

# The Urban School: A Factory for Failure

A Study of Education in American Society

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## Introduction

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Myths die hard in America. Most tenacious are those that pertain to notions about our national character, our role in international affairs, and the kind of society we envision ourselves as having built. Common to all of them is the aggrandizement of a supposed virtue that sets us apart as a distinct and unique people. Where other nations are warlike, we are peaceful; where others distribute power by means of conflict, we do it by consensus; and where others reinforce inequality, we know all men to be equal. As a consequence of what we believe ourselves to be, we have effectively blocked or ignored that which might demythologize what we know to be "real."

But despite our best efforts, reality continues to intrude. Militarism continues to dominate foreign policy, violence remains integral to the political process, and the gap between rich and poor grows wider than ever before. When confronted with these realities, we tend to cast them off as aberrations, as not really representative of American society and life. They are seen to exist in spite of what America is rather than because of what she is.

This book will tackle one such myth and offer an analysis which will show that the outcome is opposite of what the myth might suggest;

that this outcome is what is really sought, despite disclaimers. Succinctly, it may be said that the system of public education in the United States is specifically designed to aid in the perpetuation of the social and economic inequalities found within the society. In spite of the notion that schools are, in the term of Horace Mann, the "great equalizer," they affirm, reflect, and strengthen the social system which created them. As Michael Katz suggests (1971, p. xviii), "Schools are not great democratic engines for identifying talent and matching it with opportunity. The children of the affluent by and large take the best marks and the best jobs."

What this line of analysis ultimately implies is that any discussion of a "crisis" in American education is applicable only if one believes that the current social and economic system is in need of change. For so long as the United States maintains its current structural and institutional arrangements, then the schools are functioning quite well. Indeed, it might be asked how it is that each generation moves with relatively little difficulty into the slots prepared for it by the previous generation. The answer is in large measure found in an examination of the purpose and function of American public education. Schooling has basically served to instill the values of an expanding industrial society and to fit the aspirations and motivations of individuals to the labor market at approximately the same level as that of their parents. Thus it is that some children find themselves slotted toward becoming workers and others toward becoming the managers of those workers.

I think it worth reiterating: *There is no crisis in American education if we accept American society as is.* But one must recognize that inherent in its very existence are aspects of racism, class schisms, coercion, the continual erosion of freedom and destruction of the "humanness" in those insufficiently strong to resist. This book seeks to document that all of these evils find clear expression in our public schools. The last part of the book addresses itself to the social ramifications and policy implications of a reevaluation of the role of schools in American

society, focusing on what can be done with and to an institution which reinforces inequality.

### On Success and Failure in School: Some Historical Notes

If schools reinforce the inequality present in this society, then also they are actively engaged in creating winners and losers. The schools reward some students in such a manner that these students are able to reap the benefits of American society while simultaneously punishing others in such a way that they find themselves unable to partake of the American feast. This has not occurred by accident. Though Charles Silberman (1970) suggests that the creation of winners and losers is most likely results from the "mindlessness" of the schools, I would reply that such a suggestion is more benign than is warranted. The process whereby some take nearly all and others are left with nothing is, as Katz (1971, p. xviii) avers

... the historical result of the combination of purpose and structure that has characterized American education for roughly the last hundred years. . . . There is a functional relationship between the way in which schools are organized and what they are supposed to do. That relation was there a century ago and it exists today.

One of the most disconcerting aspects of the fact that schools make winners and losers is that it strikes deeply at the myth of what schools are supposed to be about. Schooling has become the secular religion of America. Central to the articles of faith of that religion are the twin notions of enhanced individual social and economic mobility and the further strengthening of the democratic process through the creation of an enlightened citizenry. This religion has its roots deep in the American past. As Joseph White wrote more than 120 years ago in a report to the Massachusetts Board of Education (quoted in Katz, 1971, p. 40),

The children of the rich and poor, of the honored and the unknown, meet together on common ground. Their pursuits, their aims and aspirations are one. No distinctions find place, but such as talent and

industry and good conduct create. In the competitions, the defeats, and the successes of the schoolroom, they meet each other as they are to meet in the broader fields of life before them; they are taught to distinguish between the essential and true, and the frivolous and false, in character and condition. . . . Thus a vast and mutual benefit is the result. Thus, and only thus, can the rising generations be best prepared for the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a free commonwealth. No foundation will be laid in our social life for the brazen walls of caste; and our political life, which is but the outgrowth of the social, will pulsate in harmony with it, and so be kept true to the grand ideals of the fathers and founders of the republic.

Though the aspirations manifest in this creed remain in the current beliefs about schools, there is no indication that fulfillment is any closer. Schools never have worked very well in equipping lower-class youngsters for mobility within the social and economic spheres of American society. It is an erroneous and romanticized notion to assume that at some point in the past schools did in fact achieve their goals and only recently have begun to lag. As Stephan Thernstrom (1964) has so aptly demonstrated, the Boston schools of the nineteenth century served to "cool out" the poor from aspirations for mobility and effectively maintained the class system that existed. What function the schools did accomplish quite well was to provide a means by which students could be socialized to accept the demands of capitalist employment. Schools became agents of social control by which the bourgeois sought to create a disciplined and skilled labor force to fill the rapidly expanding factories. To use the analogy of the factory, the unskilled immigrant child was perceived as a form of raw material that was to be transformed into an efficient end product. The product was to be a disciplined, punctual, obedient, and willing worker.

Perhaps an assessment more realistic than that of Joseph White of what was believed to be the function of the early public education in this country was voiced in a letter to the Massachusetts State Board of Education by an industrialist who wrote in 1841 (Bowles, 1972):

I have never considered mere knowledge . . . as the only advantage derived from a good education . . . [workers with more education possess] a higher and better state of morals, are more orderly and

respectful in their deportment, and more ready to comply with the wholesome and necessary regulations of an establishment. . . . In times of agitation, on account of some change in regulations or wages, I have always looked to the most intelligent, best educated, and the most moral for support. The ignorant and uneducated I have generally found the most turbulent and troublesome, acting under the impulse of excited passion and jealousy.

Under the guise of creating an enlightened citizenry, schools for the poor and the immigrant child were organized so as to resemble closely the conditions of the factory and prepare young people to perceive the inevitability of the capitalist division of labor. Public schools were conceived to serve as an integral link in the larger sphere of interinstitutional relations by reinforcing the conditions of unequal power and wealth. Historically one can trace the development of class stratification within the emerging education apparatus of the United States. Elites continued to send their children to private schools, which provided these children with training for the power and prestige they would later possess as adults. Working-class children, on the other hand, would have to leave public school early to contribute to the earnings of the family. Thernstrom (1964) estimates that in the nineteenth-century working-class family in Boston, nearly 20 percent of all family income was earned by children under the age of fifteen.

When the working-class students did begin to enter high schools, the system responded with the vocational school and the development of various academic tracks which continued effectively to socialize the working-class and poor student for occupations that did not provide upward mobility. As Katz (1971, p. 121) suggests:

It [vocational school] was also a solution fit for poor children; it would permit them to attend secondary school without inhibiting aspirations beyond their class. It would continue to instill in them the attitudes and skills appropriate to manual working-class status. Regardless of the rhetoric of its sponsors, vocational education has proved to be an ingenious way of providing universal secondary schooling without disturbing the shape of the social structure and without permitting excessive amounts of social mobility.

The contentions of Katz deserve serious consideration in light of the

comments of the superintendent of the Boston public schools who summarized his views on vocational education in 1908 (Bowles, 1972):

Until very recently, they [the schools] have offered equal opportunity for all to receive one kind of education, but what will make them democratic is to provide opportunity for all to receive such education as will fit them equally well for their particular life work.

The reinforcement of the class system occurred when others decided for the student what his "particular life work" was going to be.

One can argue in opposition that the schools were not merely sorting bins for the class system, but were in fact innovative and creative institutions seeking through a variety of ways to overcome the pressures of a class system. One might point to the establishment of the kindergarten, of intelligence testing, or to the introduction of guidance counselors as attempts to make the schooling experience more equitable for all students. Admittedly, such innovations represent no small attempts on the part of the educational system to meet the needs of a changing world. But I am less sure that their consequences were what the reformers assumed. For example, the introduction of kindergarten can be seen as an attempt by middle-class reformers (and industrialists) to counteract what they perceived as the negative effects of the home. The sooner the socialization of the school could begin, the less the influence of the unfavorable conditions of the home. Likewise, the use of ability testing may well sort students on criteria that come closer to measuring class interests and values than innate cognitive ability.

