

SCOTTISMS:

REFLECTIONS ON A HALF-CENTURY QUEST FOR EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN A RACIALLY AND SOCIALLY STRATIFIED SOCIETY



By HUGH J. SCOTT, Ed. D.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I owe a special thanks to the numerous individual whose scholarship and/or deeds have influenced my priorities and decisions as an educator and a writer. A very special debt of gratitude is extended to Dr. John Ivey, who served as the Dean of the School of Education at Michigan State University in the 1960s and to Dr. Norman Drachler, who served as Superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools in the 1960s. Drs. Ivey and Drachler identified potential in me as an educator that gave the major impetus to my advancement in the education profession.

During my quarter-century as a Dean at Hunter College, I was blessed with the understanding and support of the various individuals who served as President of that fine institution of Higher Education. Also, two brilliant ladies, Dr. Marguerite Wilke and Dr. Shirley Cohen, who served as the Associate Dean during periods of my tenure as Dean of Programs in Education which later became the School of Education. They helped me forge a rewarding period in my professional career as a Dean at Hunter College.

As a Founding Member of the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), I have had the very special experience for more than 40 years of “give and take” with educators who have enriched my professional experiences. THANKS!

My parents, Layton Leston Scott and Hazel Marie Scott, their hard work and commitment to family provided me with splendid examples that there are far more important things in this world than money. One of my great personal pleasures is the fact that my sister, Isabel and brothers, Earl, Allen, Bruce, Walter, Ronald, and John, gave me encouragement to take on the various challenges in life and openly expressed their feelings of family pride in my accomplishments.

Much of what I have experienced as an educator was possible because of my loving wife of more than fifty years, Florence Iva Scott. To my daughter, MarvaLisa Florence Scott, and to my son, Hugh Jason Scott, thanks for being supportive and for providing pertinent critiques from time to time.

Hugh Jerome Scott

FOREWORD

I feel very fortunate to be given the honor and the responsibility to write the foreword for **SCOTTISMS: REFLECTIONS ON A HALF-CENTURY QUEST FOR EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN A RACIALLY AND SOCIALLY STRATIFIED SOCIETY**. I greatly admire Dr. Scott as a human being, his work as an educator and a writer. Dr. Scott was first introduced to me over 46 years ago in Detroit, Michigan. I don't exactly remember the details of the event giving backdrop to our introduction. I surely did not know at the time he would soon become one of the two most influential and inspiring people in my life. The other person being my mother. I don't exactly remember the details, because the event was my birth and Dr. Hugh Jerome Scott, Ed D. is my father.

We live in a time where there is a constant cry for more positive role models. A positive role model is something I have always had present in my life. My primary role model lived in the house I grew up in. That role model was my father, and I was able to learn from his example almost every day. My father, with my mother's help, provided that through his own personal examples as a man and professional educator. He has shown me how to be a good person, a professional, and a man. To this day I still value his opinions on a multitude of matters and often seek his wise counsel. He has also afforded me the opportunity to interact with many fine educators, scholars, politicians, business people, and entertainers.

I have been fortunate to be present at many of the highlights of my father's career. I was there when he received his Doctorate in Education from Michigan State University. I don't remember the ceremony, being that my mother was still pregnant with me. While as Superintendent of Washington, DC's Public Schools, I was there on his first day in the office. I was there when he presented my sister, MarvaLisa, with her High School Diploma. I was there when he awarded Duke Ellington an honorary High School Diploma. I watched him write Black School Superintendent: Messiah or Scapegoat. I moved with him to New York, along with my mother and sister, when he became Dean of Education at Hunter College. I was at the reception to commemorate his tenure at Hunter College and celebrate his "retirement" in 2000.

Dr. Scott technically retired in 2000. Scottisms is evidence that he has never stopped thinking about the important issues facing our society and endeavoring to further understand them and explain them to others.

What will you find in this work? You will find exactly what is stated in the title- **SCOTTISMS: REFLECTIONS ON A HALF-CENTURY QUEST FOR EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN A RACIALLY AND SOCIALLY STRATIFIED SOCIETY**. This is what Dr. Scott has committed his adult life to. This is what he thinks about, talks about, and writes about.

My father was born in 1933, during the Great Depression, a very difficult time for many Americans and an especially difficult time for African Americans. Being born during this period, I believe contributed to instilling in him the need to strive for fairness and equal opportunity in our society's institutions. Our education system, I believe, is one of the foundational institutions of our society and has the potential to be the catalyst of positive change throughout the many strata of our society. With his over fifty years of professional experience as a teacher, school administrator, professor, Superintendent, Dean, educator, and writer; he brings a unique perspective that well qualifies him to analyze and comment on the topics covered in Scottisms.

In Scottisms you will gain insight from a man who has spent years in the trenches, "talking the talk and walking the walk", so to speak. After reading Scottisms, I was able to gain an even greater understanding of my father as a man, and what has driven him as an adult, aside from his family. We have become true friends over the years and now even collaborators.

I suspect that most who know who Dr. Hugh Jerome Scott is, know him as a highly skilled and respected, teacher, educator, professor, school administrator, Superintendent, Dean and writer. I have grown to know him as those things. The role I think he has dedicated himself most to and derived the most pride from is the role I know him best for, **Dad**. Therefore, it is my completely ~~unbiased~~ biased recommendation that you read Scottisms at least twice, share it with your friends and colleagues, and benefit from the wisdom and insight I have benefited from my entire life.

Hugh Jason Scott

RESUME

HUGH JEROME SCOTT (14, November, 1933) was born in Detroit, Michigan. He attended elementary and secondary schools in Detroit (Winger Elementary, Palmer Elementary, Columbian Elementary, Condon Junior High, and Northwestern High School). He is the recipient of the following degrees and certificates from Wayne State University in Detroit: Bachelor of Science in Education (1956), Master of Science in Education (1960), and Education Specialist Certificate (1964). Scott received his Doctorate in Education from Michigan State University in 1966.

Scott was an elementary school teacher in Social Studies (1956, 1958-1965). He served honorably in the United States Army (July, 1956 – June, 1958). In 1966, he was appointed Assistant Principal in Detroit. Later in 1967, Scott served as the Assistant to the Deputy Superintendent for School Community Relations in the Detroit Public Schools. From 1968 to 1970, Scott served as Region Assistant Superintendent in the Detroit Public Schools. In 1970, was appointed as the first African American School Superintendent for the Public Schools of Washington, DC: (1970-1973). For two years, (1973-1975), Scott served as a Professor of Education in the School of Education for Howard University in Washington, DC. In 1975, he was appointed Dean of Programs in Education at Hunter College of the City of New York. He retired as Dean of the School of Education at Hunter College in 2000. From 2001 to 2004, Scott served as a Scholar in Residence at Pace University in New York.

David Julian Hodges in the Encyclopedia of African American Education, published by Howard University in 1996, wrote:

“When it was published in 1980, Scott’s landmark book *The Black School Superintendent: Messiah or Scapegoat?*, published by the Howard University Press was a pioneering study; its prophetic voice, vision, and insight positioned it also as the defining work today on the trials and triumphs of African American superintendents in the nations’ urban centers. Scott’s subsequent work, while broader in scope, continues to bear his unmistakable imprimatur of applied analysis and earnest counsel to practitioners, traits that have consistently marked his intellectual interests as reflected in the subject he chooses and the audiences for which his work is focused.”



PRESIDENTIAL PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS Hugh J. Scott earned his Bachelor's degree and Master's degree from Wayne State University, and was awarded his doctorate in education from Michigan State University, and

WHEREAS he served as an Assistant Superintendent in the Detroit Public Schools, and went on to become the first black Superintendent of Public Schools in the District of Columbia, and Professor of Education at Howard University, and

WHEREAS since 1975, when he was named Dean of Programs in Education, Hugh J. Scott has given to Hunter College his distinguished scholarship, his deeply felt advocacy, and his tireless leadership, and

WHEREAS for this commitment and scholarship he was awarded the President's Medal of Hunter College in 1993, and

WHEREAS the impact and influence of his 1980 book, "The Black Superintendent: Messiah or Scapegoat," still resounds today among all concerned with racial equity in education and African-American leadership in our schools, and

WHEREAS Hugh J. Scott has continued to publish articles and papers on black educational excellence and leadership, as well as on broader pedagogical issues, and

WHEREAS the experiences of his childhood, growing up "on the wrong side of the tracks" in Detroit, are reflected today in Hugh J. Scott's dedication to the intellectual development of all children, and to the creation of opportunity for minorities in the field of education, and

WHEREAS Hugh J. Scott, in addition to his scholarship, shares with his students and colleagues his love of jazz and its musical heritage, and

WHEREAS in 1990 Hugh J. Scott was named to the Hall of Fame of the National Alliance of Black School Educators, an organization which he helped found that furthers the aims of educational leadership and opportunity, and

WHEREAS three years later the same alliance honored him again with a distinguished service award, and in 1996 awarded him its Lifetime Achievement Award, and

WHEREAS for the past 26 years Hugh J. Scott has also been an active member of the Cleveland Conference, a consortium of esteemed scholars and theorists of education and pedagogical methods, and

WHEREAS Hugh J. Scott continues to devote his dedication and expertise to improve urban education, and to develop excellence and leadership among black students and teachers, and other under-represented groups, and

WHEREAS Hugh J. Scott has made it his mission "to nurture all learners, be they students from East Harlem or junior faculty"; "to support the activities of faculty in reaching out to the community"; and "to always see the whole picture."

THEREFORE, on behalf of the administration, faculty, staff, students, and alumni of Hunter College, I am proud to express the profound gratitude of this institution to Dean Hugh J. Scott for two and a half decades of invaluable service, for his outstanding contributions to the field of education, and for his outstanding leadership in this urban community of which we are all a part.

January 26, 2000

David A. Caputo
President, Hunter College

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PROLOGUE

In 1980, I wrote: “The causes of the disproportionately higher dropout rates and distribution of lower achievement test scores among Blacks and the poor go far deeper than those effects produced by the shortcomings within the education profession and the limitations imposed by the boundaries of the knowledge base in the behavioral sciences.” In a racially and socially stratified society to expect the public schools for the most ravaged victims of racism and socioeconomic deprivation to produce performance results that are comparable to those produced for students from more favorable socioeconomic circumstances is both unsophisticated and disingenuous. Schools in America have never been able to salvage masses of people who have been severely victimized by societal forces structured to ensure their deprivation and disfranchisement. Yes, schools perform the dual role of aiding social mobility, and, at the same time, working effectively to hinder it. Race and ethnic stratification are basic features of the American society, and these forms of inequality are built into normal practices and exclude African Americans from full and equal participation in society’s institutions. Schools reflect the basic ideologies and dominant power structures of the American society. Thus, schools will not only serve but mirror the socially derived inequalities associated with social stratification in the United States. Rightfully criticize and confront the schools for their sins of omission and commissions, but do not expect the schools to cure all of the ill-effects of racism and poverty on the community and family life and developmental experiences of children of color.

Differences in cultural tradition, language, childrearing practices, and so on do not exhaust the environmental factors that may affect intellectual performance. But, it is imperative to look beyond the subcultural of any racial or ethnic group and examine how the larger culture of the American society impinges on African Americans. African American families simply do not have the same degree of flexibility exercised by White families in manipulating the essential component of life. Millions of African American children are denied the full measure of their rights to grow and learn in the American society and the equally important and in separately connected right to be treated as entire citizens of the society into which they have been born. The United States has gone only a part of the way in remedying inequities built into its very foundations; inequities that have been continuously reinforced throughout the nation’s history. Racism in America profoundly structures who we are, how we are treated, how we treat others, and our access to resources and rights. The American Anthropological Association in 1998 sought to set the record straight when it declared:

Given what we know about the capacity of normal humans to achieve and function within any culture, we conclude that present-day inequalities between so-called racial groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational, and political circumstances.

