

# A Series: THE BLACK FAMILY AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE 80's

## PART VII - CHILDREN AND THE 1983-84 SCHOOL YEAR: THE QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE

by Maudra Jones

*"There is little disagreement among educators about one of the broad objectives of teaching a free society — to help people function constructively as citizens. However, what people have been taught and how they behave are not necessarily consonant. For example, few who have been to school have escaped exposure to the concepts of equality and justice somewhere in the curriculum. Yet the attitudes and actions of many citizens with regard to social injustice suggest that what they have been taught is not affecting their behavior."*

Gerald Weinstein and Mario D. Fantoni  
Ford Foundation Report: "Toward Humanistic Education — A Curriculum of Affect", 1970

If our children are not taught to see the world as it is, then they become confused in their attitudes and actions as they approach the responsibilities of adult citizenship. When what they learn (or do not learn) in school contradicts what they have been told, or what they really know, then the quest for excellence becomes separated from human values and virtues.

In the words of John Holt: "If children come to feel that the universe does not make sense, it may be because the language we use to talk about it doesn't seem to make sense, it may be because the language we use to talk about it doesn't seem to make sense, or at least because there are contradictions between the universe as we experience it and as we talk about it."

Will we continue to pour out words to our children, i.e., "We hold these truths to be self-evident . . ." while we ignore the reality that they live daily and carry in their minds?

Or can we envision a new humanity that each of us can help to create—one that will give true meaning and substance to the principles on which our great land was founded?

Recalling an article authored by Vincent Harding, which appeared in Black Enterprise Magazine during the late seventies, it becomes clear that the challenges posed then are still very real for us today. Dr. Harding suggested that we must dare

to see visions beyond our own small individual ambitions, reminding us of the hope that our forefathers nurtured in forging new paths to freedom. He asked: "Have we envisioned what it might be like to begin to create a physically and mentally healthy society, to house its people with grace and foresight? Have we dared to dream of an America where our children and our grandparents will walk the streets without fear, where human beings will learn again what it means to trust, to open up the constricted walls of their lives?"

Echoes of the utterings of great minds ring out across the ages in answer to these burning questions, taking us back to the source from which all creation springs and reminding us of that far-off goal "toward which all creation moves."

Dr. Donald Shriver once asked "What is the service of the love of the truth to the truth of the love?" He answered: "The conviction that everything that is of value to God gets nourished best in a community of people who demonstrate daily their value to each other."

Wrapped in this brilliant theological thesis are the ingredients for a serious quest for excellence — in any undertaking. For after all, it is the quality of our lives that will determine our attitudes and actions, thus, our individual worth and our ability to "function constructively as citizens."



Maudra Jones

It is the quality of our lives, our value constructs, which will be translated and transferred to the children we rear and teach and prepare for the responsibilities of adulthood. Therefore, our vision of humanity must be real and uncompromising; it must be tied to truth and hope; it must be supported by our belief in what God values, if we are to create a new social climate in which "real" learning and excellence can be achieved. Hence, an "examination of the resource base for schools should produce additional resources to accomplish this new educational perspective."

"The Record — The Black Experience in America, 1619-1979," a pictorial and documentary summary of Black History in America, was published with a Teacher's Guide in 1979 by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Anti-Defamation League of B'Nai B'Rith and

the National Council for Social Studies.

This chronological account of the heritage of Black Americans pro-

vides teachers with a valuable tool for "real learning" in preparation for the world as it is. Its introduction is timely:

*"Although Blacks have played a significant role in this country's history since its beginnings, until very recently their contributions were largely ignored by historians, and the Black man's face appeared only rarely in history books. The suppression of Black history and of the Black's enrichment*

*of America's development came from the same mythology of racism that for so long denied Black citizens history in all its dimensions. It is time to acknowledge the positive role of Blacks in our society and to appreciate and learn from contributions made in spite of slavery and the damages wrought by discrimination. In this history of struggle and courage we are reminded of the values that have been America's strength, and we see anew that the freedom of each individual — Black and white — derives from the rights accorded to all."*

justice in this society. Only by illuminating the history of America's Blacks can we eradicate the myth and distortion responsible for problems and gaps in communication that still exist. Through information comes understanding, and through understanding, friendship.

Beyond this, awareness of Black history provides America with a greater truth, a fuller picture of this country's

What, essentially, must accompany this new educational perspective — this new experiment in truth — is a new commitment to the ideals and principals of democracy. We must "live out our creed."

## JACOB

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enforcement problem. And that is where most of the public debate has focused — on how to enforce the law.

But there's more to it than that. After all, it is estimated that there are over two million specific instances of suspected law breaking through illegal housing discrimination. But only 5,000 of those ever reach the complaint stage. So the inescapable conclusion is that attitudes need to

be changed, along with stricter enforcement procedures.

The Fair Housing Act itself contains provisions for fair housing promotion. It mandates programs of education,

conciliation and voluntary compliance. And it requires all government agencies to administer programs "in a manner affirmatively to further" fair housing.

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