What is the condition of the atmosphere outside?" It looked mighty wet to me, but just as I started to answer, the town boy sitting next to me whispered in my ear, "Dry." For a fleeting second I clung to my original observation. Then, figuring that town students surely knew more than I, I answered "Dry." Naturally guffaws greeted that answer and I retreated farther into my shell.

I have often wondered about these experiences and what might have been done to salvage my self-respect or to avoid the incidents altogether. Perhaps some of you have read a book I wrote called Did You Carry the Flag Today, Charley?

Little School was a real school for four- and five-year-olds to give them some orientation into an actual school situation when they should start later. The teachers realized they needed extra personnel, so they invited all seventh- and eighth-graders who wished to join them to serve as aides. They would need probably seven or eight, they announced. The aides would receive no pay, but they would have a hot lunch with the children. Their duties were to be present in the classrooms and to help the children in any way they could. That meant fetching them down from the mountain if they escaped, seeing that they knew at all times where to go, helping them whenever they needed help. There were some thirty seventh- and eighth-graders. All thirty volunteered. To their great disappointment, they had to be staggered so that all could help, but no one could help more than two days a week.

Even among adults, I have never encountered a more dedicated, more useful, or more responsible group of people, than those thirty boys and girls. Punctual and diligent, they dealt gently but firmly with the children, and related to them in an intimate, friendly, and persuasive way that no teacher could have done.

Maybe these Appalachian children entering city schools today, bewildered, terrified by noise and impersonality, might be assigned an aide from among dependable students who could orient them, be a friend to them, and see them through without traumatic experiences.

One thing happened during my high school days that did more than anything else to restore my self-esteem. The principal of the high school decided the town should have an old-fashioned spelling match. On the night of the match, the whole town, and quite a bit of the country, including the Caudills, turned out. Those selected to choose sides were the town banker and the wealthy Appalachian farmer. Money can't necessarily spell, but it can place one in conspicuous positions.

The banker and the farmer drew straws to determine which should have first choice. The farmer won and, even before he could stand erect, he called the name of my father. Somewhere way down the line the banker chose me.

Back and forth we spelled, back and forth, for more than an hour, and every person who missed a word sat down. Finally, two people were left standing, my father on the farmer's side, I on the banker's side. Back and forth, back and forth we spelled. Finally, I was given a word that was my undoing. The word was tobacco and I spelled it with one "c." My father, of course, was the hero of the evening.

As we went home that night, I was literally bursting with pride because my

father had spelled down the whole town. I am sure my father was feeling just as much pride in me because I had held out against him so long. But Appalachians do not readily express words of appreciation or affection. They are like that child who wanted to put his arms around the teacher because he thought she was crying, but couldn't. Neither my father nor I ever mentioned to one another what we were feeling that night. But this prestige honestly won by my father and openly exhibited before the whole town, together with what I knew to be my father's unimpeachable character, did more than anything else, perhaps, to restore my self-esteem and to help me grow into a better person in my own right.

Ever since Mr. Bender asked me to speak to you, I have been wondering what -- what in the world -- can we do to bring into the mainstream of life not only Appalachians but blacks and chicanos and Indians and all other minorities. I can come up with only one answer. We will have to change our priorities.

On the TV news only a few evenings ago, I heard reported that a Central Illinois town had decided on the projects on which their Federal Revenue Sharing funds would be spent: improvement of streets, improvement of sidewalks, and the building of tennis courts. Not one cent was allocated for social programs.

On the Federal level, as Norman Cousins pointed out in a recent issue of World, the President has asked for a military budget of more than $80 billion representing a $5 billion increase over the previous year when the Viet Nam war was being waged. But he said no to millions of school children who will not have new textbooks or audiovideo equipment or new library books.