More than any other social conditions, poverty has the greatest impact on people's life chances—the opportunities that they will have or be denied throughout life. Poverty is often used to give an initial view of social class inequality. African Americans have remained consistently three times more likely than White Americans to be poor. Also, about 90 percent of the long-term child poverty-five or more years—is experienced by African American children. About 50 percent of White children grow up in families that have never been poor or lived in a poor neighborhood; this is true for only 5 percent of Black children. Every infant in America is born into a family that already has a particular place in the society's system of inequality. Race and social class are so closely intertwined in everyday social interaction in America that they have no independent existence. Nothing in America affects one's social standing as much as birth into a particular family. Ancestry has a strong bearing on future schooling, occupation, and income. Just as surely as a family's wealth promises a better future for their children, poverty often means growing up in rotting communities and smashed families that place many children on a path leading to warped, empty, and destructive lives.

There is nothing intrinsic or innate in “Whiteness” or “Blackness” that is responsible for the Black-White achievement gap. The Black-White achievement gap is a functional—if not intended—consequence of the cancerous nature of racism and the resiliency of socioeconomic deprivation in the United States. On average, children from low-income and poverty families will score lower on IQ tests and standardized achievement tests than do children, irrespective of race or ethnicity, from middle income families. The fact that schools ought to be more instructionally effective for students placed in “harm's way in an uncaring society,” does not mean that poverty does not matter. Public education has always been the most effective when the environments for living and learning have been mutually supportive. The social environment can unleash or stifle human potential. Genetic and other biological traits establish broad boundaries for individual achievement, but the environment in which a child is raised can cause his or her potential to be realized more or less fully. The fact that some poor children do reach or exceed the national norms does not mean that poverty does not matter. No single cause is rigidly deterministic. In human affairs where multiple causations pertain, causes are not disproved by exceptions.

The treatment of African Americans has been disgraceful throughout the nation's history. Why? The subordination and exploitation of African Americans is functional to the operation of the American society with the color of one's skin being a primary determinant of people's position in the social structure. Institutional and individual racism provides White Americans with disproportionate advantages in the social, economic, educational, and political spheres. Alexander C. Cox (1948) argued that race prejudice in the United States is the socio-attitudinal matrix supporting a calculated and determined effort of a White ruling class to keep some people or peoples of color and their resources exploitable. Derrick Bell (2004) opined that racism has

produced an ideology of “whiteness” which asserts that since Whites are in the majority and hold the power, they are entitled to inequitable advantages over non-Whites in the allocation of wealth, income, power, and privilege. Cruel and unfair treatment are often undergirded by myths and belief system designed to justify inequality. The harsh policies of America’s ruling class deny assistance to many who need it desperately, take support away from people who have the will to succeed but need some help, and shift blame for misfortune from society to the victims. There is no “mystical, within group, biological or cultural disorder that is responsible for African Americans being the economic losers in America. African Americans are being destroyed by economic forces; these forces have significant impact their behaviors and culture. The behaviors of the poor that are widely criticized are driven by their poverty rather than a cause of it. Blaming the poor is like “blaming the corpse for the murder, and ignores the system of power, privilege, and profit that makes them poor.”

The psyche—the human soul, or mind—is shaped in large measure by the social system. Whether a child grows up emotionally healthy, does well in school, and leads a successful adult life is grounded in the elements of his or her social environment, in elements outside of the child himself or herself. Racism and excessive poverty are stains on the American democracy. Widespread arrangements and practices within social institutions operate with the intent or effect of favoring White Americans over non-White Americans. The inequalities imposed on African Americans in one generation tend to be systematically transferred to succeeding generations. In particular, institutional racism fosters both an ignorance of and disregard for the overall talents and abilities residing within the African American population. It is disingenuous and deceitful for the policymakers in the United States to demand that the public schools do for African Americans that for which the nation has historically failed to do, provide equality of opportunity. Thus, any major reform movement in public education must encompass improvements in employment opportunities, housing conditions, health services, welfare conditions, and family life, as well as in public education. Richard Rothstein (2002) correctly warned: “The national determination to reform only education and then expect all other forms of oppression to take care of themselves will doom the nation to another half-century of lack of progress.”

James Comer (1989) noted: “Even the best educated people in our country have little knowledge about the way past social conditions have adversely affected the community and family life and developmental experiences of minority group children.” But research for decades has clearly and irrefutably cited that educational performance is linked to socioeconomic background. Politicians in both parties have leaped at “blaming the schools” with full knowledge of the fact that school reform efforts involve relatively little money and ask practically nothing of the nonpoor. Just as certain as smoking increases the odds of having cancer, it is even more certain that racism breeds poverty and poverty breeds lower academic achievement. The challenge of achieving equality of educational opportunity in the United States cannot be borne by the schools alone. Equal educational opportunity is a social goal that

demands commitment from the larger society. This discourse provides capsule commentaries of non-school and school forces that operate against both equal opportunity and equal educational opportunity. Hopefully, Africa Americans, in particular, will rally in massive numbers around the reality: “Equal educational opportunity may be crucial to equal opportunity itself, but the former, at least in part, is a function of the latter. Equal educational opportunity depends upon equal opportunity at large. Equal opportunity and equal education opportunity do not produce themselves; they are the products of a society or community that commits its efforts and resources to achieve such ends.”

“NO WAY OF LIFE IS NATURAL TO HUMANITY, EVEN THOUGH MOST PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD VIEW THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR IN THAT WAY.”

[John J. Macionis, 2004]

Nature and Nurture

The term nature refers to the influence of natural or biological influences over human behavior. The term nurture refers to the influence of social forces in shaping human behavior. Our genetic traits and individual potentialities unfold and take on form only in the course of experience in a social environment. No way of life is “natural” to humanity. What is “natural” to our species is the capacity to create culture. Culture is the values, beliefs, behavior, and material objects that together form a people’s way of life. Culture must be learned. No child is born with a built—in culture. Culture is not instinctive or innate in the human species, but the biological equipment of human beings makes culture possible. Our biological heritage alone cannot make us into adequate human beings; it is only through social relations—constant intimate interaction—can the rich cultural legacy that sets humans apart from other animals be transmitted to new humans. The learning process, by which infants are made into normal human beings, possessed of culture and able to participate in social relations, is called socialization.

While biology is involved in some human abilities, it is wrong to say that our abilities are the result of intrinsic and unalterable heredity. Genes do not fix behavior; they establish a range of possible reactions to a range of possible experiences that the environment can provide. The social environment can unleash or stifle human potential. Genetic and other biological traits establish broad boundaries for individual achievement, but the environment in which a person is raised can cause his or her potential to be realized more or less fully. Personality is a person’s consistent patterns of acting, thinking, and feeling, and we build a personality by taking in our surroundings. The structure of personality as well as many of its components—habits, attitudes, values, beliefs—although built upon anatomical and physiological foundations, is derived largely from the culture, via social relationships. Development refers to the orderly and durable changes in children resulting from a combination of learning, experience, and maturation. Viewing development as the simply outgrowth of biology is not only simplistic but often has devastating consequences for children.

Intelligence

Intelligence is somewhat like the term “force,” it can be known by its effects, but its presence must be inferred. A broadly accepted definition of intelligence or cognition remains elusive; there is no clear consensus among researchers on how best to define and assess intelligence. Intelligence is the aggregate capacity of an individual to act purposefully, to think rationally, and to deal effectively with the environment. In its most practical application, intelligence is demonstrated in acquiring the social and emotional competence needed for the successful management of the critical tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development. At best, there is general agreement among experts that intelligence involves higher-order thinking, processes such as abstract reasoning, problem solving, and decision-making. But disagreements about the structure of intelligence—whether it is a single ability or many separate abilities do exist. The more recent attempts to analyze intelligence have moved away from accepting intelligence as a unitary concept. Most mental measurement experts recognize intelligence as not being a single trait. There is greater acceptance of the fact that intelligence is multi-dimensional; it can be demonstrated in everyday settings, and intelligence in everyday settings is as least as important as academic intelligence.

Intelligence is a current state of affairs, affected by past experiences and open to future changes. Individuals are not born with a fixed degree of intelligence. Intelligence is not static and fixed at birth; it can be enhanced, developed and expanded over time. At most, genetic heritage help establish a rather wide range of intelligence that a person can potentially manifest. But precisely where within this range a person will actually score on an IQ test is determined largely by environmental factors. Intelligence tests measure what people have learned over the years—the effects of environment as well as certain aspects of their innate mental capacity. Intelligence is not the same as what intelligence tests measure. Intelligence tests measure only a limited range of mental abilities—mainly verbal and mathematical—but little or nothing of a person’s creativity, flexibility, street smarts, insights, skills with people, music, dance, or design. The multifarious complexities of the concept of intelligence cannot be encompassed in a meaningful way by a single number called IQ score.

Learning about Learning

It is the general dominance of mind over matter in our engagement of the trials and tribulations of life that shapes humankind's response to the challenges of our physical and social environments. "Pain causes us to think; thinking makes us wise, and wisdom makes life endurable." Human beings are blessed with the capacity to develop sounds and symbols (letters and numbers) that make it possible for us to communicate with each other and to record our questions, observations, experiences, and ideas. Like all other creatures, human beings sense the surrounding world, but unlike other creatures, human beings also create a reality of meaning; humans transform the elements of the world into symbols—anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture. It is language that unlocks centuries of accumulated wisdom. Language sets humans apart as the only creatures who are self-conscious, aware of their limitations and ultimate mortality. Language allows human experience to be cumulative; language provides a social or shared past; language provides a social or shared future, and language allows complex, shared, and goal-directed behavior.

Knowledge is more than the end product of previous learning; it also guides new learning. What we already know is a scaffold that supports the construction of all future learning. Learning is constructivistic, it goes beyond memorization of facts and seeks to find the underlying relationship and constructs that bind and interrelate to a subject area. Knowledge construction requires learners to reason with incomplete information; they must begin with what they already know, target what they want to learn, and think their way to truly educated guesses to skills and information that will connect the two. Learning is something that occurs inside of us; it can never be observed directly. In the broadest sense, learning occurs when experience causes a relatively permanent change in an individual's knowledge or behavior. To qualify as learning, the change in behavior must be brought about by experiences. Changes resulting from learning may be deliberate or unintentional, for better or worse, correct or incorrect, and conscious and unconscious. We often learn to feel, think, and behave in new ways from observations and interactions with parents, teachers, and other important people in our lives, as well as from events that we experience. Working memory is the component that allows people to keep the many things that they learn from their experiences over the years. Unless individuals continue to think about and actively pursue items from their long-term memory, it becomes what is sometimes called short-term memory.

Children and Learning

The vast majority of Black children, like White children, are normal, and all normal children are born with all of the genetic, biological, and physiological potential required for functional participation in the American society. Children are born with an eagerness to learn. Right from the start, a healthy child is an active participant in his or her growth—exploring the environment, learning to communicate, and in a relative short period of time, beginning to construct new ideas and theories about how things work in the surrounding world. The pace of a child's learning depends on whether and to what extent the child's inclination to learn encounter and engage supportive environments. Most children learn easily and naturally when environmental conditions facilitate rather than impede growth and development. No child in his or her lifetime truly escapes from the experiences of his or her social environment, and knowledge of a child's social environment and group affiliations is often sufficient to predict and account for many of his or her actions.