The introduction of guidance counselors in the schools may well be a beneficial aid to students uncertain about their future, but the guidance given may be steering the child toward assumed needs and interests—class linked, of course.

Charles Silberman (1970, p. 80) offers a more contemporary example to reinforce this contention:

A black student does poorly in a Northern high school for three years. When he expresses interest in college, his guidance counselor assures him that he is not "college material." Through the intercession of some white friends, and over the objection of the guidance counselor,

he is admitted into the federally financed Upward Bound program at a nearby college, which provides an intensive remedial program during the summer and special tutoring during his senior year. His grades shoot up so rapidly that the Upward Bound officials recommend him for a special Transitional Year program at Yale University, designed to give "underachieving students" with high potential the academic skills and self-confidence they need to realize their potential. The counselor begrudgingly supplies the necessary transcripts, after remarking to the boy, "What, you at Yale? Don't make me laugh." But when the student is admitted—one of sixty selected, out of 500 applicants—the school system's public relations apparatus swings into action. The boy's picture appears in the local newspaper in an article reporting the high school's success story; the superintendent introduces him to the public at an open meeting of the board of education; and when a group of local black leaders meet with school officials to press some of their complaints about the system, they are told that the boy's admission to the Yale program shows how well the school was serving black students.

### Success and Failure: More Recent Interpretations

Within the past decade, two prominent explanations have emerged for the continued school failure of large numbers of poor children. Both place the responsibility on the student for his own failure. Behind such explanations lies a belief in the immutability of the school itself and the need for the child to accommodate himself to the organization of the school. The first, the "culture of poverty" notion, posits that children fail because of the environmental obstacles they face in their homes and poverty-stricken communities. The other explanation suggests that the basis for failure is to be found in genetic differences among groups of children. This has been most recently elaborated upon in some detail in the work of Jensen (1969). Neither perspective, however, is acceptable. Both go to great pains to avoid any analysis of the school systems themselves and by default consent to the myth that schools are egalitarian, classless, humane institutions interested in the potential of individual children.

Central to the culture of poverty concept is the idea that there is such an early and pervasive destruction of the cognitive and creative ability

of poor children by their environment that by the time they are ready to enter the public school system they are irreparably damaged. The children are seen as lacking sufficient motivation, self esteem, awareness of the world around them, acceptable language patterns, and knowledge of various social roles in the family, for instance, of the "missing father." Schools then are faced with the nearly impossible task of resurrecting from a smashed organism a lively and vibrant human being. In such circumstances, who could possibly assume that schools would do very well? Failure is considered inevitable for many of the children so afflicted.

What the culture of poverty concept does very nicely is not only to relieve the school system of any blame for the failure of children, but also to take away any guilt from the society at large. We are assured that it is not poverty per se that creates the conditions of failure (for we all know of poor children who are not like the ones described above), but it is the *values and culture* of that particular segment of the poor, passed on from generation to generation, that breed apathy and a fatalistic view of life. Children who live in a culture such as this are assumed to be incapable of planning for the future, delaying gratification, utilizing abstract reasoning, or curtailing their sexual expression.

One of the more notable spin-offs from the culture of poverty concept has been the development of an "inadequate mother" hypothesis, an assumption that mothers from a "culturally deprived" background produce deficient children. It is suggested that the incapacity of the mother creates a destructive environment in which linguistic development is thwarted, cognitive processes are impaired, and self esteem is destroyed. The mother is viewed as failing to provide the social, sensory, and aesthetic stimulation produced by talking and reading to the child and organizing the schedule of events in the home so as to give the child a notion of the importance of time and space. Baratz and Baratz (1970) have provided an excellent critique of this hypothesis and suggest that the basic assumption of a deficit in children from low-

income families is both erroneous and pejorative. They note that a difference is not to be equated with a deficit.

With the culture of poverty notion as the dominant theoretical guideline of the "War on Poverty" launched by President Johnson, massive federal funding went into programs seeking to intervene in the lives of the poor in such a manner as to provide them with the motivation and skills necessary for occupational success in American society. Though the "war" was in reality little more than a protracted skirmish, there is little indication that the programs would have succeeded, particularly those dealing with the educational processes. The assumptions guiding such intervention are simply untrue. There appear to be several interrelated ones in particular that are grounded more in the biases of the educational system than in the actual potentialities of poor children. One assumption is that when poor children enter school, they are unable to deal with the curriculum as organized because of deficits in their families and environment. Secondly, the longer the child remains in a "deprived" environment, the more pervasive and permanent his "damage." Third, schools will never succeed with such children as long as the parents live as they do. And fourth, given that some environments are believed to be better than others, it is the obligation of the "betters" to offer assistance to the "lessers."

The pernicious nature of such notions is that they do contain half-truths that, if not carefully scrutinized, leave some who are involved in working with the poor feeling justified in their assumptions about why the poor stay poor. Teachers can claim that they have tried to teach but that some students were simply unable to respond; social workers can comment on the failure of lower-class persons to follow the directives they suggest; and poverty warriors can throw up their hands in resignation because the poor do not "appreciate all that is being done for them." Under the guise of providing motivation and aspiration for self-improvement, these individuals harbor a hegemony of cultural values that labels any others as deviant, deficient, or deprived. The affluent

have laid exclusive claim to a set of attributes that supposedly distinguish them from the poor. Such characteristics as neatness, punctuality, orderliness, and aspirations for a decent life are held up to outsiders willing to conform. Schools are viewed as sacred guardians of such virtues, whose obligation it is to pass them on to the deserving poor. Students must conform if the very fabric of civilization is not to be threatened by the mindless antics of an ignorant *lumpenproletariat*.

In retrospect, it may be that the recent theories concerning the inadequacies of the poor are no more than the pouring of old wine into new bottles. Consider the definition by the Boston School Committee of the task set before it in the creation of a city-wide public school system in the early nineteenth century (Katz, 1971, p. 40):

... taking children at random from a great city, undisciplined, unstructured, often with inveterate forwardness and obstinacy, and with the inherited stupidity of centuries of ignorant ancestors; forming them from animals into intellectual beings, and, so far as a school can do it, from intellectual beings into spiritual beings; giving to many their first appreciation of what is wise, what is true, what is lovely, and what is pure; and not merely their first impressions, but what may possibly be their only impressions.

The Boston Committee was concerned at the time with large numbers of recent immigrants to the city, Irish in particular; but the cultural arrogance and incipient racism reflected in this passage have not diminished. The minorities that schools are seeking to serve have different national origins and skin color, but the attitudes remain. Such a view of the poor and the nonwhite is central, not peripheral, to the system of public education.

To oppose theories that environmental factors influence academic success or failure, there periodically emerges a study suggesting that the most significant variable in evaluating academic achievement is the heredity component. One of the more recent is an article published by Arthur Jensen in the Winter 1969 issue of the *Harvard Educational Review* under the title "How Much Can We Boost IQ and Scholastic Achievement?" Opening with a statement that "compensatory educa-

tion has been tried and apparently has failed," the article brings together data from a large number of previous experiments variously concerned with issues of genetics, intelligence, heredity, and with compensatory programs that seek to modify the influences of all these. Jensen proposes that individuals with low Intelligence Quotients (IQ) were typically different in their genetic makeup from those who possessed high IQs. Christopher Jencks has noted in a review (1969) of Jensen's work that very few people would dispute such a statement on the surface. The issue is where one goes with it. Jensen does admit that environmental factors can influence IQ differences. He concludes from studies conducted in the United States and England that 80 percent of one's intelligence as measured by IQ tests is due to heredity and 20 percent due to environment.

To this point, Jensen's conclusions are not particularly controversial, although there may be some dispute over the relative percentages of influence of heredity and environment. What provides fuel for controversy is his subsequent argument that the overwhelming influence of genetic factors (.80 versus .20) can explain not only the IQ differences among individuals *within* the same group, but also differences *between* groups as aggregates.