The President has asked taxpayers -- you and me -- to foot the bill for $25 billion in salaries alone for almost 1,700,000 officers or noncommissioned officers out of a total military force of 2,300,000 men. But he has said no

to millions of people living in slums, in little Appalachians, the victims of poverty, malnutrition, undereducation, and violence. He has said no to the mentally ill who, in eight years, will no longer have the benefit of local mental health programs; no to scientific and medical researchers; no to handicapped children; no to preschool children.

What then can we do for transplanted Appalachians? They are my people I ask at least that you give them the gift of yourselves. And with your giving, give understanding and compassion. They will respond.

Black English: The Politics of Language

June Jordan

I have made the assumption that most of you have seen the essay I wrote on Black English in the School Library Journal, so I'm not going to go over that. Well, I seem to be gaining some kind of dangerous notoriety in connection with Black English. . . .

Since arriving in the Capitol I have been so severely attacked at the expense of Black Language that what I tried to do for today, was to write some, brief notes that I want to share with you now, -. Then I will throw the discussion open and let anyone who wants to ask questions or attack me or any of my ideas, do so. This is really rather serious.

What I am calling for is:

- The immediate acceptance of Black English as a language system, a communication system as legitimate as any other. This will require the recruitment of curriculum development specialists who will concentrate their energies, over the next year at least, on the creation of teacher-education materials, enabling teachers to understand Black English and, therefore, to teach Black English.
- The immediate acknowledgment of Black English as a legitimate language system will furthermore require the development of curriculum materials to educate Black children in their language; that is, Black children, on entering the public school system, will receive orderly instruction as to the structure, the rules, and the regularities of their own language.

- In short, I am calling for nothing more or less than what is given automatically to white children in relation to the language they have acquired as pre-school people living in America.

Accredited steady course revisions for the creative use and literary study of Black language will proceed naturally in a fashion parallel to the studies not reserved for standard English. I am not calling for the elimination of language skills in standard English in regard to Black children; on the contrary, I am calling for the elimination of the traditional teaching process which begins by rejecting the first language skills of Black children. It is demonstratively clear that you cannot expect to teach a child a second language, for example, the second language of standard English by destroying the child's original language, by condemning his language as sub-standard, as inferior, as wrong. That is as absurd and damaging as the condemnation of Puerto Rican kids because they speak Spanish. What I am proposing is the formal acknowledgment of Black English as I have just outlined for these reasons:

-There is no intellectually sensible reason to do otherwise. Unless these changes occur in the regular experience of Black first and second graders, we will have to deal with the continuing failure of Black children; i.e., or that is to say, the continuing failure of public schools to enable Black children to systematically increase their language and reading proficiency.

-Once we provide for the assured increase of language proficiency in the first language of whatever child sits in front of him, he or she will be able to successfully undertake a second, third, or even a fourth language.

- The point is that this is not now the case. The point is that public school education, where language is concerned, has failed Black children. There are no figures to contradict this assertion. On the contrary, less than three weeks ago the front page of the Sunday New York Times described the uninterrupted lowering of reading scores achieved by "inner-city" children across the country. Reading scores have everything to do with language skills. Language and/or reading abilities are the basis for academic performance per se. Moreover, low reading scores and low language skill scores racked up by Black students across America are interpreted as evidence of limited intelligence and a serious lack of cognitive potentiality. All of this underlies a national tragedy that evolves, I submit, from a fundamental error or two. First, a fundamental misunderstanding of language, per se, its functions and its nature. Second, there is a fundamental error of failing to seriously undertake alternatives to the techniques that have produced catastrophic, dysfunctional illiteracy and alienation from all language skills among the majority of Afro-American children. See, it is not working. It is, therefore, time to try something new. I am quite simply proposing something new; namely, a radically different approach to language proficiency; that is, formal instruction in the first language of every child. He or she may then undertake a second language afterwards, without the humiliation.

What is language?

It is the main means of social communion. It is the naming of experience and, thereby, the possession of experience. Language is a

social and a socializing process whereby we learn and we tell who we are, where we come from, and what we want. Frantz Fanon has written, "I ascribe a basic importance to the phenomenon of language."