Poverty does not guarantee bad outcomes, but it most certainly stacks the deck against millions of children. Deprivation refers to the taking away of something or the state of being disposed. Deprivation is the condition of not having something, whether or not; it was previously possessed, that a child should reasonably expect to have. Deprivation involves loss or being excluded from things that are typically available to others. Racism has imposed on millions of children of color a life for which poverty and despair are life's daily companions. Deprivation separates a child from the people and things a child needs to round out his or her life satisfaction, or round out unfulfilled desires. Racism often imposes a poverty that inflicts a deprivation that intrudes upon a child's ability to understand, manage and express the critically important tasks of learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of human growth and development. Getting all children off to the best possible start in life is the best way for the United States to avoid the human casualties resulting from poor nutrition, poor health care, poor housing, and inferior education.

“IF YOU CAN CONVINCE THE LOWEST WHITE MAN HE’S BETTER THAN THE BEST COLORED MAN, HE WON’T NOTICE YOUR’RE PICKING HIS POCKET. HELL, GIVE HIM SOMEBODY TO LOOK DOWN ON, AND HE’LL EMPTY HIS POCKETS FOR YOU.”

[Lyndon B. Johnson, 1960]

Myth of Race as Biology

There is no such thing as biological race; racial distinctions are a way of classifying people with certain characteristics such as skin color, eye shape, and hair texture. While there are clear physical differences between human beings and some of these differences are inherited, the reasons why some differences and not others become matters for prejudice and discrimination have nothing to do with biology. Nevertheless, race, racial classifications, racial stratification, and other forms of racism, including racial ideology, rather than being a part of our biology are integral components of the American culture. The myth of race as biology is dangerous because it merges physical attributes, such as skin color, with unrelated qualities such as intelligence. Only in the sense that different groups of people have what appear to be distinctive characteristics is race a reality, but there are no “pure” races and no race is superior to another race.

Races are not biologically distinct or biologically meaningful groups of the human species. DNA evidence proves conclusively that contemporary human beings are one variable species with their roots in Africa. For the past 10 millenniums, human beings have been spreading around the world. Thus, throughout human history, human beings have been divided into innumerable societies, each which maintains its own culture, thinks of itself as “we” and looks upon others as “they.” Human history is a continuing story of fusion and fission, of a myriad of populations, emerging and shifting over time and space, sometimes isolated temporarily, then fusing and producing new formations. There is no scientific evidence that the possession of a few distinctive genes by any segment of the population has any significant effect on human behavior. Members of the same racial group tend to be similar in a few genetic ways that are often biologically irrelevant. Moreover, the genetic variability found within each racial grouping is far greater than the genetic similarity. Racial characteristics are not causally linked to behavior, to capacities, to individual and group accomplishments, to cultural institutions, or to propensities to engage in any specific activities. The American Anthropological Association in 1998 sought to set the record straight when it declared: “Given what we know about the capacity of normal human beings to achieve and function with any culture, we conclude that present-day inequalities between so-called racial groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, education, and political circumstances.”

Racism and Culture

For almost 400 years, comprehensive and systematic racial prejudice and discrimination—250 years of slavery and more than 100 years of racial discrimination following slavery—denied African Americans “social justice and equality under the law.” The use of racial theory sought to give legitimacy to the establishment of socioeconomic patterns of racial segregation and discrimination and to provide an ideological camouflage to support claims by White Americans that African Americans were innately inferior, intellectually and emotionally, to White Americans. White Americans are adept at using the negative consequences of racism on the life chances of African Americans to validate that their negative assessments of African Americans. But the negative consequences of racism on the life chances of African Americans rather than being any justification for racial prejudice and discrimination, constitute harsh evidence of the social, economic, political, and educational consequences of how racism seriously damages or shuts down the life chances of African Americans—the opportunities that they will have or be denied throughout life.

White Americans are not born racist; racial prejudice and discrimination are not inherently or automatically acquired. But the seeds of racial prejudice and discrimination, allegiance to the in-groups and its values constitute one for the preconditions for hostility toward other groups. Racial prejudice and discrimination and the stereotypes that sustain them are cultural products. Racial prejudice and discrimination stem from social experience and are often derived from others as White Americans acquire their social identity and establish their group loyalties. Racial discrimination goes far beyond individual acts; it involves such social forces as tradition, role playing, social sanctions, and ideological supports. For most White Americans, racism means active bigotry, a charge from which they readily acquit themselves. They reject the contention that the heritage of slave laws continues to impair the life chances of African Americans. Millions of White Americans view racism as the sin of their forbearers and not a current pervasive social disease. But prejudiced White Americans are conforming the norms of White America because most White Americans do not move in social circles in which racial equality wins much moral or social credit.

The Economics of Racism

In his seminal research on racism in America, published in 1944, Gunnar Myrdal opined that racism was a contradiction which constituted a gigantic flaw in the fabric of the American democracy. Myrdal believed that racism in America would inevitably be eliminated with the moral conscience of White Americans being the driving wheel of change. Myrdal was wrong on the latter point. Racism in America cannot be relegated to America's social problems morgue. Racism, old and new, continues to impose limits on the life changes of African American. Racism in America serves too many important economic purposes to be easily ameliorated and most White Americans do not move in social circles in which racial equality wins much moral or social credit. Alexander C. Cox (1948) argued: "Race prejudice in the United States is the socio-attitudinal matrix supporting a calculated and determined effort by a white ruling class to keep some people or peoples of color and their resources exploitable." Tilden J. LeMelle (1971) argued that racism is so internalized and institutionalized in the American culture that he doubted that America could even legislate, let alone enforce, public policy to combat racial discrimination. Derrick Bell (2004) wrote that racism had evolved into an ideology of "Whiteness" which asserts that since Whites are in the majority and hold the power, they are entitled to inequitable advantages over Blacks in the distribution of wealth, income, power, and privilege.

Rodney Stark (2003) is correct: "The roots of ethnic and racial antagonism usually lie in economic inequality and conflict." Doxey Wilkerson (1946) argued that Black people are oppressed because the ruling class in the American society find it highly profitable to oppress them. Racist acts continue to flow from hatred, stereotyped conceptions, or prejudgments, but the roots of racism in America remain grounded in White Americans believing that racism is a rational response to their commitment to preserve their own advantage in the struggle for wealth, income, power, and privilege. The color of one's skin remains a primary determinant of people's position in the social structure. Gordon Allport (1956) opined that when two groups in the American society differ in some cultural or physical characteristic, the relationship between two such groups depends on whether the two groups are of equal status and whether the benefits of cooperation outweigh those of competition. Economic competition between groups of unequal status is fueled by the overall economic inequality in America, which is fueled by the capitalist class tendency to pit group against group in a win-or-lose situation to create a split-labor market, workers divided along racial, ethnic, and gender lines.

The Fourteenth Amendment and the Supreme Court

Immediately following the Civil War the Southern states and localities enacted Black codes to regulate the status and conduct of the newly freed slaves. The Black codes deprived African Americans of many of the basic rights accorded to White Americans, including full rights to own property, to testify in court in cases in which Whites were parties, to make contracts, to travel, to preach, to assemble, to speak, and to bear arms. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, proposed by the Congress in 1866 and ratified by the states in 1868, made all persons born within the nation citizens. It also incorporated an Equal Protection Clause which prohibited the states from abridging privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States and from depriving persons of due process of the law or equal protection of the laws. Nonetheless, with repression in the South, indifference in the North, and inaction in Washington, the privileges and immunities of citizens referred to in the Fourteenth Amendment were narrowly interpreted by the Congress and the courts.

Problems of race and race relations in America have often come before the U.S. Supreme Court. The Courts' decisions in such cases have been influenced by the attitudes of the individual justices toward the race problem itself. Justices of the Supreme Court bring to the Court a host of attributes, sentiments, values, motives, and needs. They—like all other Americans—reflect the prejudices of their own lives and those of their class and culture. It is an understatement to say that the Supreme Court in making its decisions on matters of race in America has been influenced by the attitudes of White society as a whole on racial issues. More often than not, in responding to racism in America, the Supreme Court has accorded the attitudes of White Americans toward racial equality greater regard than it has given to the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment has yet to be made fully applicable to the eradication of the widespread social arrangements and practices in America which have the intent or effect of favoring White Americans over non-White Americans. Justice Harry Blackmun (1998) in lamenting the high court's majority opinion in a racial discrimination case, stated: "One wonders whether the majority still believe that race discrimination—or more accurately, race discrimination against non-Whites—is a problem in our society, or even remembers that it ever was."

THE VALUE CONTRADICTION OF GROUP SUPERIORITY CONTRADICTS FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY, AND EQUALITY

The American Society

America is a nation of increasingly diverse people, drawn from many national, linguistic, and religious origins. In many respects, America is a nation of minorities, with each minority attaching some emphasis on its race, its language, its culture, its national origin, or some combination of these. The society in which Americans interact is highly diversified and complex and consists of many different groups of people with characteristically different ways of life. Americans, unlike other peoples, are not bound by a common religion or a common ethnicity. Theoretically, the binding heritage of the nation is its democratic version of liberty, equality, and justice. The very genius of the American society is its potential for the widest possible range of variability and greatest differentiation of individuality. America's great potential as a society lies in its constitutional support for the premise that there is no fixed or final American.

Values and norms do not describe actual behavior in the American society as much as they suggest how Americans should behave. Ideal culture always differs from the real culture that actually occurs in everyday life. If equality is judged in terms of legal equality, equality of opportunity, or equality of outcome, then inequality is a dominant feature of the human condition. Sadly, the United States is more unequal than other developed nations, and that inequality has become more unequal in recent years. Most Americans still evaluate other Americans according to race, ethnicity, social class, and gender. The American society remains structured in ways that confer substantial advantages to males over females, to Whites over non-Whites, and to the wealthy over all others. In the United States, who we are, how we feel about ourselves, and how other people treat us are usually consequences of our social location which is determined by our race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. Inequalities in the United States are largely linked to patterns of social organization. The American society is not humane, caring, and provident in developing the talents and abilities of all its citizens. Since inequalities in the United States are largely human made and thus subject to appropriate political action, Americans should not assume a defensive, fatalistic attitude toward unequal social arrangements. There is intellectual, moral, and political support for demanding that the American society provide those conditions of life which all Americans need for the development of their capacities and remove such barriers standing in the way of such development.

Children

Children are neither economic liabilities or assets. They are human beings, totally dependent upon the good will of adults for their well-being. Every age and society has given place and meaning to childhood and youth, and many adults look upon young people as very special, deserving love, protection, and nurturing. Children, whether they live in nations identified as developed or underdeveloped, have very special needs. There comes a period in every person's life when he or she must meet the task of moving from childhood dependency to adult independence. In order to develop into adults functioning in accordance with the limits set by their biology, children need to be surrounded by people who care for them. Regrettably, nearly every nation has some serious shortcomings in response to these needs. The reality is that children of the world are politically disenfranchised, economically disadvantaged, extremely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, and are often chattels of their biological families.