It is at this point that he introduces the issue of race and black-white IQ differences (which he says have held fairly steady at an average fifteen-point gap, though both have numerically increased over time). Jensen concludes that blacks as a group do less well in areas such as abstract reasoning and problem solving when compared with whites and Orientals. He equates ability in these areas with that measured by intelligence tests and, noting that blacks do persistently less well on IQ tests than do whites, imputes these differences to factors of inheritance—matters of genetic structure and brain formation. He then suggests that educational compensatory programs that have been tried to date have ignored the impact of heredity upon performance, and the forced exposure to cultural events, compensatory programs, trips to the country, and properly spoken English will have little if any effect.

(He is correct in arguing that compensatory programs have failed, but for reasons, I suggest, quite different from those he offers.)

In violent disagreement with Jensen, Silberman (1970, p. 77) accuses him of raising an "ugly question." Silberman suggests that Jensen has gone far beyond the boundaries of his data in drawing conclusions, particularly with reference to cross-racial comparisons. He argues that Jensen's data are insufficient to imply a distinctive role for heredity in whatever differences there might be between the scores of black and white children on intelligence tests. Silberman also attacks Jensen's treatment of environmental issues, calling it "simplistic, almost to the point of caricature."

Morris, writing for the Center for Afro-American Studies at U.C.L.A. (1971), takes a somewhat different tack, focusing on Jensen's superficial treatment of the conditions in which black children grow up. Morris suggests that Jensen makes an error of immense proportions in assuming that there exists a relatively similar environment for blacks and whites. This assumption, Morris contends, underplays the impact on blacks of coping with a racist environment and ignores the capacity of the person versus his performance. Any interpretation from IQ tests that goes beyond the acknowledged problematic nature of such tests, he states, "is simply wrong."

Though the two positions just outlined are but a small sample of the vigorous dissent against Jensen, their proponents share with him an erroneous assumption. Before one can discuss the differences among "races," one must decide what precisely is meant by the term "race." The general response to Jensen's position has taken issue with his interpretation of data, his apparent insensitivity to the differences between black and white culture, and his willingness to place firm faith in IQ tests as accurate measures of intelligence. Little if any attention has been directed toward explicitly defining the categories being compared. In short, the argument of black-white differences is meaningless until there is some notion of what is meant by "black" and "white."

To suggest that there are clearly definable parameters between gene pools of various "racial" groupings which allow for no overlap and for the making of clear distinctions is a debatable presumption at best. The family of man has physical characteristics that exist on a continuum: tall to short, light to dark, straight hair to kinky hair, large nasal passages to small nasal passages, and so on. *To decide along that continuum to create various categories and label them "races" is to perform an act that has its foundations in political, ideological, and cultural considerations, not biogenetic ones.* In fact, many geneticists have come to this conclusion first, and, ironically, the social sciences now stubbornly hold to genetic theories that geneticists have discarded. Ashley Montague, in his recently edited book entitled *The Concept of Race* (1970), brings together a number of geneticists and physical anthropologists who have sought to demythologize the concept of race. Several authors in the volume even suggest the term "race" itself is so value-laden and imprecise that it needs to be dropped from discourse.

With this in mind, it is difficult to take seriously the whole Jensen debate in the framework in which it is now being discussed. To suggest that "blacks as a group differ genetically in intelligence from whites as a group" is to make a statement that implies so many subtle assumptions about what we all "know" to be meant by black and white and what we "know" about how the boundaries were drawn between the two groups that it becomes meaningless. (To add confusion to chaos, there is the debate over what is meant by "intelligence.") Meanwhile, as scholars expend time, energy, and emotions discussing the pros and cons of Jensen's position regarding the genetic merits of groups that have only a social reality, schools—free from any responsibility—continue to produce winners and losers because they "know" that white middle-class children are the superior genetic group. The fact that the winners take both "the best marks and the best jobs" becomes no more than the acting out of a historical inevitability that was decided



at conception. Schools can only serve to expedite the upward movement of the genetically endowed and to insure that the less endowed do not develop aspirations beyond their capacity.

### The Perpetuation of Inequality

It can be granted that children come to school possessing differences in cultural backgrounds and states of cognitive development. Nevertheless, schools appear to be deliberately organized so as to persist in implementing policies and practices that each year create a continual stream of losers. The reason schools are organized in this fashion is that they have a direct complicity in maintaining the current patterns of inequality in the society; and those who benefit from such inequalities are not clamoring for change. Regardless of rhetoric, the schools serve as sorting mechanisms which legitimate the present structures in American society, insuring that the upper classes preserve their privileged positions and that the lower classes have little or no opportunity to reach them.

Though there have been some blatant manifestations of this sorting process that insures inequality in the society—for example, tracking by social class—the general process is more subtle. Schools do not have to reinforce the structure overtly; they can merely proceed in such a manner as not to create the conditions for change. This I take to be the major message of the report prepared by James Coleman (1966, p. 325) for the United States government entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Coleman notes:

One implication stands out above all: That schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; and that this very lack of independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. For equality of educational opportunity through the schools must imply a strong effect of schools that is independent of the child's immediate social environment, and that strong independent effect is not present in American schools.

By failing to provide the conditions in which children might overcome the inequalities imposed on them, the schools insure that the *status quo* is preserved. It is the goal of this book to demonstrate how one particular school did operate so as to reinforce the inequalities found in the larger society. The consequence was to contribute to the ranks of both winners and losers.

The findings of the Coleman Report have been disputed, but reanalysis of the data by a group of social scientists and educators at Harvard University indicates that the initial findings are largely correct. The Harvard group has published its conclusions in a book edited by Mos-teller and Moynihan (1972). The significant findings of Coleman, substantiated by reanalysis, are several:

(1) The vast majority of black and white children attend schools that are segregated by color. (Eighty percent of white children in the first and twelfth grades attend schools that are more than 90 percent white. For black children, the figures for first and twelfth grades are 65 percent and 48 percent respectively in schools more than 90 percent black.) One would be justified in stating that in 1965 the elementary and secondary schools of the United States had nearly reached the racially "separate" state outlawed by the Supreme Court in 1954.

(2) Though Coleman showed that schools for black and white children were "separate," he also stated that, contrary to the general assumption, they were nearly "equal" in physical facilities, formal curricula, and teacher characteristics, given controls for regional differences. The Report found that the assumed black-white school differences were simply not there. White schools scored higher on some variables (physics and chemistry laboratories) while black schools scored higher on others (full-time librarians and language laboratories). In short, black and white schools were nearly "separate but equal."

(3) Even where there were measured differences between the facilities, curricula, and teacher characteristics, they had, according to the Report, very little effect on the performance of either white or black students as measured by standardized tests. The implications of this

and (2) taken together are important, for they suggest that merely providing an equalization of any unequal facilities, curricula, or teacher characteristics will not be sufficient to overcome the patterns of inequality imposed upon the schools from the home, the environment, and the peer group. The United States has, in large measure, reached equality of opportunity if that is measured by what is offered to children when they attend school, that is, by input. But if one focuses on the *output* of the schools instead, the gap remains as wide.

(4) The two most significant variables which displayed a consistent relation with test performance were those of social class of the parents and social class of fellow students. Thus low-income children came to the school with a double handicap in terms of variables influencing achievement—they themselves were poor and the majority of their classmates could also be expected to be poor. It was found that in those situations where few low-income children were placed with many middle-income children, their performance rose appreciably. Cohen, Pettigrew, and Riley (1972) evaluated the Coleman data to test for the influence of race independent of class on the achievement of black students and concluded that the variable of race most likely varies with social class, though "decisive conclusions about the effects of racial composition . . . are not possible. . . ." Minority-group students, with the exception of Oriental-Americans, on the average scored lower on the administered tests than their white classmates. But when controls for the influence of social class were imposed, the impact of racial differences became nearly nonexistent. This is probably explained by the fact that the majority of nonwhite students also are lower class. There were also variations in test achievement within the group of white students by social class. This finding would suggest that in the future the continued gap of black-white academic achievement will not be closed solely by upgrading schools or by racial integration if the gap in socioeconomic status is ignored.

