

VOICE EDITORIALS



Education Is Power

By Thomas E. Wilson, Ph.D.

During the last few weeks one of our local newspapers has printed a series of articles concerning the fact that our children in Clark County School District were not up to par academically by the time they got into the eighth grade. At first glance, it would appear that there is something drastically wrong with our school district and with those who teach in the district. A closer look reveals several reasons why this may or may not be so. This is not to say that the school district administration and the teachers within the district are totally without fault, but merely an attempt to place the whole thing in its proper perspective.

It appears that politically it is expedient for the school district administrators to blame the teachers for the problems for the teachers to blame the administration. However, if each role group would together properly analyze the situation, a solution that would be beneficial to the children could be worked out.

It seems that we should take a look at the kinds of student populations that the school district is trying to educate. Many students come from elsewhere during the school year. In many cases they have not been in school for several weeks and have missed a lot of school work. If they arrive here in time to be tested, it naturally follows that their test scores will be low. The transient nature of the school population places a great burden on the school district administration and the teachers.

If we look at the permissive nature of many parents and teachers we may also find reasons for lack of achievement in school. Children are not required to conform to any regulatory standards at home or at school. It appears that children, especially adolescents and young adults (18 years and older), have gotten the upper hand on teachers & parents. Teachers are afraid to discipline children for fear of being sued, the parents seem afraid to discipline their youngsters for reasons unknown. This permissiveness and lack of discipline will cause children to become frustrated and refuse to apply themselves to a learning situation.

Some of us can remember Sputnik. It was the first Russian satellite to circle the earth. Immediately after Sputnik there was a loud hue and cry that Russian schools were ahead of ours, and that we were coddling our students and not teaching them enough science and math. Much effort was thrown into improving the science and math curricula. As a result of the stampede to "catch up" with Russia, we forgot about the child and that it takes time to adequately train teachers for a science and math oriented curriculum. We have not fully recuperated from this rush to this day. We also forgot that Russia is a country where only the very best are allowed to attend school past the elementary grades. We began to teach too much, too fast, too soon and the children began to dislike school. From that time on, it seems that the achievement levels have been declining.

Several other things come to mind as possible reasons for a decline in academic achievement. Have we considered that we are now trying to educate everyone up to age seventeen whether

they want to be educated or not? Have we thought about the fact that some of our classrooms have as many as forty or fifty students in them, and that it is almost physically impossible to maintain order in a classroom of this size if five of the students are uninterested and want to be disruptive? Maybe we should take a look at the public expectations for the schools and see if we can help to relieve this situation through a willingness to build more schools and/or classrooms.

Are we willing to look at the different cultural and language backgrounds of our students and provide the kinds of classrooms (size and quality) that will help these students enter the mainstream of American education, or do we see helping these students as a waste of time and money? Tests usually do not cover the culture and background of the language and culturally different student. Have we thought about the enormous amounts of money being spent on testing children and what could be done if they were tested only half as much and the remainder of the finances put into hiring new teachers and providing supplies to help the students?

Do we consider it appropriate to teach proper study habits in school in order that the students may know what and how to study for maximum retention of subject matter? Do we take into consideration that many students "freeze" when taking tests and that the tests may or may not be accurate indicators of the children's achievement? Also have we considered that many children take tests when their minds and/or their feelings are centered on something else?

Lastly, are we careful in hiring teachers who are willing to go that "extra mile" to help students? Then, do we pay them enough to make them financially secure, or are we so tight-fisted that we want exceptionally well-prepared teachers without being willing to pay for their services? Also do we provide adequate preparation and relaxation time during the school day so that the teachers will do his/her best?



Benjamin L. Hooks

FCC

Commissioner

In Jackson, Miss., black folks turned out for an NAACP-sponsored rally. The affair was designed to raise \$100,000 towards a massive nationwide fund-raising goal. By the time you read this Mississippi blacks may or may not have attained this goal, which is designed to offset the \$1,250,599 damages a Mississippi court assessed against the NAACP.

The court declared that 12 white merchants in Clairborne County (Port Gibson) were damaged to that extent by an NAACP-led boycott from 1966-1970. The NAACP believes it can win this battle on appeal. But under Mississippi law, the organization must first post not 100 percent, but 125 percent of the total in bonds before the case can be appealed to a higher court.

It will take money, money from hands of black folks to help raise this bond. To that end, NAACP chapters throughout the country are mobilized, staging neighborhood drives, church rallies, and street solicitations before downtown stores and in suburban shopping centers; raising money to buy commercial advertising spots on television

and radio; staging phone-a-thons.

At New York NAACP headquarters, officials have dropped all but the most essential duties in order to put all their efforts behind the fund-raising drive. A number of top officials volunteered to man phones on weekends in the headquarters office to receive calls from the organizations branches -- calls that detailed branch drive goals and amounts of money raised.

The NAACP is still reeling from a \$240,000 libel judgment awarded a Jackson, Miss., policeman against the organization's field director and national office in February of this year. Before that, the organization's financial coffers were all but empty. They were briefly replenished by a \$300,000 fund-raising dinner in honor of the venerable Roy Wilkins, in Washington, D.C., last fall.

During those heady days when civil rights fever was at its height, black organizations could and did count heavily on financial support from liberal white individuals and organizations.

Today, given a different racial climate, interest and sympathy have shifted to environmental issues, thus these sources of financial support have, for the most part, dried up.

Black folks, then, are thrown back on their own resources. Ultimately, this is the way it should be. No one can earn another's freedom. He must do that for himself or herself. It is a lesson that blacks will learn and it is best we learn it sooner than later.

In the libel matter, the NAACP had to put up \$262,000 cash in order to appeal. In the boycott judgment, using once more the 125 percent figure, the organization must post \$1.6 million.

Together, these two judgments amount to less than \$2 million. If each and everyone of America's 30 million blacks put up a piddling 15 cents, the NAACP would be home free. It is unfortunate that some NAACP officials do not believe they will be able to raise this money.

Recently, the organization had \$200,000 in cash in the bank, the phone-a-thon to its national branches, garnered \$300,000 in pledges. The NAACP said it would just have to float a loan for the balance of the \$1.6 million (the \$262,000 has already been posted).

This is a crying shame. Some folks say that black people always have money enough to buy what they want, but turn around and beg for what they need. If this were ever true, and said to say it certainly appears to be so in too many cases, it is surely time to shed this shabby and needless old burden.

We must step out smartly now as free men and women, chin up, head high, putting aside for a time, the Saturday night "party time" fever and that impulsive bent to invest in a new set of "threads." We must divert that money to support our timeless institution: the church, civic groups and a beleaguered organization like the NAACP, all of which have been our Rock of Ages in time of need.

I am confident that black folks will rise to the occasion, that the "party time" label has never been a true, overall assessment of our character.

So that even though the hour is late, the note past due, we will continue to send our money -- more than 15 cents each, hopefully -- to help bail out the NAACP in these difficult times. Won't you help - PLEASE?

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