The United States is the world's richest major nation. Yet, one in four Americans under the age of 18 lives in poverty. The United States has the highest rate of poverty for children of all developed nations, as much as five to eight times higher than other industrialized countries. Almost half of the American children classified as living in poverty, live in deep poverty. The United States is the industrialized nation with the highest incidence of poverty among the nonelderly and widest distribution of poverty across all age and family groups. Poverty in the United States is not only more widespread and long-term than in continental Europe, it is also likely to be more severe. The failure of American public sector to provide certain necessities taken for granted in most industrialized countries, increases the extent and impact of poverty in America. The United States provides far less assistance than other countries in areas such as health care, day care, and housing. The United States is not humane, caring, and provident in developing the talents and abilities of all its citizens. America has yet to recognize that a hostile environment breeds hostility, belligerence begets belligerence. True greatness will continue to elude the United States as long as its institutions are detached from the problems and needs of young and old.

The Family

The family is the central institution in all human societies. In power and breadth of influence, no social context equals that of the family. The family is the universal social institution that does something for children that is not done as well or as easily by other social institutions. Children are utterly dependent on their families; our experiences in the family are so intense that they have a lifelong impact. The family is the child's first reference group; the first group whose norms and values the child adopts as his or her own and refers to in evaluating his or her own behavior. The family gives us ideas about who we are and what we deserve to get out of life, it is in the family that we begin to think of ourselves as strong or weak, smart or dumb, good-looking or ugly—or somewhere in between. Aside from the obvious function of providing the child with the physical need for food, shelter and clothing, the family indoctrinates the child into the ways of society. The family determines both what and when the child shall eat, how the child shall express his or her thoughts and feelings and what language the child shall speak. It is the family that makes the initial determination of what the child's political and religious commitments shall be and what sort of vocation the child shall aspire to.

Children grow up in diverse families. Some parents truly nurture and support their children, and some families treat their children harshly or ignore them. Many children have experienced their parents' divorce, and many other children live their entire childhood in a never divorced family. Some children's mothers and fathers work full time, and other children's mothers and fathers are present in the home when they come home from school. Some children live in poverty, and some children live in economically advantaged households. Some children have siblings and others do not. Different family arrangements emerge out of patterns of social and economic conditions. Every infant in America is born into a family that already has a particular place in the society's system of inequality. Within a single generation social mobility usually is small; for most families, social mobility involves limited movement within one class level rather than dramatic moves between classes. Thus, wealth and poverty tend to be passed down through intergenerational inheritance. Families pass on their advantages and disadvantages to their offspring. Ancestry has a strong bearing on schooling, occupation, and income. While the transmission of social class position promotes stability in society, it also promotes inequality based on ascribed status. Just as surely as inherited wealth tends to shape a bright future for children, inherited poverty just as surely impedes the life chances of the children of the poor.

Social Class and Family Circumstances

The American society is made-up of social layers, usually called social classes. Each social class has a different degree of access to power, goods, and status. A social class may be said to be a segment of society in which members of which socially participate more within one segment than in others and within which their relations are more frequent and intense. In the United States, the social class of a family is usually defined in terms of the income and education of the adults in that family. Members of each social class tend to share certain values or styles of interaction, with the largest differences found between families living in poverty and those in the higher social classes. The basic and most readily available measure of inequality in the American society are wealth, income, occupational prestige, and educational attainment. Of these measures, income is most often used to give an initial view of social class inequality. Class position in society influences one's life chances, which are the opportunities for securing such things as health, education, autonomy, leisure, and a long life. Persons at the top of the social stratification system in America have a greater range of options and have more effective means of responding to opportunities or resolving personal problems. For the poor and for many at the lower level of the working class, they have less education and less control over what happens to them in life. Not knowing what is going to happen to you next is "one of the hallmarks of poverty" in America. But when the rich look around, they sense superiority and control over their destiny.

"Rags to riches" or "riches to rags" stories do occur in America, but they are very rare. Within a single generation, most social mobility is usually small; for most families, social mobility involves limited movement within one class level rather than dramatic moves between classes. There is no "natural" rank order of human beings that is reproduced in the inequalities associated with social stratification. Social stratification is structured inequality that is determined by the people who have power to shape the stratification system to their own advantage. The contrasts between higher and lower, rich and poor, and powerful and powerless constitute the substance of social stratification in America. Social stratification has very little to do with individual differences in ability. Social stratification is far from a harmonious system that benevolently distributes greater resources to our society's supposedly more qualified members. For the vast majority of Americans, social stratification is dysfunctional. It has surprisingly little to do with individual differences in ability. High-ranking persons, even those lacking outstanding intelligence or ability, generally find it far easier to obtain property, prestige, and power than do even the most capable of persons who hold lower ranking statuses in the American society.

Out of Wedlock Births

About 69 percent of African American children are born to an unmarried female. However much out-of-wedlock births may perpetuate poverty, they are more a consequence of poverty rather than a cause of poverty. Urban minority poor women—the ones most likely to give birth out-of-wedlock—have a very small pool of employed marriageable men from which to make choices about marriage. The availability or lack of availability of jobs influences the likelihood of marriage among Whites and Blacks. The increasing male joblessness among Black males is the major underlying factor in the rise of Black single mothers. The Black underclass in urban America has been left behind without jobs and without opportunities for upward mobility. There has been a long-term decline in the proportion of Black men, particularly young Black men, who are in a position to support a family. The extreme difficulty experienced by Black men in gaining the economic security necessary to sustain a family is a formidable obstacle to marriage. Because of the shortage of jobs and more jobs offering little income, poverty has increased in the United States. This means expanded downward mobility for millions of families already plagued by excessive debt.

Families can be a source of joy, but the reality for far too many Black families falls far short of the ideal. Two-thirds of American children living in poverty have a parent who works full-time for wages that are too low to lift the household out of poverty. In a study of two-parent families living in poverty, it was found that 44 percent of such families had at least one member who was working full time. Children are poor because they live with adults who are poor. Black adults are three times as likely as White adults to have incomes that are too low to meet even the adult's needs in the family. Even if Black children lived in two-parent families during all of their childhood at the same rate as White children, Black children would still experience poverty more frequently than White children. Long-term childhood poverty is more concentrated among African Americans; almost 90 percent of the long-term poor children—five or more years—were African American. Marriage is often not a viable option for many African Americans; even if the father is willing, he is usually unable to earn enough to keep the family out of poverty.

The American Dream: The Social Function of a Myth

The American Dream promised continued material advancement and therefore of social opportunities for all citizens who get an education, work hard, and take advantage of opportunity. American capitalism was to function as the economic mechanism through which Americans could lift themselves up by their own boot straps without assistance from the government. Americans are indoctrinated by the media, the government, the schools, and even their own parents to believe that most Americans, including minorities and the working poor have an average or better than average chance of getting ahead. While this claim is a gross exaggeration, most Americans, including racial and ethnic minorities, continue to have faith in the American Dream. The myth of the American Dream in an unequal class structured society, places blame for economic failure on the individual rather than on society. But contrary to egalitarian ideology, millions of Americans are systematically denied access to a good education, a good job, and inherited wealth. The basic tenet of American capitalism is “who gets what is determined by private profit rather than by collective need.” The United States espouses egalitarian social and political principles, but its economy creates gaping disparities in the economic well-being of Americans. American capitalism does not operate in a manner that ensure equality of opportunity for all, employment at decent wages for everyone who wanted to or needed to work, and a distribution of economic rewards sufficiently equitable to satisfy basic standards of fairness.

The United States is the world’s richest major nation, but it is also the industrialized nation that displays the most extreme economic inequality in the developed world. The United States displays the highest incidence of poverty among the non-elderly and the widest distribution of poverty across all age and family groups. Since 1973, while more Americans became rich and the rich became richer, the American middle class steadily declined and poor became poorer. The poor in America have found it increasingly more difficult to “earn” their way out of poverty and work itself does not guarantee a route out of poverty. As the rich have become richer, the American economy is characterized both by a shortage of jobs and the low-income generating capacity of many jobs. While globalization—the move to a post-industrial economy rather and other structural factors in the economy have brought downward mobility for millions of Americans who once held middle income jobs, economic policy in the United States has increasingly catered to the interest of the wealthy to the detriment of the majority of Americans.

Urban Ghettos

Unquestionably, a structural analysis of concentrated poverty in the nation's urban ghettos clearly indicates that the nations' inner cities are beset with a disproportionate share of social problems. But the concept of a troubled underclass locked in urban ghettos due to behavioral deficiencies is false. The Black underclass in the nation's urban ghettos is not destroying itself because of its own behaviors and culture but is being destroyed by economic forces. The economic failure of a large segment of the African American population "is functional, if not intended," given racism and the inequitable distribution of wealth, income, power, and privilege in the American society. There is no "mystical, within group, biological, or cultural disorder" which is responsible for Africa Americans being the disproportional economic losers in the United States. In economic periods, good and bad, poverty has been a fact of life for a significant proportion of the African Americans. The permanence of the disadvantaged economic status of African Americans results from the normal operations of the American economy. Despite the success of an emerging Black middle class, the absolute and relative economic status of African Americans remains considerably worse than that for White Americans. African Americans continue to have high unemployment rates, low rates of employment, inferior occupational distributions, and low wages and earnings.

Since around 1950, millions of good-paying jobs in manufacturing were shifted from the central cities to the suburbs or overseas to take advantage of cheap foreign labor. Millions of African Americans were left behind in central cities without jobs and without opportunities for upward mobility. When work disappears, you have unemployment, poverty, welfare assistance, family dissolution, and crime. The lost of work combined with the exit of African American professionals from the inner cities, produced an erosion of the tax base and an increase in drug use and crime, making the nations; urban ghettos a disastrous place to live. America's urban ghettos constitute the human reservoirs in which our racially and socially stratified society entraps the most adverse victims of racism and poverty. In the absence of strong and consistent intervention, continued poverty and inequality will remain the permanent economic status of about 25 percent of the African American population. Poverty is functional for the affluent; it provides capitalists with a large labor pool that is willing (or unable to be unwilling) to do society's necessary dirty and dangerous work. Thus, far, America's capitalist powerbrokers have not felt any major political pressure to invest in the economic uplift of the nation's underclass.

Demonization of the Poor

Americans have long abided the contradiction of poverty and human misery in a nation of plenty with their consciences dulled by the facile rationalization that the poor are largely responsible for their poverty because of their actions or inactions. Many among the privileged in America find it expedient and comforting to claim that their socially derived advantages stem from their ownership of intrinsic personal qualities. On the other hand the poor are largely labeled the authors of their own economic plight because “of some flaw within their biological and/or cultural makeup” that explains their inferior position. In shameful numbers, Americans do not stop and asked whether or not the poor have been given equal opportunity nor to acknowledge how hard many poor people work. Because American capitalism rests on the exploitation of cheap labor, poverty provides capitalists with a large labor pool that is willing or unable to be unwilling to do society’s necessary dirty and dangerous work. Americans who are poor and physically able to work are not idle because they are avoiding work. There are not enough jobs to go around or jobs that pay enough to keep a family out of poverty. One of the chief causes of poverty in America is that people who are working fulltime are not being paid wages that provide enough income to keep them above the poverty line. Also, owners of large companies and corporations tend to keep large numbers of Americans at subsistence wages in order to retain great profits for themselves.

