

# Inferiority Complexes Plague Colored Children

PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES show that Negro children, by unconsciously accepting the white man's widespread prejudice against colored people, become prejudiced against themselves by the time they are 4 or 5 years old according to noted pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock.

Dr. Spock is convinced that one of the most serious problems facing the Negro child is this false belief that he is basically inferior to the white child because his skin is darker.

"At a later age," Dr. Spock said in an article in the September issue of Redbook magazine, "experiments involving Negro and white students who take tests in one another's presence show that a Negro who actually scores the same as a white student will characteristically rate his own performance as inferior. This unrealistic sense of inadequacy gets expressed, of course, in low expectations for himself in school and career. It also follows that the Negro comes to think less well of his family, his friends and his race than they deserve. And they, in turn, have less esteem for him."

Dr. Spock's remarks parallel those of Dr. Joseph S. Himes, head of the sociology department at North Carolina College, Durham, N.C. Dr. Himes advanced the theory of what he calls "learned apathy" among Negro children at a recent conference held by the Washington School of Psychiatry and the National Child Research Center.

"VERY YOUNG CHILDREN of whatever class or race are, if healthy, spontaneous and active," Dr. Himes said. "Middle-class parents, with the time, economic resources and understanding, recognize, conserve, guide and cherish this quality. Deprived parents, however, tend to find spontaneity troublesome and even sometimes dangerous or threatening. They tend to repress it, unintentionally to be sure. They want the child to stay out of mischief, danger, 'the way' and so on and not to ask troublesome and embarrassing questions."

Dr. Himes goes on to say: "His (the Negro child's) extra-family world also contributes. The social institutions, police, economy, church, mass media, all of them, limit his field of options and show him the stereotype he is or is supposed to be like. For example, if he goes to work it is hard, heavy, dirty, low-paid low-prestige work and everybody and everything tells him this kind of work is not good. So he doesn't like work and sees no evidence to prove that 'hard work' will help him get anything but tired. He learns, rationally and realistically, the habits, attitudes and skills of work avoidance."

Like Dr. Spock, Dr. Himes argues that the apathetic person is not an activity vacuum but a person acting in terms of a pattern or value that is divergent from that of the middle class.

Dr. Spock takes note of experimental projects carried out by the Bank Street College of Education which show that some of the most withdrawn and indifferent Negro pupils, those classified as "unteachable" in the Washington, D.C., school system, respond dramatically to teachers who like them, believe in them and are able to go halfway to find their interests.

DR. FRANK RIESSMAN, a psychologist currently engaged in Mobilization for Youth Inc., has taken this a step further by suggesting that "apathetic" and "non-verbal" youngsters in the classroom are lively, vocal youngsters at play and that the teacher's problem today is to divest himself of middle-class teaching patterns and meet these children on their own ground in terms they can understand.

Dr. Spock also deals with the harm that discrimination does to white children. In addition to teaching fear and hate, Dr. Spock points out, white parents communicate to their children a less easily seen anxiety when they find them playing with an unknown Negro child or discuss the possibility of a Negro family moving into the neighborhood in apprehensive tones.

"... the mere fact that a white child's parents don't meet Negroes socially will give him a slight sense of strangeness and uneasiness, which most of us realize is still in us in adulthood when we try to overcome this barrier," he says.

Taking note that other groups in America's past have started from poverty and slums but were able to escape as soon as they learned American ways, Dr. Spock says:

"The Negro, because of his skin, is chained to a slippery incline. He must struggle more intensively than a white person to climb upward, but if he or his children are not able to persevere, they'll slide more easily to the bottom again."

DR. SPOCK SCORED the opposition to school integration that is based on the theory that Negro children on the average have lower scores

on intelligence tests and show less aptitude than average white children.

"In actuality, there are very bright Negro children as well as average and dull ones, the same range as for white children," he says. "But there is a larger proportion of Negroes in the lower-score brackets, and this is what brings the average down. There is no proof, however, that Negroes are innately less endowed with gray matter. Most psychologists believe that the intellectual and academic differences are explained by the cultural deprivation of the Negro."

Studies of the effects of school integration in Louisville, Ky., and in Washington show academic improvement for the Negro children and no academic disadvantage for the white children, he states. In advocating that people of goodwill take part in opening schools, jobs and residential areas to Negroes, Dr. Spock further notes that news reports show clearly that "those who are aroused to fear and antagonism at the prospect of integration are quick and vigorous in expressing their feelings. It is the people of goodwill who most often fail to speak up."

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