Overall, the findings of the Coleman Report allow one to make a number of important negative inferences concerning the impact of schools

on achievement (for example, teacher training does not appear to make a significant difference in pupil learning; the ratio of teachers to pupils does not appear to make a significant difference in pupil learning; the presence or absence of language laboratories does not appear to make a significant difference in pupil learning). But when one begins to make positive inferences about effects of schools on pupil achievement, the data become less abundant. One can infer from Coleman that the mixing of students from different social classes is of benefit to children of the lower class, so long as the percentage of lower-class students does not reach X percent. For example, low-income black students in largely middle-class schools were about twenty months ahead of low-income black students in largely low-income schools, while those in intermediate social class schools fell in between. Similar results were also found for low-income white students. The question to be pursued from these data is, what social class mix constitutes the "tipping point" at which the performance of lower-class students stops rising? Or, what is the point of diminishing returns on class integration?

This question is crucial, for the data suggest that there is greater pupil variability *within* the same school than *between* schools. Consequently, if the desired outcome of the educational process is to create means whereby one equalizes the outcomes of schooling for children, the efforts to reduce between-school differences will have little impact. Smith (1972), in his reanalysis of the Coleman data, found that 90 percent of all variation in the range of test performance could be located within any typical school for the urban North. One would conclude from this finding that the students who performed the best were often in the same school with those who performed least well. Speaking to this same point, Jencks (1972a, p. 86) comments:

The implications of this are in many ways more revolutionary than anything else in the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey (EEOS). In the short run it remains true that our most pressing political problem is the achievement gap between Harlem and Scarsdale. But in the long run it seems that our primary problem is not the disparity between Har-

lem and Scarsdale but the disparity between the top and the bottom of the class in both Harlem and Scarsdale. Anyone who doubts this ought to spend some time talking to children in the bottom half of a "good" middle-class suburban school.

What the findings of the Coleman Report and the reanalysis offered by Jencks and Smith, among others, make clear are that the heated debates over what were assumed to be the critical variables of physical facilities, teacher training, curriculum, and the like, have, in large part, missed the mark. *The inequality in American education is accounted for, not so much by differences between schools, but by how the same school treats different children.* By defining the learning situation in a certain fashion and rewarding some forms of behavior and performance to the exclusion of others, the schools create conditions for differential treatment.

It is important to move one step beyond the analysis provided in the Coleman data. Succinctly, though the Coleman Report presents examination results indicating significant academic differences among various groups of children in the nation's schools—and often within the same school—it gives no hint as to how these differences come to manifest themselves within the individual classrooms. What is left unexamined is the process by which there come to be winners and losers.

I would suggest that the process whereby there emerges a stratification system within the schools and within individual classrooms has its genesis with the teacher—his or her values, norms, and expectations as to what kinds of children can perform and what kinds cannot. W. I. Thomas many years ago set forth what has become a basic dictum of the social sciences when he observed, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." This is what I have observed happening in classrooms. The teachers reported upon in this study assumed a certain reality (middle-class children can learn and lower-class children cannot) and then acted upon this assumption in their classroom organization and behavior. In so doing they created that which they "knew" to be true before they began;

Robert Merton (1957) elaborated upon the work of Thomas and de-

veloped his theory of "the self-fulfilling prophecy." Merton posited that most people act most of the time in accordance with what they believe to be the expectations held for them by others. Thus the perception of what is expected is strong enough to evoke the behavior that was anticipated. The influence of others can bring one to act almost in spite of oneself. Merton notes (1957, p. 421):

... Men respond not only to the objective features of a situation, but also, and at times primarily, to the meaning this situation has for them. And once they have assigned some meaning to the situation, their consequent behavior and some of the consequences of that behavior are determined by the ascribed meaning.

What is so pernicious about the self-fulfilling prophecy is that, once meaning has been ascribed to a situation and both the person and others begin to respond in terms of it, then whether there was any truth in the original evaluation is beside the point. Merton suggests (1957, p. 423), "The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error." Schools are organized in such a manner as to perpetuate the "reign of error" Merton describes. The system orients itself to the rewarding of the achievements of middle-class children and to the denial of the achievements of lower-class children. Schools assume that middle-class students can learn, and they do. Likewise, schools assume that lower-class students cannot learn, and they don't.

How do such assumptions come to be? How do teachers come to "know" that some children can do it and some cannot? The answer may well lie in what can be termed the "culture of schooling." The values, the ethos, the milieu of schools create for those within them a reality shaped by cultural values predominant in the middle-class strata of the society. Katz (1971, p. xvii), in his study of the development of public education in the United States, suggests that such middle-class values have historically left schools estranged from the working-class and poor communities. He writes:

... The schools are fortresses in function as well as form, protected outposts of the city's educational establishment and the prosperous

citizens who sustain it. In their own way, they are imperial institutions designed to civilize the natives; they exist to do something to poor children, especially, now, children who are black or brown. Their main purpose is to make these children orderly, industrious, law-abiding, and respectful of authority. Their literature and their spokesmen proclaim the schools to be symbols of opportunity, but their slitted or windowless walls say clearly what their history would reveal as well: They were designed to reflect and confirm the social structure that erected them.

Given such conditions, can one assume that lower-class and working-class children will conform to what the schools require? There has been deep antagonism, often overtly hostile, between the schools and the nonaffluent for more than a century in the United States. School establishments perpetuate the myth of opportunity by a distortion of reality: schools cannot fail, only children fail. Teachers, trapped between the community and the brokers of power within the schools, have sided with the establishment and have come to accept the definition that the onus of failure should be placed squarely on the backs of those who fail. *Ironically, what the teachers create through their expectations for children is precisely what the schools were designed to make real—class inequality disguised as individual differences.*

Many, and especially those in the field of education, I suspect, will strongly disagree with the foregoing analysis. For them, culture deprivation and genetic differences will suffice as fairly accurate explanations for why winners and losers emerge within schools. I see adherence to such views as no more than another tactic by which those who have direct responsibility for children seek to ignore their own complicity in the perpetuation of an unjust system. Their refusal to acknowledge it is a denial of the profound importance of the institution of schooling for the life chances of children. The creation of winners and losers is ultimately a political statement by the schools as to whom they deem fit to partake in the benefits of American society. Denying political control does not make it go away. The class system in this society does not magically appear for the young person when he finishes his schooling. He has been socialized all through childhood and

adolescence to "know" and "accept" his place as either a "have" or a "have-not," and the process inherent in compulsory education becomes the mechanism to insure that socialization.

### Design of the Present Study

To observe the process by which schools create winners and losers, it is necessary to make oneself a part of the school and classroom milieu. The process of socialization within classrooms involves the development of attitudes, values, beliefs, notions about the world, and notions about self. One cannot discover the influences of the educational experience upon the child merely by relying upon abstracted measures of aptitude, attitude, grades, or IQ. Although these indexes may provide guidelines to the current performance of the child, they do not elucidate the complexities of the classroom by which "products" such as grades or test scores are generated. It is in the examination of classroom behavior that I believe one finds the clearest expression of what the educational experience means for the life chances of the child.

A teacher spends nearly one thousand hours with her students during the course of the school year. Such intensive and continual interaction within the confines of a single room results in the development of an internal order and logic that becomes apparent only to those who seek to make themselves a part of that classroom. Thus one must view the educational experience as it occurs *over time*. The plotting of grades and teacher reports as measures of a child's progress remain at best only an abstraction of actual behavior and performance.

In its broadest scope, the research in this study from September 1967 to January 1970 involved both participant and nonparticipant observation of school, home, and peer experiences of a group of black students.<sup>1</sup> I sat as a nonparticipant observer in the kindergarten class-

<sup>1</sup>An appendix describing in detail the methodology for this kind of study is available from the author on request.

room of these children at least twice weekly throughout the 1967-1968 school year and then again when they were in the first half of their second grade year (1969-1970). The length of the formal classroom observations varied by time of day, day of the week, and length of observation, the latter ranging from forty-five minutes to three and one-half hours. While the children were in their first grade year, I visited the class a number of times informally, but did not systematically observe. During all formal observations a continual handwritten account was kept of classroom interaction and activity. Smith and Geoffrey (1968) have termed this method of classroom observation "microethnography." During the informal observations notes were made immediately upon leaving the school. No mechanical devices were used to record classroom activities.