Yes, there are some irresponsible people who are responsible for their poverty. But the weight of sociological evidence clearly points toward society—not individual character traits—as the primary cause of poverty in America. When work disappears, there is unemployment, welfare, poverty, family dissolution, and crime. Poor people would love the opportunity to practice deferred gratification, but they have little or nothing to defer. Also, poor people soon learn that deferred gratification is gratification denied. Many of the behaviors of some among the poor are driven by their poverty, rather than a cause of their poverty. Oscar Wilde (1891) wrote: “The real tragedy of the poor is that they can afford nothing but self-denial.” Napoleon (1821) in a death bed statement said: “If crimes and misdemeanors increase, this is proof that misery is on the rise and that society is badly governed.” Adam Clayton Powell (1967) declared: “A man’s respect for law and order exists in precise relationship to the size of his paycheck.”

“JAMES BALDWIN (1961) NOTED THAT BLACKS WANTED TO BE TREATED LIKE HUMAN BEINGS AND OBSERVED THAT PEOPLE WHO HAD MASTERED KANT, HEGEL, SHAKESPEARE, MARX, FREUD, AND THE BIBLE, FIND THIS STATEMENT IMPENTRENTABLE.”

African Americans

The almost 39 million African Americans are not a homogeneous group with regard to values, social preferences, outlook on life, and personal circumstances. African Americans vary in color, in identification with the variants of African American culture, in place of ancestral roots, in educational attainment, in employment opportunities, in level of income, in quality and location of residence, in religious preferences and commitment, and in political views and party affiliations. Whatever the differences and similarities among African Americans, millions of White Americans believe that African Americans, as a group are less endowed with the attributes that advance civilization. In the final analysis, it is race rather than the content of the character of individual African Americans that determines how most White Americans form their value judgments about and establish their social arrangements with African Americans. The United States is one of the most widely heterogeneous societies in the world. But racial diversity in the United States is celebrated far more in the nation’s literature than in the practices of its people. Despite strong notions about individualism and freedom, most White Americans evaluate other Americans according to gender, race, ethnicity, and social class.

In the United States, who you are, how you feel about yourself, and how other Americans treat you are usually consequences of your social location, which is determined by your race/ethnicity, gender, and social class. Racism makes it impossible for African Americans to dream their dreams free from the dire reality that color in America is the key that opens the doors to the full range of opportunities and benefits of the American democracy. Benjamin E. Mays (1971) noted in *Born to Rebel* that his was a life-long quest-without complete success—to be judged on the basis of what you are, on what your potentials are, and on what you aspire to be. Race, racial classifications, racial stratification, and other forms of racism, including racial ideology, rather than being a part of our biology, are an integral part of the American culture. John Hope Franklin (2002) opined: “That those who insist that we conduct ourselves as if a utopian state, meaning a color-blind society, already existed have no interest in achieving it and indeed would be horrified if we even approached it. Things in America are not what they used to be for African Americans but most certainly, things are not what they should be. The Black dilemma for African Americans is that no individual African American can truly be free in America as long as millions of African Americans remain ill-housed, impoverished, under educated, and demoralized because racism and capitalism function as partners in their deprivation and disfranchisement.

The African American Culture

From a synthesis of contradictions in America, a unique African American culture evolved. African Americans are drawn from a diverse range of cultures and countries in Africa, later from the Caribbean and from Central and South America. As a consequence of the subjugation of the Africans who were force into slavery, their past has been distorted or simply omitted from the libraries and curricula. By what it elects to include in its curriculum, an educational system implies something about what is worth knowing and what is important. In general, White historians ignored Black people in their treatment of the world and American history. And when they considered Blacks, their work was impaired by White supremacy. African Americans were treated as an appendage to American history rather than an integral part of it. Thus, most African Americans are both uninformed and misinformed about their ancestors and ancestral roots. But Frank Kirkland (1983) is correct: “The fact that Black Americans have a poor sense of their past, does not mean that African Americans do not have a past.”

There is an African American culture in America, and this culture is unique, rich, and distinctive. African American culture is a synthesis of African culture and American-European culture as they interacted under slavery. There are aspects of American-European culture that African Americans subscribe to and have incorporated into their communities. But there are also distinctive characteristics in major aspects of Black life that set them apart. Yet, it is critical to the development of sense of self for African Americans to understand that they are fundamentally Western in terms of their culture and values. African Americans who reject their Western heritage and influence reject important parts of their own cultural heritage. African Americans have related to the West, not merely as victims or as oppressed; they have been major contributors to making America the world’s most important nation. An acknowledgement of a Western identity by African Americans does not entail a repudiation of self, but to repudiate, dismiss, or traduce their Western heritage would be to cut African Americans off from a part of what they are, to the detriment of the possibility of a coherent self-concept.

Assimilation

American history reveals that the ethnocentrism of dominant White groups has meant that the invitation to participate equally in the America society has been offered selectively to the nation's various racial and ethnic groups. African Americans learned early that people whose cultural background and/or physical appearances (particularly skin color) are dissimilar to that of the dominant White groups have considerable difficulty pursuing assimilation. Assimilation is a process by which distinct racial ethnic or cultural groups take on the values of the more dominant groups in the society. Complete assimilation consists of intermarriage and adoption of the customs, attitudes, and skills of the dominant groups. African Americans who support assimilation reject the contention that racism is so deeply woven into the fiber of American institutions that it cannot be unwoven. Black assimilationists are committed to the assumption that American institutions can be restructured so that Blacks, along with Whites, can enjoy economic, political, and social security. Most African Americans who are assimilationists believe that racial integration in the United States does not have to be a one-way street and that it is possible for African Americans to introduce some of their own traits and customs into the dominant White culture.

The solidarity of the Black masses in America is “neither nationalistic nor nativistic.” By and large, African Americans desire, like all other Americans, to become an integral part of the American mosaic; they strive for neither a fifty-first state, leading to an independent nation nor a back-to Africa movement. African Americans want to retain their cultural identity while being as American as any other American in those aspects of citizenship which require allegiance to the Constitution and a willingness to stand up for and defend the nation against a foreign threat to the American democracy. African Americans opposed racial segregation because it was imposed on them by a powerful racist mechanism controlled by White Americans. Genuine racial integration will exist in America when Whites and Blacks gravitate toward each other as status equals who share decision-making control over institutions and communities. Millions of African Americans live in a nation whose values they both envy and despise. One thing is certain, racial equality will have been achieved in America only when a person's race does not reliably indicate his or her status. Race and social class are so closely intertwined in everyday social interaction in the United States that they have no independent existence.

African American Heroes

Progress has been possible for African Americans in each and every generation because there have been Black leaders with the capacity and willingness to give leadership to significant strategies for improving the life chances of African Americans in a racially and socially stratified society. Black heroes hold an esteem place in African American history, not because they were never wrong, but because they demonstrated exemplary patterns of courage and conviction as champions of the self-determination rights of oppressed African Americans. Oppression is the exercise of authority or power in a cruel or unjust manner. The treatment of African Americans has been disgraceful throughout American history. African Americans have been denied equality in money, jobs, service, housing, and even the right to vote. Whatever their differences, African American heroes hold an esteem place in the hearts and minds of millions of African Americans because they contributed significantly to African Americans holding on to their self-respect and hope in a society that consigned them to a disfavored status because of the “color line.”

The choices African Americans make about how to pursue self-determination in a racist society should be informed and guided by the reservoir of knowledge and wisdom provided by those Black heroes whose self-determination efforts have survived the test of time. Differences between great Black leaders were common in the past and exist in the present. What matters most to African Americans is that their Black heroes were experts in advocating for freedom and dignity. Black heroes were in basic agreement on survival with dignity, resistance to oppression, and the elevation of Black people through education and economic advancement. Black civil rights leaders since the Civil War have been in general agreement with the statement made by Frederick Douglass in the 1860’s “Neither we, nor any other people will ever be respected till we have means to live respectably.” The words of Negro Committee in 1910 remain revelant: “Any discrimination based simply on race or color is barbarous, we care not how hallowed it be by customs, expediency, or prejudice.”

THE CONCENTRATION OF INCOME AT THE TOP IS NOT JUST THE WORK OF DEEP ECONOMIC FORCES. IT IS AIDED AND ABETED BY POLITICIANS WHO FAVOR THE VERY RICH OR ALLOW POLICIES, THAT ONCE FAVORED THE REST OF US TO ERODE.

[Robert Solow, 2010]

The Economy

The economy is the social institution that accomplishes the production and distribution of goods and services within a society. From a sociological view, the economy is the social system comprising social relationships of all kinds and profoundly affecting all aspects of social life. How we survive in modern societies depends on whether we have jobs and income, on the nature of markets, on the public policies that involve government in economic affairs, on worker-management relations and so on. The economist, John K. Galbraith (1973) opined: Few differences can be greater than that between an economy in which inequality is intrinsic and increasing and one in which it is exceptional and decreasing. No economic system has yet been able to offer both political freedom and economic equality. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a statement focused on economic justice, published in 1986, declared: “Full employment is the foundation of a just economy. The most urgent priorities for domestic economic policy is the creation of new jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions.”

Walter Reuther, one of the nation’s great labor leaders, wrote: “Never before in world history has a nation been so endowed with wealth and power, yet plagued with doubts as to the proper use of that wealth and power.” Decades ago, the United States led the world in the wages and benefits provided to its worker. In 1969, the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, stated: “The most obvious fact about American income is that it is the highest in the world and rising rapidly.” Today, the United States is the industrialized nation that displays the most extreme income inequality in the developed world. Because the United States has such severe economic inequality, it also has the highest incidence of poverty among the non-elderly and the widest distribution of poverty within all age and family groups among the industrialized nations. Globalization, skills shifts, technological transformations, economic change have reduced the overall life chances of millions of Americans. But, while all of such factors were impacting on the American economy, politicians in both major parties rewrote the rules of American politics and the American economy in ways that have benefitted the very few at the expense of the many. Because so much of America’s wealth and income are concentrated in relatively few hands, millions of Americans are worse off economically than their counterparts in other developed nations.

Work

Work is central to the human experience, and societies are organized to allocate work in order to produce the goods and services needed by the society and its members. Work is effort aimed at producing a product or service for which one is usually rewarded with pay. Particularly, in modern complex societies, an important part of a person's identity is linked to his or her work. This is true regardless of whether people perform menial tasks in a factory, are skilled craftsperson, make powerful decisions in a boardroom, or are chronically unemployed. Occupational titles carry important symbolic status. Work provides a way of defining other people, as well as ourselves. In large measure, when people ask, "What do you do?" They seek information about your job but they also make certain perceptions about your educational level and about you as a person. Work provides us with a predictable structure for organizing our daily lives. Work gives us opportunities to use our learned skills and abilities. Particularly in our capitalist economy with its ideology of "competitive individualism," our humanity is equated with some sort of reliable and sustaining work.

The distribution of work and how it is rewarded are major sources of inequality in the American society. America's future depends not only the number of jobs but also on the type of jobs, whether they offer real economic opportunity. Economic inequalities are often found in capitalist democracies to be at the base of many persistent social ills. The job market in America has changed; shrinking the middle class and shifting jobs away from the central cities to the suburbs or overseas to sources of cheap labor. The significant loss of "good-paying" jobs means that millions of workers have experienced decreased earnings. More jobs now offer little income. Americans are finding it increasingly more difficult to secure a job that pays a decent income, and it has become increasingly more difficult to "earn" one's way out of poverty. The American economy has thus far failed to create jobs that create careers which enable Americans to escape unrewarding and poorly rewarded jobs. Runaway economic rewards for the wealthy have not unleashed an economic uplift for America's middle class. This generation of Americans confronts an economic period in which the rate of downward social mobility exceeds the rate of upward social mobility.