To speak means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization. Every dialect is a way of thinking. In their recently published book, Jim Haskins, a Black educator, and Dr. Hugh Butts, a Black psychiatrist, writes "Language produces and structures thought. What is particularly damning for the Black man is that while the linquistic deviations of other ethnic groups are seen as natural and changeable in time, the White society has invented a theory of racist inferiority to explain Black language differences." The name of that book, incidentally, is the Psychology of Black Language, published by Barnes and Noble, 1972. I'd just like to add that Black opposition to the legitimate acknowledgment of Black language is probably the result of two things: self-hatred, that whatever is distinctively non-white is, therefore, not good, and secondly, a fear that failure to be white in language, and in every other feature of cultural expression, will lead eventually to failure on the job market, in social situations, and so forth. This is perfectly true, and will remain so unless we will bond together and legitimize Black language on a nationwide scale.

What is Black language?

1. It is a language in which there is a remarkable consistency of syntax, for example, the interrogative, the imperative, and the simple declarative idea can be carried by exactly the same words all depending upon inflection. You goin' to the store? You goin' to the store. You going to the store!

2. It is a language which uses a minimum of verb inflection: I go, you go, we go, they go.

3. It is a language distinguished by the absence of what is called the linking verb. Instead of saying you is wrong, or you are wrong, or you be wrong, you just say-you wrong.

4. It is a language characterized by the infrequent and highly irregular use of the possessive case.

5. It is a language in which use of double and triple negatives occurs as a matter of logic. Indeed, Haskins and Butts write that, "The Black English rule of negation is that a negative is attached to all negatable elements within the same simple sentence; that is, for a negative sentence to be grammatical according to the rules of Black English, all indefinite pronouns, all indefinite articles, all indefinite adverbials, and the verbal auxiliaries must be made negative." (That is: nobody ain't never met no ghost nowhere).

Beyond everything else, Black language is at least as comprehensible to all (white or Black) as standard English is to both white or Black. What's more, Black language is as communicative as standard English and, most importantly, Black language is the language deriving from our Black experience in Africa and in America through hundreds of years. It is evidently a successful system of communication used by millions and millions of Black folk every minute of every day of their Black lives. It is, if I may repeat myself, a language.

But, meanwhile the schools, the libraries, the personnel officers, and the powerful generalists, deny the validity of this language. This

means a calculable, irreversible psychological damage to Black children, and it means academic failure in school. It means these statistics: as of 1971 there are three times as many Black male students - three times as many as white - 22 percent as against 7 percent who are two or more years below normal grade level at age seventeen. I am citing the national 1971 statistics. My source is: Bureau of Census, U. S. Department of Commerce - Publication Social and Economic Status of the Black Population in the U. S., 1971.

So I'm just quoting from an undisputable source. Here is another terrifying fact: twice as many to four times as many Black male students are drop-outs. That is up to 44.1 percent of all Black males in the U. S. are either not enrolled in high school or are not high school graduates, as against a maximum of 12 percent for white students. These figures describe a destiny of certain failure in American society for an unconscionable number of Black kids. These figures follow, as the day, the night, the first grade and second grade encounter with the systematic denigration and ridicule and arbitrary negative evaluation of Black language skills.

I am one of the growing number of writers and linguists and parents who are seeking an alternative to this life-destroying pattern of national failure. We are writing stories and book reviews and histories, speeches, and songs, and scientific treatises and, I trust, textbooks and grammars, and rallying cries

in our Black language. We will not divorce ourselves from our experience. We will not deny the history of our life as a people. Nor will we permit the definition of our future to take place in the terms of and the language of those who do not love us, who have never loved us. There can be no right or wrong words to express our experience and our dreams. There can only be problems of understanding. We, Black folk, have perforce striven to understand the words, the terms, the language, the verbal expression of white American experience values and dreams. It is now time for white America to turn around and learn to understand us Black people: our words, our language, our history, and our goals as we will state them, without fear, and with love.