In addition to the classroom activities of teachers and students, I also observed conversations in the teachers' lounge, the monthly meetings of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), field trips with the students, special assemblies in the school, medical examinations of the students, library periods, sessions with the speech therapist, noon hour recreation on the playground, movement in the halls between classes, and teachers at lunch. Interviews were conducted periodically throughout the study with both teachers and administrators. I also visited several of the children in their homes, where I met their parents, participated with the children in softball games, walked with them in their neighborhoods, read to them, took them for rides in my car, and watched television with them. The circumstances of the particular observation dictated whether I was able to take notes during the activity. In the nonclassroom but school-related observations I was frequently unable to take notes (on field trips, for instance, I was usually given "responsibility" for the boys); but I could quite easily do so during PTA meetings. The only time notes were taken during any of the home observations was in interviews with parents.

It would perhaps be well to clarify what I believe to be the benefits derived from the long-term and detailed study of one group of chil-

dren. The single most apparent weakness of the vast majority of studies on urban education is that they lack any longitudinal perspective. A number of studies on schooling have utilized a single episodic approach, more closely resembling the description of a still-life painting than an ongoing activity. Likewise, even where there have been attempts at the direct observation of classrooms, the time span allotted often has been quite short; Smith and Geoffrey (1968) completed their study in one semester, Leacock (1969) in four months, and Eddy (1967) in three months. Secondly, as I have suggested, the complexities of the classroom cannot be reduced to the mere evaluation of differences by a measurement technique over some specified time span. The abstraction of classroom activities to various scores and test results can only give indication of output, not of process. Finally, it is only with long-term participation in a social system such as the school that one becomes aware of the subtle nuances, the brief references that have meaning only within that system, of the gaps between word and deed, and of the official versus the unofficial notions of how the roles and tasks for various participants are defined. The privilege of sharing "inside" gossip and the personal feelings of the participants is not achieved by presenting a letter of introduction.

There is a legitimate concern about the degree to which one can generalize from data gathered in one school to other schools in the same city, to other urban schools in the nation, and to the process of schooling itself. The school reported upon in this study was one of five selected by the district superintendent as available to the research team. All five schools in the district were visited and extensive observations were conducted in four by various members of the staff. The district superintendent's selection of these schools was based, apparently, on the fact that relatively few researchers had visited them previously. The principal of the school I studied, however, suggested that I was fortunate in coming to his school since his staff, and the kindergarten teacher in particular, were "equal to any in the city." From other descriptions of urban black schools, both popular (Kohl, 1967; and

# The System and the School

Kozol, 1967) and academic (Eddy, 1967; Fuchs, 1969; Leacock, 1969; and Moore, 1967) the school in this study does not appear atypical—except that the physical facilities were less than ten years old. Admitted limitations of the use of participant and nonparticipant observation are that it makes the sample size small, the scope of the study narrow, replication difficult, and the basis for generalizations limited. The benefits, though, are derived from the development of an extensive case history and the accumulation of large amounts of data on few subjects; and what generalizations can be made are grounded in the similarity of that sample to others removed in both time and place. Ultimately, one must choose a methodology that best suits the particular problem at hand. Participant and nonparticipant observation seem best suited to describing the reality of schools and schooling. In a funnel-like fashion the following chapters seek to describe the process by which one particular urban school generated successes and failures. Chapter 1 focuses on the city school system and the school itself, its social and cultural milieu as well as the training, attitudes, and values the teachers brought with them to the various classrooms. Chapter 2 and 3 describe the kindergarten experience of one group of children, from the first day of school to the last. Chapter 4 briefly follows the same group of children and outlines some of the patterns of organization in the first grade that were found to be influenced by the kindergarten year. Entering into second grade, Chapter 5 traces the interactions and activities of the same children until the first weeks after their Christmas vacation. This is followed in Chapter 6 by a summary of the study as well as a discussion of several alternatives for breaking the cycle of a perpetual creation of winners and losers.

Individual classrooms in any school do not exist in a social, cultural, or political vacuum. They are tied in innumerable ways to the teachers and activities of other classrooms, to administrators and their policies as well as to the larger school system of which they are one small unit. Though it has been in vogue for some time to tell “horror stories” of what children face in schools, particularly in urban schools, there has been scant attention paid to the nature of the school or to the system in which such abuse occurs. By ignoring these two additional levels of influence on the child and focusing exclusively on the classroom, some recent studies leave unexplicated the bureaucratic, cultural, and political properties of the schooling process. What follows in this chapter is an attempt first to elucidate important aspects of the school system which impinge on the classroom situation and then to focus somewhat more specifically on the social and cultural milieu of a single school. By this gradual funneling process, one can arrive at a study of individual classrooms within the context of larger system properties.

washing of mirrors and sweeping of floors, works ultimately to the detriment of students, teachers, and paraprofessionals themselves.

The general picture which emerges from an examination of the program at Harris Teachers College is one of strong adherence to traditional practices and values. The normative as well as functional aspects of the program serve to preserve the status quo in St. Louis schools—whether it be with regard to racial separation, insensitivity to black values and cultural heritage, the continued use of well-worn pedagogical techniques, or restriction of options for experimental teaching situations. The schools are seen as fulfilling their function in their present form, and the students of Harris are socialized to fit that form. Moreover, as future teachers they are trained not only to accept the system, but also to expect students to fit into the institutional arrangements of schooling. The result is that the children are managed, the equipment is preserved, and the records are completed.

### Part 2: The School

A block away from a major thoroughfare, by which many whites travel each morning from the suburban areas into downtown and return home in the evening, stands Attucks School.<sup>6</sup> The school is located on the north side of the city in the black community. It shares a city block with several small homes, two burned-out buildings, a liquor store, and a service station. In the immediate vicinity are two corner grocery stores, four storefront churches, and a used tire and battery shop. The residential units in the area are primarily small single-family dwellings and two-story apartment buildings. In 1965 the census tract including Attucks School was listed as being 98 percent black (Liu, 1967). The racial composition of the school quite clearly reflects the racial characteristics of the neighborhood. There are slightly more than 900 stu-

<sup>6</sup>The names of the school, all staff, administrators, and students are pseudonyms. Names are provided to indicate that the discussion relates to living persons, not to fictional characters.

dents in the school, all of whom are black. Likewise, all teachers, administrators, secretaries, special service personnel and janitors are black. Since Attucks School was built in the early 1960s, a white child has never attended the school.

### Premises

The outside appearance of Attucks School varies, depending upon the rate at which litter accumulates and the janitors replace the broken windows, from that of a building under siege to that of any typical new two-story elementary school. At the beginning of the school year the building is most attractive, but its appearance steadily deteriorates as the year progresses. During the first weeks, flowers bloom around the base of the flagpole and along the sidewalk leading to the main entrance. The grass is mowed and the hedges along the front of the building are trimmed and free of weeds. The large playground surrounding the school on two sides is cleared of broken glass and trash. The five-foot chain-link fence encompassing the playground has no debris caught at its base. With the coming of winter, less is done to maintain the appearance of the building, and by spring, flowers must push their way up through layers of paper, glass, and leaves. The most consistent work done on the outside during the winter is the replacing of broken windows with large sheets of plywood. The long rows of windows on the front side of the building by spring have achieved a checkerboard effect of wood alternating with glass. Only with the advent of spring are broken bottles and litter cleared away, the plywood replaced with glass once again, and the playgrounds swept.

As one enters Attucks School through the main entrance, the offices of administrators and special service personnel are to the left, two gymnasiums and the library in a corridor ahead, and the classrooms along a corridor to the right. The following note records impressions of the building on my first visit:

All the walls on the first floor were soft colors—yellow, blue, green,

and beige. The color scheme matched a darker tone of a color on the lower half of the wall with a lighter tone of the same color on the upper half. The floors, of green and white tile, were clean and waxed. There were no noticeable marks on the walls or the floors. The building gave the general appearance of being well kept. Walking down the corridor of classrooms reminded me of walking through a modern hospital; the doors leading into classrooms resembled doors into wards. The atmosphere was aseptic.

### Social and Cultural Themes in Attucks School:

#### The "Ideology of Failure"

Perhaps the single most pervasive and influential theme within the school which gave support to the winners-losers dichotomy was the idea that very few of the Attucks students would "make it" in American society and that large numbers would not.<sup>7</sup> For any number of reasons cited—the small number of two-parent families, the overwhelming presence of poverty, the lack of parental concern and of reading material in the home—the teachers and the administrators of Attucks School expressed the belief that the majority of students were failures. As a consequence, the role of teacher as *teacher* became minimized for large numbers of children because there was a fatalistic assumption that teaching really could make no impact or reverse the skid into failure.