American Capitalism

The American economy has always been based on the principles of capitalism, but the present economy is far removed from the free enterprise system. The American economy is no longer based on competition among more or less equal private capitalists. It is now dominated by huge corporations that, contrary to classical economic theory, control demand rather than respond to the demands of the market. American capitalism has long been presented as the economic mechanism for achieving the American Dream—anyone who gets an education, works hard, and takes advantage of opportunity can get ahead in America. American capitalism promised that Americans could lift themselves up by their own bootstraps without assistance from the government. Capitalism is supposed to structure a system of material rewards that brings out the productive best in Americans. However, while the United States espouses egalitarian social and political principles, its economy creates gaping disparities in the economic well-being of Americans. One percent of the population holds almost 40 percent of America's wealth, more than is held by the entire ninety percent of the population. Twenty percent of the population holds 84 percent of America's wealth, leaving eighty percent of the population to struggle for the remaining 14 percent of America's wealth. When financial assets are balanced against debits, millions of Americans have no wealth at all, with many actually living in debt.

Economic disparities in America are not confined to Black-White or White-non-White categories. About 45 percent of the poor in America are White Americans. But Black and Hispanic Americans are three times as likely as White Americans to be poor. Since 1973, more Americans have become rich and the rich have become richer. But over that same time period, the middle class in America steadily declined and the poor became poorer. As the gap between the wealthy and the rest of the American population increase, policy and policymakers increasingly catered to the interests of the very wealthy. Social problems are societally induced conditions that harm any segment of the population, and the major social problems in the United States are in large measure linked to the form of the economy. American capitalism simply has not operated in a manner that ensures equality of opportunity for all, decent wages for all who want to or need to work, and a distribution of economic rewards sufficiently equitable to satisfy basic standards of fairness. The United States has far greater economic inequality than is needed to provide incentives for productivity. A major reason for this is the abuse of wealth and power by those who have such advantages and use them to shut out those who do not.

Wealth, Power, and Conflict

In class structured societies, like the United States, the most valued but inequitably distributed resources are wealth, income, power, and privilege. In the quest for these resources, there is cooperation and accommodation but there is also competition and conflict. Much of the social process, both of association and dissociation in America can be understood as an attempt to hold on to or to increase one's share of these valued resources. Whenever a resource is scarce—in insufficient amounts for everyone to have as much as he or she wants—groups and individuals struggle with one another to increase their share of money and power, often by reducing the money and power of others. The interests of those who have a great amount of money and power conflicts with the interests of those who do not. Groups and individuals with a great deal of money will attempt to preserve the status quo in society, so that they can continue to enjoy their socially derived advantages. Groups and individuals without a great deal of money should want to create change so that they can get a bigger share of money and power. In large measure the nature of the American society is shaped or influenced by the outcome of the struggles between those who have much and those who have less than they believe they should have.

The capitalist economic system with its “winner, firster, money mentality,” promotes “the ideology of competitive individualism.” The American society, especially in recent decades, has never experienced anything approaching equilibrium in how wealth, income, power, and privilege are allocated. Conflict and strife in our capitalist economic system are arguably more basic to the American society than harmony and smooth functioning. Abraham Lincoln (1837) said: “These capitalists generally act harmoniously, and in concert, to fleece the people.” Perhaps the most racist of American presidents, Woodrow Wilson (1913) noted: “The truth is that we are all caught in a great economic system which is heartless.” Peter Drucker (1977) wrote: “Free enterprise cannot be justified as being good for business, it can be justified only as being good for society.” Benjamin Franklin reminded the constitutional convention that two passions influence men: ambition—the love of power—and avarice—the love of money. Inequality in America is advancing in numerous directions because elected leaders have failed to curb the abuses rendered by capitalists. It is certainly not by chance that such a high percentage of the members of Congress leave office far, far wealthier than when they entered office. Catering to the wealthy is a societal detriment. The interests of economically dominant groups in America are “enshrouded in the flag, fortified by law, nurtured by the media, taught by the schools, and blessed by the church.”

New Technologies

Technologies are the artificial means by which humans extend their ability to manipulate the environment. New technologies refer to any set of productive techniques which offer a significant improvement (whether measured in terms of increased output or savings in society.) Technological changes are especially significant because each major new development provides an additional element leading to more rapid changes in the future. A single shift in technology may have potential to have multiple institutional consequences for the American society. Also, the perceptions of technological success or failure, advancement or decline, lie in the eyes of the beholder. Technologies are social constructions with the particular value of a specific technology often being a subjective judgment made by the social group involved.

What is certain, the revolution in technology has transformed the production process. High-technology fields do indeed provide the leading edge in economic growth and productivity, but they have not led the way in employment creation. Introductions of new technological innovations are designed specifically to reduce the level of employment already generated in some areas. In terms of securing more jobs and increased pay for workers, the new technologies have closed more doors than they have opened. The loss of jobs due to technological innovations has impacted on skilled workers, as well as workers who perform menial tasks. The new technologies have carried on the tradition of transforming the production process through technology. Undoubtedly, human labor has been displaced permanently by many of the electronically based forms of automated production. The reality is the capitalists have always been engaged in ways and means of reducing labor costs and simultaneously increasing production. Unfortunately, this has been accomplished in many situations without similar increases in employment and wages. New technologies are critically important, but each society must decide how it will use new technologies. There needs to be a correlation between the use of technological innovations and how workers survive in modern societies. Such a determination is linked to whether workers have jobs and income, on the nature of the market, on public policies that involve government in economic affairs, on worker-management relations, and so on.

Post Industrial Era and African Americans

Deindustrialization, a process in which the manufacturing sector of the economies of the developed nations declines while the service sector expands has substantially transformed the nature of work and reversed the patterns of upward structural mobility in America. The share of U.S. labor force engaged in manufacturing is now half of what was in 1960; service work, especially computer-related jobs make up the difference. The post-industrial society is one where knowledge has displaced property as the central preoccupation, and the prime source of power and social dynamism. Technicians and professionals are now the pre-eminent social groups and service industries are more important than manufacturing. Service industries employ most working people in America. Matters of economic growth and expansion cannot be divorced from matters of distributions and redistribution. Low-paid jobs in the service sector are expanding carrying with them a growth of households in poverty. The American society has not resolved the problem of providing millions of men and women with the language and computer skills needed in the new economy.

Millions of good-paying jobs mostly unionize jobs; have been lost because corporations have shipped them overseas to take advantage of cheap foreign labor. While the number of technical service jobs that are well-paid increased, not enough of these jobs have been produced to replace the desirable good-paying jobs in manufacturing which have been exported. Low-skilled service jobs—"McJobs" pay barely enough—or not enough—to keep workers out of poverty. The loss of good paying jobs in manufacturing has been made worse by the loss of about 25 percent of all executive positions because of globalization—the extensive interconnections among nations due to the expansion of capitalism. Middle class workers who lose their jobs tend to stay unemployed longer than their working class counterparts. The post-industrial era has created more jobs that pay very little and made competition fierce for the reduced numbers of good-paying jobs. Millions of Americans are finding that their career expectations are not being met because there are not enough good-paying jobs to go around. Any economic force that impacts negatively on White workers will impact even more severely on Black workers. Thus, African Americans must confront an economic future laden with increased possibilities of an expansion in their poverty and employment in low paid jobs.

JOHN DEWEY (1908) CHALLENGED THE NATION TO CONSIDER EDUCATION'S RELEVANCE TO THE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES OF OUR SOCIETY. DEWEY WAS NOT SIMPLY SPEAKING OF MAXIMIZING HUMAN CAPITAL FOR SOCIAL ENDS BUT BECAUSE IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO MORALLY AND ETHICALLY.

Public Education

Public education in the United States is the consequence of fifty systems of public tax-supported lower and higher education in which policy is made by fifty sets of state officials, governors, legislatures, judges, state boards of education, and their counterparts in thousands of local communities. Governmental authority for public education is primarily state controlled through delegated authority to thousands of local school districts. Public education in America is not heavily dependent upon the federal government to make educational policy or to provide financial support for educational institutions. Nevertheless, the federal government through enactment of special laws and regulations pertaining to education in America exercises an influence on policies and programs well above its level of funding support. In essence, public education in America is probably more diverse, disparate, decentralized, and dynamic than any other in the world. Formal education in America encompasses almost every segment of the population in terms of students' age, interests, and ability levels. Schooling is expected to benefit those who are gifted, disabled, and all those in between. The old, young, the elite, as well as the poor are all targets of specific school programs. Education is expected to promote social cohesion as well as cultural diversity, academic achievement as well as vocational relevance; moral values as well as individual self-enhancement.

Values and norms in education—similar to those in the general society—do not describe actual behavior as much as they suggest what should be. In any examination of education, there must be an analysis of the patterns of opportunity and achievement; who can reach them, and who will rise to the top and will not? What do such patterns of achievement reflect about broader social issues such as social class, mobility, racial ethnic relations, gender roles, and group dynamics? What are the positive and negative implications of education's major role in formally transmitting cultural values, skills, and knowledge from one generation to another? All societies use the schools for ideological instruction, to transmit core values to the young and to teach order and loyalty to the society. What does this mean for racial and ethnic minorities in their quests for equal opportunity and equal educational opportunity?

Education and the Pluralist Ideal

It is through education that society attempts to pass on the standards and ideals believed to be good and necessary for present and future generations. From its very beginning, public education functioned as the society's chief instrument in the attempt to fuse culturally different populations into a narrowly defined concept of the American culture. Students were subtly and not so subtly informed that they were to change their ways and not emulate their parents. Prior to the twentieth century, schools were implored to "break up the ethnic enclaves and implant among the new immigrants an Anglo-Saxon concept of righteousness, law and order, and popular government. Most White immigrants rejected both the imposition of the Anglo-Saxon model American and the "melting pot's" homogeneous American. Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans were not deemed worthy of serving as racial and ethnic contributors to the "melting pot" because it was believed that they would contaminate the American culture. The efforts to mold a "fixed and final" American failed because Americans, regardless of color, national origins, and socioeconomic class, manifest a firm desire to maintain their cultural ties. Americans prefer to blend into the main stream of society while preserving their "distinctiveness and originality."

The American culture belongs to all Americans and its constantly evolving. The American culture is a conglomeration of the lifestyles of all who have participated in the building of America. Ideally, educational institutions should be committed to engendering values and implementing policies that will enhance respect for individuals and their cultural roots. For African Americans, appropriate access to knowledge about their history and culture and appropriate inclusion of the contributions and circumstances of African Americans in the main stream culture are not "pleasant luxuries" but the very marrow of survival of African Americans in a racist society. The Task Force on Black Academic and Cultural Excellence in 1984, declared: "we know that African American history and culture will be unavoidable if truth, and quality scholarship form the basis of what is taught and respected in the schools." African American scholars should be held to the same standards of academic integrity and conduct and the same checks and balances that are applied to their White colleagues. Scholarly inquiring is intellectually stimulating, but it can also be psychologically and socially discomforting. There can be no guarantees that scholarly inquiry will culminate in knowledge that reinforces prior values and beliefs or in findings that resolve differences rather than intensify differences. All who are worthy of the designation of scholar inherit an obligation to promote a climate civility and to accomplish this imperative without requiring that everyone be the same. Every discipline has its false prophets and zealots. All who teach in schools, colleges, and universities should be bound by the premise that legitimate goals do not justify improper means.