The basis for this assumption was what the teachers and principals saw around them every day—that very few black people in American society do make it and large numbers are left out. Acting on what they believed to be true, the teachers attempted to salvage some fulfillment from their jobs by concentrating on those few students who they be-

<sup>7</sup>This section will not attempt to elaborate on all the social or cultural themes discernable in the school, but will focus on those that appear directly to reinforce notions of the inevitability that some children will become winners and others losers. Thus the themes, for example, of emphasizing the Christian religion; of school participation in holiday related events—Halloween, Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and so on; and of American nationalism will not be analyzed.

lieved had some opportunity to escape "the streets." Overwhelmingly in the classes observed, those few students designated by the teachers as possessing the necessary traits for mobility were the children of middle-class black families trapped in the inner city by suburban racial segregation.

The pervasive view that black schools are warehouses full of failures permeated the attitudes of both administrators and teachers. One of the principals at Attucks School suggested, when asked, what he believed would become of the children:

"Well, many of these children will go on. Most will finish elementary school and most of them, I believe, will start in high school. Some will drop out, though. A few of them will finish high school and start college. I am trying to say that I don't think that the school is going to make that much difference. If it does, you won't really be able to say. I feel some will be successful, but most will be at the same level as their parents. Some will be on relief. Now I would say that when this generation grows up the percentage on relief [55% in the school currently] should decrease, and that will be an accomplishment in itself."

One teacher who had stratified her children on perceived ability levels noted:

"I guess the best way to describe it is to say that very few children in my class are exceptional. I guess you could notice this just from the way the children were seated this year. Those at Table 1 gave consistently the most responses throughout the year and seemed most interested and aware of what was going on in the classroom."

Of those children whom she placed at the remaining two tables, she commented:

"It seems to me that some of the children at Table 2 and most all the children at Table 3 at times seem to have no idea of what is going on in the classroom and are off in another world all by themselves. It



just appears that some can make it and some cannot. I don't think that it is the teaching that affects those that cannot do it, but some are just basically low achievers."

A second grade teacher when interviewed expressed many of the same attitudes as the teacher quoted above. This teacher also tracked her students by table, although she did not use numbers for table designation. Instead she gave the three tables, ranked in descending order of perceived ability, the names "Tigers," "Cardinals," and "Clowns." Of the Tigers she noted:

"Well, they are my fastest group. They are all very smart. They all feel an education is important and most of them have goals in life as to what they want to be. They mostly want to go to college."

On the Cardinals:

"They are slow to finish their work, but they do get finished. You know, a lot of them, though, don't care to come to school too much."

Finally, the Clowns, whom she seated at the last table:

"Well, they are really slow. You know most of them are still doing first grade work.

"They are very playful. They like to talk a lot. They are not very neat. . . . They always want to stand up. . . . All these children, too, are very aggressive.

"I don't think education means much to them at this age. I know it doesn't mean much to Lou and Nick. To most of these kids, I don't think it matters very much.

"This is just the way it goes for a lot of the kids in the class. They are not going to go anywhere."

The presence of such attitudes at all levels of the city public school system provided a constant reiteration of the causes for the failure of so many of the students. So long as the source of the failure of the students was held to be outside the structural and bureaucratic domain of

the school itself, then the school and its practices were not called into question. In such a perspective, teachers were encouraged to "do the best they could" and be realistic in their assessment that they really could not do much for the majority of their students. As a consequence, since students were not to be taught yet had to remain within the school for many hours each day, the task for the teachers became one of maintaining control—insuring that the students did not disrupt the smooth functioning of their own confinement.

### Violence and Control

Though the appearance of the school and the silence in the halls during class periods gave the impression of tranquility, there was an undercurrent of violence that was never far below the surface. Corporal punishment was administered by the teachers as well as by the principal in disregard of the rules. According to school regulations, no child was to be struck by anyone but the principal and then only in the presence of the classroom teacher. There appeared to be an informal agreement among the teachers that nothing be openly said about their use of corporal punishment—primarily, it seemed, because most of them relied on it. The teachers frequently stressed in interviews that they believed the children lacked the self-control necessary to maintain proper conduct in the halls and that the threat or use of violence was necessary to keep them "on the line."

During the periods of the day when there were large numbers of children in the hallways at one time, the teachers would come out of their rooms and stand by their doorways. They would carry long rattans four or five feet in length, wrapped in white adhesive tape. There appeared to be a general assumption shared by all the teachers as well as by the principal that the implicit threat of violence was necessary to insure that the children would move in an orderly fashion in the halls. Though I did not observe frequent use of rattans, there were occasions when the implicit threat was transferred into explicit violence.

As I left the kindergarten classroom at 2:05 p.m., the bell had just rung to begin recess. As I entered the hall, two boys were fighting with one another while the teacher was hitting them both on the back of the neck with a long rattan. There was a great deal of shouting. The halls appeared to be in complete chaos. A number of the teachers were out of their rooms and using their rattans. It was evident that, even though the teachers were hitting the children, they were not in control of the situation.

On another occasion, though I did not observe the actual use of rattans, their presence suggested the final resolution of any teacher-pupil conflict.

As I walked from the kindergarten classroom toward the principal's office during the recess period, I saw several teachers gathered around a group of students. One teacher called out in a loud voice, "Okay, now stay on that line. Boy, get yourself back on that line." This she said in a rather firm and harsh voice. The four teachers with this group of students all carried their rattans and one teacher kept hitting the side of her leg with her rattan.

Control of the children was a concern not only during recess but also during regular class sessions.

As I walked with several of the children from the kindergarten room to the nurse's office, we passed the room of one of the fourth grade teachers. She was standing by her desk, and we could quite easily hear her shout at one of the children: "You shut your big fat mouth and keep your head on the table or I'll keep it there for you."

The teachers' periodic discussions of methods of controlling the children and the necessity for doing so reinforced their belief that the children were extremely violence-prone. Within the classroom, they suggested, it was only the continual and persistent use of control-oriented behavior that inhibited the emergence of violence and the disruption of

the teaching process. At least some of the teachers had chosen the grade levels at which they taught on the basis of how much discipline they thought necessary to control the children.

On the way to the teacher's lounge, Mrs. Benson introduced me to one of the special education teachers on the second floor, Mrs. Warner. The three of us began discussing the special education class in the school, and Mrs. Warner said that she had received a minor in special education, but that she would not mind going back to teaching children in a regular class. She stated that she would especially like to teach kindergarten because they "were all such cute little dolls. They will do anything you want." Mrs. Benson then commented that she didn't really like to teach the second grade, "because you have to spend so much time with them individually." She said, though, that she did like the children because they were "so lovable." "They will come up and love me and hug me and want to kiss me. You know, I'm afraid to shout at them because they are so small and so cute that I'm afraid that I will make one of them cry." Mrs. Warner then commented that the warmth of the children was one of the reasons that she liked kindergarten. She then noted, "You know, girl, you will never get me teaching some of those older kids. They would just as soon hit you as look at you." Mrs. Benson agreed and stated that that was the reason that she would never teach above the third grade level. She stated that children beyond third grade were so "tough and hard" that one could "not do anything with them."

Likewise, the seventh grade teacher said that she decided to teach seventh grade only after she knew she could "control them." She stated that since she could handle the older students, she would rather teach them instead of the younger "crybabies."

Mrs. Crawford said that she didn't worry too much about any of the students "jumping her" because they were all so "puny." She stated that she did have one boy who gave her a lot of trouble, but

she smiled and said, "He chooses to stay home a lot so I don't have to worry." One of the other teachers said, "You mean David" and Mrs. Crawford responded, "Who else?" Then several of the other teachers began to speak about David and his brothers and sisters in the school. They also commented about his mother coming to the school and "nagging" about the grades given to her children. Several of the teachers said that they would be glad when the children had all left the school, for then they would not have to deal with the mother.

With the very young children, a different technique was occasionally used—that of the threat of extreme punishment beyond the experience of the child.

As I walked past the door to the first grade classroom, I heard the teacher, Mrs. Logan, say to the children that she did not like to eat little boys and little girls. She stated that she was not a "mean animal." She said that she was their very best friend in the school and that anytime they ever had anything to tell her or ask her, they should do so because she was their friend. She then said, "I've never eaten a little boy or girl in my whole life." Her voice then became quite harsh, and she continued, "But when you want to go to the bathroom, you have to ask me; you cannot simply get up and walk out of the room."

Though the teacher said that she had never eaten a child and that she would not enjoy doing so, she implied that it might happen should the children fail to ask permission to go to the restroom. On another occasion during a field trip with the second grade class to a large building downtown, the teacher warned the children that they would have to stay away from the edge of the stairs or she would "throw them over the railing" to the floor two stories below. The children appeared to have no reason to doubt her word, and they all moved down the stairs staying very close to the wall. An adult would dismiss such threats as

hollow, but perhaps they sound quite plausible to a five-year-old who hears them from a teacher.

When a teacher was out of her room for any length of time, it was an accepted practice in the school for a student from one of the eighth grade classes to come into the room and supervise the children. The older child was allowed to use whatever methods he or she deemed necessary to maintain control in the class. One such situation resulted in serious consequences:

As I was about to leave the nurse's office with Brad, four young girls walked into the office, one of them crying very loudly, almost hysterically. The nurse calmly walked over to them and asked what was the matter. One of the girls not crying explained that this girl had just come back to school after an eye operation and that a big girl in the classroom had hit her with a stick. The child that had been hit was in the first grade. The child was bent over and I could not tell what damage had been done to her eye. As I shortly walked back to the kindergarten classroom, I passed the first grade room. I looked in through the door window and observed a large eighth grade girl walking around the room indiscriminately striking the children with the rattan. Almost all of the children were out of their seats and making attempts to keep out of the reach of this girl. Several of the children were crying, one boy was holding the back of his neck and a girl was holding her arm. The older girl continued to stalk around the room attempting to reach the children to strike them. She was shouting to them to "shut up," "sit down," and "git back in your seats." I entered the room, and as I did, the teacher from the room across the hall followed me. She dismissed the eighth grade student and told the first grade students to get ready for recess. Several of the children were sobbing.

When the teacher dismissed the eighth grade girl, she did so without rebuke, merely indicating that the girl could leave as it was time for recess and that she would now take the children out to recess with her

own class. Apparently the situation did not seem to her to warrant any admonition to the older girl.

Older children were used to control younger children in other ways. The eighth grade boys were the school patrol, who had responsibility not only for helping children to cross the streets safely before and after school, but also for maintaining quiet and order in the halls and assisting the two teachers assigned to the playground during lunch period. The four boys assigned to the inside corridors were observed pushing smaller children in the halls as well as forcing them out of the halls onto the playground. The four patrol boys on the playground, who shared with the teachers the responsibility of lining up the children by grade before they could reenter the school after a recess or lunch period, would push and shove the children into lines on the playground and then shove them as they began to walk inside. (All the children marched double file into the school with the younger grades first, girls before boys.) Children in the upper grades were also used as lunchroom monitors to supervise the younger children as they ate. No teachers were assigned to lunchroom duty. Supervision was assumed by the cooks, occasionally by a teacher's aide, by the older children, and by the physical education instructors. The principal was seldom present. *The violence system of the school was hierarchical, all teachers and the principal free to exercise violence against any children and the older children free to do so against the younger.* At least some of the students recognized this; several fourth graders told me that they wished they were eighth grade patrol boys so they could "beat up" children they did not like.

The violence within the school appeared to reflect the presence of violence in the larger cultural milieu. On one occasion when I went to the school, the children were very excited and related that there had just been a murder in front of the school. A man walking on the sidewalk had been shot from a passing car. During another visit, I witnessed the police chasing several fugitives in front of the school, and a

number of shots were fired. I once observed a very real threat to the kindergarten teacher, as two men came off the street and intruded into the classroom.

Two men, appearing to be in their early twenties, walked into the classroom and stood by the door. The kindergarten teacher walked over to them and asked what they were doing. They replied that they were watching. She became very firm and told them that they would have to leave the school. At first they refused to move and she said again, "I'm asking you to leave or I will call the principal." They then left the classroom and stood in the hallway. She asked them if either had a pass to be in the building and they stated that they did. She asked to see it and they told her that they weren't going to show it to her. She then went to the first grade classroom, saying that she would call the office. The men left the building and she soon returned to the class. She commented to me that the teachers on the first floor were often bothered by intruders off the street. She stated that they were "roughhousers" who were no longer in school and wanted to cause trouble for the teachers and the students. The kindergarten teacher appeared quite disturbed and upset. Before she went back in front of the class, she stated, "It's awfully hard to teach when you have to be a policeman too."

With no other means at her disposal, the kindergarten teacher attempted to bluff her way out of the situation and make the men leave without incident. It was a bluff because there was no phone in the first grade classroom by which the teacher could contact the office. There was a two-way communications system in the building but the switch was in the principal's office. The teachers spoke of this type of incident on several occasions and expressed anxiety over the lack of security in the school during class hours. They pointed out that, with each teacher isolated in her room, there was little chance anyone would know if another was in danger.

### Patterns of Reciprocity

Attucks School is one subunit of a larger organized and structured bureaucratic organization, the city public school system. There is a series of regulations which all schools in the city must follow, and the authority to insure compliance lies with the central administration. The individual schools also have their own rules, and on this level it is the principal who insures that regulations and goals are not disregarded. As Gouldner (1954) and many others have noted, within a bureaucracy and its series of formal rules there develop informal norms and patterns of behavior. An example I observed of the impact of failure to adhere to established norms involved the two principals who were at Attucks School during the course of my study. The first, Mr. Miller, was in the school during the 1967-1968 and 1968-1969 school years. The second, Mr. Elder, took over the position on September 1, 1969.

The principal's job entailed responsibility for the school and its functions, but not the authority commensurate with such responsibility. This was especially true of the principal's relationship with the teaching staff. He was dependent upon their performance in their roles as teachers and their acceptance of his leadership in order for the school to function. Yet he did not have the formal power to dismiss teachers who would not comply with his "requests." (The principal was not in a position to make demands, for they might be ignored or challenged, thus creating a direct confrontation in which the exact extent of his authority was at question.) The teachers, on the other hand, were dependent upon the principal in at least one very crucial area—the disciplining of disruptive students in their classrooms. Regulations stipulated that teachers must request the principal to use physical punishment against a child. It was to be the prerogative of the principal to strike children. In Attucks School an informal norm of reciprocity developed whereby the teachers granted legitimacy and leadership to the principal in return for his discipline of difficult students.

During the 1967-1968 school year, the pattern of reciprocity between principal and teachers became seriously strained and was nearly

broken by the end of the year. The conflict arose from the teachers' complaint that the principal, Mr. Miller, was failing to handle the disruptive students sent from the classroom to his office to sit for a period of time in the "bull pen." Occasionally, the teachers claimed, Mr. Miller would ask a student who had been thus detained as punishment to do special errands for him in the building. One teacher said that when a student whom she had sent to the office for disciplining came back in twenty minutes with a message from the principal, she decided that she would no longer send any of her students to the office. This was also the case with a number of the other teachers, most notably those from upper grades. An informal boycott of the principal's authority developed among many of the teachers as a response to his failure to take what they considered adequate measures against difficult students. The teachers said that Mr. Miller was not providing them with the necessary support to insure that they could teach without disruptions. Thus, a number of the teachers ignored the informal norm of reciprocity, and they began disciplining children within their individual rooms, seemingly without the knowledge or permission of the principal. Additional tactics employed by the teachers to negate the authority of the principal during that school year included either avoiding or leaving early from staff meetings, failing to participate on committees established by the principal, and not submitting reports on time to the office.

The formal bureaucratic structure of the city public school system provided a mechanism that enabled teachers to bypass the principal in the hierarchy and deal directly with the supervisor at the district level. As the displeasure of the teachers with Mr. Miller increased, several of them told me that they had expressed their views to the district office through the district supervisors. Mr. Miller was transferred to another school within the district at the end of the 1968-1969 school year. Subsequently, when I returned for formal observations in the 1969-1970 school year, different teachers related how they had urged the district office to remove Mr. Miller as principal. It is not possible to

state conclusively that the discontent of the teachers was the major reason for the transfer, but it may have served as a significant catalyst. After the arrival of the new principal, Mr. Elder, at the school for the 1969-1970 school year, I did not witness the same high incidence of physical punishment among the teachers as in previous years when Mr. Miller was principal. The frequency with which teachers used their rattans during recess periods was also noticeably less. The continual presence of the principal with children in the halls and his willingness, in the words of one teacher, to "get down with the children instead of always trying to be above them" were used to explain the decrease in student disruption.