The Politics of Education

Politics and propaganda are much alike. Neither is necessarily good nor bad, but both are deeply rooted in the essential characteristics of the processes of public education in the United States. The very inevitability of conflicting demands and wants makes schools and educators influenced by political events and also participants in the political process. When we look at the way in which conflicts over scarce resources occur, we are looking at politics. Politics determines who gets what, when, and how. Politics is the social process by which people gain, use, and lose power, and power increases the probability that an individual or group within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his or her own will despite resistance. If power is the potential for influence, it is obvious that politics and education are inseparable.

By what it elects to include in its curriculum, an educational institution implies something about what is worth knowing what is important. Thus, the curriculum is often the focus point of debate and controversy, and political considerations influence decisions about the content and purposes of the curriculum. Kerber & Smith (1966) wrote: “all of the popular and unpopular views, the striving factions, the powerful and the weak, the selfishly interested and the noble, and the various monopolists of the truth engage in a head on struggle when it comes to shaping the content of the curriculum in response to change.” Most groups have interests to protect, but power is a much sought after but often elusive commodity. Education is just too important to the common good to be free from politics. The “bottom line” is that “politics is the process through which organized power is, in the final analysis, applied in a free society.” None of the major constituent groups in public education are without some base of power in the politics of education. Groups that lay claim to be powerless are about the business of seeking to wrestle power from the powerful and the power elite. Groups with power often believe that they need greater power to protect and advance their interests. Power in the politics of education too often becomes an end unto itself, and power either in the possession of lay persons or educators can be used to stymie or frustrate, as well as promote and preserve educational growth and development in the schools. People act in their own interest and in the interest of the groups to which they feel loyal. Nearly everyone has an idea of what education should do and such views are not always compatible or consistent.

A Quality Education

The formal system of education in the United States and in other democracies is conservative—teaching new comers the attitudes, values, and training necessary to the maintenance of the society. Thus, schools are primarily about the business of preserving the culture, not transforming it. But in a racially and socially stratified society, when schools do society' work, they do a disservice to large segments of the American population. Quality education here defined requires that schools relate directly to helping all individuals and groups live constructively together. In a society where individuals and groups are geographically close but socially distant, the schools have a clear commitment to help produce a culturally pervasive climate in which democracy works. Thus, schools must demonstrate a greater concern for individuals and groups to work and plan with other members of the American society, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and social class. A quality education is the designation given to those schools who programs, policies, and practice contribute significantly to the intellectual, social, and psychological preparation of students for effective participation in the American society. Schools that fail to develop the capacity of their students to participate intelligently in the control of their society not only emasculate them but guarantee that social decision-making is kept in the hands of those who use such power to preserve their personal advantages, at the expense of the many.

By their very nature and importance in the American democracy, the schools should work to help pluralism work. The United States is one of the most widely heterogeneous populations in the world. By their very importance to the preservation of democracy in the United States, the schools would be involved in the identification and examination of societal problems as they appear at various levels of government. The integrity and viability of our pluralistic democracy depends, in large measure, on the effectiveness of schools as agents of social consciousness. When schools are relegated to the role of passive observers of social injustices, they cease to serve the fundamental principles of the American democracy. The public schools are far too important to the hopes and aspirations of Americans of all races, ethnicities, and genders to be deterred from the task of helping to turn the promises of the American democracy into realities.

Teaching

Teaching is an applied or clinical science involving service to people, using the processes of diagnosis, prescription, and implementation. Also, teaching is characterized by the creative integration of professional knowledge and skills, personal style, and teaching art. The professional culture of teaching is that body of knowledge and repertoire of behaviors and skills needed in the practice of the profession. But teaching is beset by the many problems inherent in a discipline grounded in the behavioral sciences. The diversity of human behavior does not lend itself readily to categorization. Moreover, many concepts regarding human behavior are speculative. Numerous variables tend to combine to contribute to the formation of an identifiable pattern of human behavior. In each individual situation, the variables tend to differ in their mixture and to fluctuate in their dominance. These fluctuation and inconsistencies produce difficulties in predicting, shaping, and assessing patterns of human behavior.

It is the art and science of teaching which separates the effective teacher from the pedestrian practitioner. You do not have to be a genius to be an effective teacher, but above average intelligence would certainly seem highly desirable. The best teachers are not necessarily those who have the highest IQ's. Equally certain, the best teachers are not developed from a cadre of people who are intellectually short-changed. The art and science of teaching are enhanced or diminished by the teacher's social perspectives and personality, as well as by his or her comprehension of subject matter. Teachers are involved in decision-making for their students, and these decisions would be made in accordance with the most valid knowledge available, against a background of principles and theories. Because knowledge in teaching is probable rather than certain is why judgment is critically important to successful practice in teaching. What is required in teaching is not certainty, but correlational knowledge that is reasonably dependable. Teachers tend to be more dedicated to their teaching than to the professionalization of their teaching. Thus, differences among teachers do have an effect on the academic performance of students. Some of the best teaching occurs in mainly minority urban public schools. But mainly minority urban public schools are disproportionately staffed with ill-prepared teachers.

Educational Leadership

Leadership is that which causes individuals and groups to perform in a manner that maximizes their contribution to the achievement of the overall objectives of an organization. Leadership is that quality that enables an individual within a setting to motivate and inspire others to adopt, achieve, and maintain organizational and individual goals. It is the leader who is given authority to take action, to require and receive performance of actions by others, and to direct and to give decisions to others. Educational leaders are skilled social managers. Leadership is best approached through the development of people—not the direction of things. Effective educational leaders are capable of raising the performance standards of others to levels of effectiveness that they might not have perceived as attainable. At his or her best, the educational leader is the architect in the development of academic achievement.

Professionalism requires a satisfactory adherence to a generally accepted set of explicit and implicit principles. Such professionalism governs the formation of performance goals and the accepted standard of performance in the implementation of goals. Professionalism neither imposes an unexamined perpetuation of the “status quo,” nor a sanction of policies, programs, and practices which are demeaning and delimiting. The decisions rendered by educational leaders are influenced by their sociological values and their understandings of the problems and needs faced by parents and students in their pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. Educational strategies are derived from the pervasive social beliefs and primary educational assumptions of those who exercise power in the determination of permissible educational policies and practices. Thus, educational leaders should be prepared philosophically and pedagogically to inaugurate systems of education in which all students are accorded equitable opportunities to realize their potentialities. The educational leader interprets the purposes and performance of the schools, he or she stimulates and leads his or her professional colleagues and is alert to promising new educational ideas—sorting out those with promise and those without. The educational leader has the level of social awareness sufficient to cope satisfactorily with the sociological and psychological manifestations of cause-effect relationships in the crises, confrontation, and conflicts inherent in the pursuit of a quality education and quality living.

“IN THE FIELD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION, THE DOCTRINE OF “SEPARATE BUT EQUAL” HAS NO PLACE. SEPARATE EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES ARE INHERENTLY UNEQUAL.”

[Earl Warren, 1954]

Public Education and African Americans

Education is a form of social policy; a means by which society distributes power and privilege. The level of entrance into the occupational world is significantly determined by the level that is attained in the educational world. The United States is a racist society. Thus, it is not reverse racism to state the deplorable fact that a White monopoly in the determination of the purposes and content of public education has resulted in African Americans being the most poorly educated, the most severely impaired, and the most deliberately misinterpreted of all the major racial groups received by the public schools. Educational institutions reflect the dominant values and priorities of the American society in the manner in which the various racial and ethnic groups are received and treated. Schools do not function independent of or are unaffected by the society that they serve. Because education is looked upon as “the engine of the future,” the formal and informal educational processes and systems seek to conserve and preserve the dominant ideologies, customs, and tradition of the American society. The public schools not only serve but mirror the vast inequalities associated with social stratification in America. Thus, the public schools perform the dual role of aiding social mobility, and, at the same time, working effectively to hinder it.

Legally, the fundamental right of every American child to equal educational opportunity cannot be denied or abridged because a child is poor or Black. Yet, the quality of education that children receive in the schools can be predicted, to a considerable degree, by their parent’s race and income. African Americans confront the elusive goal of equality of educational opportunity. They must confront the negative role that schools often play in shaping their life chances. Yet, while equal educational opportunity may be crucial to equal opportunity itself, the former, in large measure, is a function of the latter. The challenge of achieving equal educational opportunity in a racially and socially stratified society is one that cannot be borne by the schools alone. Equal educational opportunity is a social goal that demands commitment on the part of the larger society as well as the schools. Equal opportunity and equal educational opportunity do not produce themselves. They are the products of a society or community that commits its resources and efforts to achieve such ends. Only when a person’s race does not reliably indicate his or her social status will racial equality be achieved in America. Only when individual disparities in achievement are as wide or narrow within one social group as they are in another will equal educational opportunity be achieved.

The Hidden Curriculum

The dominant ideologies in any society are always those of its ruling class. All societies use the schools for ideological instruction, to transmit core values to the young, and to teach order and loyalty to the society. Because education is looked upon as “the engine of the future,” the formal and informal educational processes and systems seek to conserve and preserve the dominant ideologies, customs, and institutions of the American society. The United States is a racially and socially stratified society. Thus, you cannot do society’s work without creating negative as well as positive result. In education, the hidden curriculum refers to the way in which cultural values and attitudes (such as obedience to authority, punctuality, and delayed gratification are transmitted through the structure of teaching and organization of schools.) The hidden curriculum is different from the formal curriculum that is subject-based or topic based. Since schools reflect the larger society of which they are a part, for good or ill, the hidden curriculum reflects the “values” that permeate the other social institutions that interact with education.

Education is a selection process, with the schools “sifting and sorting” students and separating them into various quality groups. More often than not, children from the high social strata are placed in the “higher quality” groups, and children from the lower social strata are placed in the “lower quality” groups. The hidden curriculum includes all the informal, unwritten norms that exist both inside and outside of society. Norms regulate human conduct, and this regulation is ensured by the incentive or by the threat of sanction. All societies have ideologies that justify the inequalities associated with social stratification. Such ideologies are used to socialize students to believe that existing patterns of inequality are legitimate. Biology is not destiny, and demography is not predestination. Human beings have an extensive capacity for educational improvement. Educators, who give up on students because they believe in the doctrine of immutable, inborn limits, commit the “grievous error of chaining the human spirit.” The hidden curriculum is reinforced by an insufficient understanding of intelligence and the misuse of tests which result in the mislabeling, misclassifying, and miseducating of countless numbers of students.

Inequities in School Funding

Jack Benny is quoted as saying: “Money may not be the most important thing in life, but it is way ahead of whatever is in second place.” School districts, with students in the greatest numbers from middle and upper income families, spend more per student, than school districts with students in the greatest numbers from low-income and poverty families. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that education where the state has undertaken to provide it “must be available to all on equal terms.” But in *Rodriguez*, (1973), the Supreme Court gave constitutional approval to a school funding system which allowed a child’s education to be dependent largely on the wealth of the neighborhood where the child resides. More students now attend racially isolated public schools in America because de facto segregation than attend racially segregated public schools because of de jure segregation. America’s schools tend to be segregated by race and social class, both by neighborhood and within schools, by ability grouping. Racial and economic segregation is especially prevalent at the elementary school level. The disparities in school funding within a state and between states are great because of the tradition of school funding being heavily dependent on local property taxes. Rich school districts—largely comprised of middle and upper income White Americans—can spend more money on their students than poor school districts which serve large concentrations of students from low-income and poverty families.

The nation’s public schools continue to operate in a manner that reflects a belief among many White Americans that certain groups and classes deserve better education than others. In school system after school system where the scope and complexities of the challenges presented to educators are maximized by the societal injustices imposed on children of color insufficient funds is the standard reason given for denying requests for additional funds. Such denials impact on school districts in which programs and services are considered inadequate at best. Resistance to school desegregation efforts decades ago resulted in White flight from school districts compelled by the courts to desegregate. But the Supreme Court has given constitutional approval to inequitable school funding systems that allow primarily White, middle-class school systems to be free from state-wide equitable school funding systems. Whenever widespread arrangements and practices within social institutions have the intent or the effect of favoring White Americans over non-White Americans, racism is operative. The nation’s national priorities are easily identified in how funds are allocated. Predominantly mainly minorities school systems serving high concentrations of students from low-income and poverty families are increasing. Unless the U.S. Supreme Court reverses its 5 to 4 decision in *Rodriguez*, (1973), the expansion of underfunded, low-performing, mainly minority school systems will represent the pattern of public education offered to the majority of African American students.

Education As A Constitutional Right

In *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court in a 9 to 0 vote, not only ruled that segregated public education was unconstitutional, it also declared: “Such an opportunity, where the state has under taken to provide it is a right which must be available to all on equal terms.” But in *Rodriquez*, (1973), the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5 to 4 vote, ruled that education was not a fundamental right, since it was not guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution. Also, in *Rodriquez*, (1973), the high court significantly diminished the intent of “on equal terms,” when it ruled that a school funding system which operated for property poor school districts as a “spend-less, tax-more system of school finance, and for rich ones as a spend-more, tax-less system” did not violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In his dissent, Associate Justice, William Brennan, argued that a fundamental right to an education did exist because of education’s importance to the enjoyment of rights that are guaranteed explicitly and implicitly in the U.S. Constitution.

Over the years, justices of Supreme Court have defined fundamental rights to be those without which neither liberty nor justice would exist. It is the general dominance of mind over matter that separates human beings from other forms of animal life. For human beings, the mind is the element, part, or process that reasons, thinks, feels, wills, and perceives. Education is to the mind what food is to the body. Some forty years after the Constitution had been rectified, Thomas Jefferson wrote: “Laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind.” Associate Justice Brennan (1986) wisely opined that how the high court interpreted the application of the Constitution’s broadly worded guarantees must constantly evolve. Brennan believed that the genius of the Constitution “rests not in any static meaning in a world that is dead and gone,” but how its great principles are adapted to cope with current problems and current needs.

Public Schools and Students of Color

- ** African American and Latino students are much more likely than White students to attend high-poverty schools. About half of America's African American and Latino students attend public schools in which more than three fourths of the students come from poverty and low-income families.
- ** More than half of America's African American and Latino American students attend public schools in which at least three-quarters of the students are children of color.
- ** Four out of ten public school students are children of color—a proportion that is expected to increase in coming years. The U.S. Census Bureau projected that by 2020 nearly half of the nation's school-age children will be children of color.
- ** The following large school districts have the highest enrollments of students of color: Detroit, 97%; Orleans Parish, LA, 97%; District of Columbia, 95%; Prince George County, MD., 91%; Chicago, 91%; Houston, 91%; Los Angeles Unified, 91%; Baltimore, 90%.
- ** More than one-third of public school students come from low-income families. One in every ten public school students is an English language learners—a student whose first language is not English and who is learning English.
- ** About 1 school-age child in 5 is a child of immigrants. In 2000, 19% of school age children had parents who were immigrants.
- ** About 35% of the nation's school districts are very small, enrolling fewer than 600 students. But the very largest school districts—the top 2% enroll a third of all students.
- ** Sixty percent of the nation's public school students live in the South or West. In the coming years, enrollments are expected to keep rising in the South and West while they decline in the Midwest and Northeast.
- ** Almost 9 out of 10 students in the United States are educated in public schools. Public elementary and secondary schools educate 88% of the nation's 54.9 million students. Total enrollments are projected to reach 56.7 million students in 2014.

Statements above are based on a report prepared by The Center for Education Policy (CEP), published in 2006.

School Choice

Most Americans endorsed the notion that people should have a chance to get an education consistent with their abilities and talents. But this view better expresses our aspirations rather than our achievement. Persistent and pervasive inequality exists in public education which is linked to race, class, and gender. All parents in selecting a school for their children are guided by their prejudices, biases, values, and beliefs. Certainly, not all White parents who fled urban public schools were racially motivated. White and Black parents want their children enrolled in well-funded and high performing schools. In public education, this usually means predominantly White suburban schools serving high concentrations of students from middle and upper class families. It is difficult, if not impossible; to separate the desires of White Americans for better education for their children from the fears, hostility, and distrust that so many White Americans have toward Black Americans. But, on the other side of the racial coin, the Black middle class has been in a steady exodus from neighborhoods and schools with any appreciable representation of persons from the nations' underclass. A sense of Black consciousness has not been sufficient to dissuade the Black middle class from leaving their less fortunate "brothers and sisters" in the "Other America."

If equal educational opportunity is ever to be delivered to students of color placed "at risk" of school failure in the American society, then it will be delivered in mainly minority urban public schools. With regard to school choice, there is no reason to believe that the narrow gates of private and non-public schools will be opened appreciably wider to students of color who bring with them major challenges to the pedagogical skills of educators. Thus, it is highly improbable that private and nonpublic schools will reach out in any appreciable numbers to students who would "dilute" the norms of such schools. All parents need reasonable choices in public education, but the parents and students in the greatest need of choices rarely get viable options within public school system. I am opposed to school choice proposals which increase racial ethnic, and class isolation in public education. I am opposed to school choice options which are predicated on privatization of critical aspects of public education. The equity hurdles in school choice are formidable, but they are not insurmountable and they need to be cleared.

At Risk Schools

A rejection of the premise that the schools are the primary cause of the Black-White achievement gap and therefore must be the primary cure does not remove the schools from their culpability in allowing the Black-White achievement gap to be as extensive as it is. Differences among schools and teachers are important to achievement. Schools do not create the Black-White achievement gap, but schools often create conditions that make it difficult, if not impossible, to more appreciably account for students' unequal prior experiences that exacerbate their differential access to opportunity—whether or not these differences were initially caused by schooling itself. Children from impoverished families start kindergarten at a tremendous disadvantage, trailing behind other children in basic skill areas that are the foundation for learning math, reading, and other subjects. Schools in responding to the dominant norms of our racially and socially stratified society often exacerbate the alienation and exclusion that minority group children experience in the general society.

The public schools in the nation's urban center serve large concentrations of students who are the most adverse victims of environmental supports that fall far short of meeting minimal standards of decency, humaneness, and justice. Urban education has become synonymous with the education of racial and ethnic minorities and carries the connotation of failure. School officials and educators cannot justifiably cite socioeconomic factors as justification for annually graduating thousands upon thousands of students of color whose cumulative deficiencies in reading and writing skills classify them as functional illiterates. On average, Black students receive educational programs and offerings that differ in kind and content from those for White students. Subtle and not so subtle differences in curriculum, course content and teaching methods, and the qualifications and commitment of school personnel ultimately determine which students receive a "true" education and which students are "trained" to assume a permanent role in the nation's underclass. Some of the very best teaching in America occurs in mainly minority urban public schools, but unfortunately, much of the worse teaching in America also occurs in such schools. While schools alone neither can cure poverty in America nor remedy all of the ill-effects of racism and poverty on the community and family life of children of color, "effective" educational leadership and "good" teaching, supported by appropriate funding support, can save countless numbers of students from experiencing 12 to 13 years of inconsequential public education.

Real School Reform

The behavior and performance of students in the schools are a consequence of not only what happens to them in school but also what happens to them outside the school. In particular, African American leaders and parents need to demonstrate a deeper recognition of the fact “the notion that schools alone are responsible for student achievement is primarily a “political and not an analytic statement.” The failure of school reform efforts to make a significant dent in the Black-White achievement gap tells us that the primary source of the problem lies outside the school. Deprivation and disenfranchisement are not societal conditions that germinate primarily or solely in the schools. Yes, schools mirror and reflect the inequalities associated with social stratification in the United States. But, any major school reform efforts must encompass improvements in employment opportunities, housing conditions, health services, welfare assistance, and family life as well as public education. Politically driven school reform efforts have paid scant attention to the harsh reality that 25 percent of Black children are at risk of school failure before they enroll in school; the schools did not create the deficits imposed on children before they enroll in school and neither did the children.

Any comprehensive reform movement must recognize that equal educational opportunity is a social goal that demands commitment on the part of the larger society as well as the schools. It is disingenuous for politicians in both major political parties to disregard how racism and poverty have adversely affected the community and family life and the developmental experiences of children of color. It is a major shortcoming of many Black leaders to pay insufficient attention to the hard evidence that schools alone neither can cure poverty nor remedy all of the ill-effects of racism and poverty on the cognitive and social development on millions of children of color. Unfortunately, President Barach Obama has joined the ranks of major leaders in America who continue to demand that the schools alone do for children of color what the American society has failed to do—provide equality of opportunity. The United States has created a “third world” socioeconomic environment for millions of children of color and then has the audacity to blame them and/or their schools for falling below the national norms. How long will major political power brokers be permitted to ignore the fact that in school districts noted for the high performance of their students, as well as in school districts noted for the low-performance of their students, students tend to score on standardized achievement tests almost exactly as the socioeconomic status of their parents has long indicated.

Epilogue

Gunnar Myrdal (1944) argued that racism was a contradiction which constituted such a gigantic flaw in the fabric of the American democracy that racism would inevitably be eliminated. Myrdal opined that moral conscience of the majority of White Americans would be the driving wheel of change. He was wrong! Oliver C. Cox (1948) argued that Myrdal's opinion about the conscience of White Americans bordered on mysticism. Andrew Hacker (1991) wrote that racism serves too many important economic purposes in White America and most White Americans do not move in social circles in which racial equality wins much social or moral credit. Domestic policy in America has long been driven by the premise that the costs and burdens of whatever is done must be borne by those least able to bear them. Because of their physical and cultural characteristics, White Americans learned that it was easy to single out African Americans for differential and unequal treatment. As long as White Americans possess vested interests in the maintenance of differential and unequal treatment of African Americans, they are not likely to be willing to change their actions. Capitalism produces winners and losers, and racism makes it viable socially and politically to make African Americans the disproportionate economic losers in the American economy.

For over a half-century, I have witnessed a failure of most White Americans in key positions of power across the spectrum of institutional settings in America to "do the right thing" in confronting racism. Only Lyndon Johnson, in my lifetime, used his powers as President of the United States to declare a "war on poverty." Any American--irrespective of his or her race or ethnicity--is likely to be branded a socialist or radical if he or she highlights the abuses rendered by capitalists which have been generally supported by both major political parties. Abraham Lincoln said: "If slavery is not wrong, then nothing is wrong." Racism was the mother of slavery. White Americans in considerable numbers--and even some African Americans become upset when you openly criticize the United States for its racism. But W.E.B. Du Bois (1906) was on target when he declared that African Americans should never be satisfied until we get every single right that belongs to a free-born American, political, civil, and social, and until we get these rights, we must protest and assail the ears of America." Progress in race relations is not a solution to racism. Dissent is not disloyalty. The successes of individual African Americans must not be misinterpreted as cohort success. My hope in this discourse was to highlight for younger African Americans and those yet unborn that the struggle for equal opportunity and equal educational opportunity cannot be one-dimensional.

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