From the informal conversations of the teachers, I believe the amount of classroom violence had also decreased. They commented repeatedly how well they liked the new principal and said that he handled discipline problems to their satisfaction. The degree to which he would "back them up" when discipline problems arose especially pleased them. The informal norms of reciprocity reemerged. The teachers actively complied with the requests of the principal, and he, in turn, dealt with disruptive behavior in the classrooms. All appeared to recognize the necessity for this mutual support as movement toward the establishment of the exchange began. Several teachers sent students to the office on the first full day of school, and, there was perfect attendance at the first staff meetings the principal called. But even though Mr. Elder supported his staff in discipline matters, the threat of violence and punishment continued to be present in the school. While acts of violence in the halls decreased considerably, the teachers still occasionally exercised the use of corporal punishment within their individual classrooms. I observed both the second and fourth grade teachers strike children.

#### ✓ Exchange of Information

The teachers at Attucks School also developed among themselves a series of informal norms governing the exchange of information consid-

ered important either to individuals or to the group. The most important of these obliged a teacher to share with others pertinent information on classroom organization or control. Though there was occasional trading of suggestions on methods of discipline, teachers primarily shared information regarding persons believed to be disruptive to the classroom routine, whether parents or students. When a teacher had trouble with a certain student or parent, she would pass this information on to the others, most often at either the recess or lunch period. On several occasions, I noted teachers making a special effort to inform another teacher about a student entering her class who was labeled disruptive.

One student and his family who had acquired an undesirable reputation among the teachers were David and his mother (mentioned earlier in the comments of the seventh grade teacher, Mrs. Crawford). At one time, David had been transferred to another school because of "classroom overcrowding," according to the teacher.

As the gossip about Miss Stern drew to a close, a teacher from the fifth grade came into the room momentarily and told Mrs. Crawford that she had better "be careful" because she had heard that David was being transferred back to Attucks School. Mrs. Crawford commented, "That boy better not come back over here, because if he comes, I go. I've already got Jim and Terry, and if I have David besides, it's all over." The teacher who had come into the room responded, "I'm not sure, but I heard the principal talking about it on the phone." "Girl, I sure hope not," was the reply of Mrs. Crawford.

Being thus forewarned, the teacher then had the options of requesting the principal that David be placed in a different room or attempting to arrange an exchange with another of the seventh grade teachers for one of their difficult students. A third possibility would, of course, have been to argue that continued "classroom overcrowding" made it unfeasible to bring David back into the room. Regardless of personal relations, the teachers were expected to share information with others

directly affected. At no time did I hear of a teacher deliberately withholding information from another teacher because of either personal animosity or belief that the other teacher had failed on a previous occasion to reciprocate information.

### **An Atmosphere for Failure?**

It is a premise of this study that to understand the phenomenon of academic success or failure among black children in urban schools, one must look beyond the boundaries of the individual classroom and examine the social and cultural milieu of the school itself. *In Attucks School both the milieu of the classroom and the milieu of the school appeared to sustain one another in a pattern of reinforcement of accepted values and modes of behavior.* The ideology of failure, the presence of violence and control-oriented behavior, patterns of teacher-principal reciprocity, and exchange of information among the teachers all helped to establish the atmosphere within the school and within individual classrooms. There was a cycle in which the milieu of the school influenced the learning experience of the children, which in turn helped to define the behavior and responses of the teachers and principal who had major responsibility for the social themes set by the school.

Such conditions as negative expectations for the children, the utilization of violence, and the exchange of deprecatory information among teachers are destructive of a humane and supportive learning milieu. They may in fact sustain the very forms of behavior and academic performance which the teachers decry. The principal and the teachers conform to patterns of behavior they claim to be necessary because of the performance of the students and thus place themselves in the position of instigating and reinforcing the failure and withdrawal of students.

Furthermore, so long as the structure and orientation of a school like Attucks retain the form described, one can expect these social and cultural conditions to continue. For example, the organizational ar-

rangements of the school sustain the presence of violence by causing it to be sanctioned as punishment and accepted as legitimate by school officials. The debate within Attucks School was not about whether violence should be used, but about when it was appropriate. This suggests that if there is serious intention of treating black children in a more humane manner within the school palliative measures of "restraining" the use of violence will not be sufficient. Rather, there will have to be a fundamental shift in how black children within the school are viewed. They must no longer be viewed as people to be "controlled," but rather as individuals to be taught and, most importantly, respected. The use of coercion and violence on children as young as four or five to insure institutional conformity reflects on the nature of the institution as well as the regard in which the children are held by those who know them incapable of defending themselves.

clean group" and that the two could not remain in the high group because they were not neat. David and Anne were described as "extremely neat with their desk and floor." When moved to the Cardinals, Virginia and Joe were placed in the back seats of the group.

With this incident in mind, we might rephrase the quotation from Michael Katz's work given early in the book: "The acceptable, by and large, take the best marks and the best jobs."

We began this study with the contention that myths die hard in America. If what we have seen in Attucks School is representative, we can add that inequality will also die hard. What we have found is an interlocking pattern of institutional arrangements descending from the macrolevel of the city-wide school system to the social and cultural milieu of a single school to the various stratification techniques employed by individual teachers in their classrooms. The outcome of this multileveled organization is ultimately expressed by comparing the experiences of the Tigers to those of the Cardinals and Clowns or more precisely, comparing the experiences of Laura to those of Lilly.

Throughout the various levels of the St. Louis educational system we found commonly shared assumptions about "how things really are." The basic tenets may be summarized as follows: Middle-class students can learn, lower-class students cannot; white schools are "good," black schools are "bad"; control is necessary, freedom is anarchy; violence works, persuasion does not; teachers can save a few, but will lose many; the school tries, the home will not; and finally, only the naive would dispute these beliefs, as the wise know. *The outcome of this set of attitudes, assumptions, and values is that the*



*school as an institution sustains, in a myriad of ways, the inequalities with which children first come to school. The school's response to issues of color, class, and control all mesh together to make two nets—one to catch winners and one to catch losers.*

### Teaching and Learning in Attucks School

A major goal of this study has been to demonstrate the means by which teachers' assumptions manifest themselves within the classroom setting. These assumptions transform themselves into expectations for individual children, with the result that differential treatment is accorded various members of the same class. The single most influential variable to which the teachers responded was the social class background of the student. Thus, the kindergarten teacher's expectations as to who would emerge within the class as a "fast learner" and who would emerge as a "slow learner" clearly delineated the middle-class students from their peers. It is important to reiterate that when the teacher made her seating assignments on the eighth day, she had no formal measures of academic ability or cognitive development to aid in her evaluation.

With both the first and second grade teachers, the process of within-class differentiation resulted in patterns of classroom organization not dissimilar from those of the kindergarten teacher. The latter two teachers, however, created their tracking systems not on the basis of subjective interpretations, but by evaluating the previous test scores and readiness material completed by each student. The end result of this "objective" placement of students in different groups was the reinforcement of internal class divisions instigated by the kindergarten teacher.

One outcome of within-class tracking was the creation of a pattern of segregation among the students based on the socioeconomic positions of their parents. Among those defined by the teachers as expected to learn were the students who came to school clean and neatly

dressed, who came from homes intact and middle-class in attributes, who displayed interest in the teacher, continually sought interaction with her, and who quickly learned the routine of schooling. On the other side of the segregation barrier were the students who were often dirty and smelling of urine, who came from poor homes frequently headed by one parent, who did not seek interaction with the teacher, and who never appeared to grasp the subtleties of the school routine. The relative impermeability of the top group through the various grades gave it a caste-like character violated only once in two and a half years.

In the examination of specific classrooms, there emerged at least two identifiable interactional processes which operated simultaneously. Both occurred between teacher and student and both evolved four distinct stages. Using the kindergarten as an example, the first involved the teacher and the students sitting at Table 1. Initially the kindergarten teacher developed expectations for different students in her class, some of whom she believed met the criteria essential for future academic success. Second, she reinforced through mechanisms of positive differential treatment those particular characteristics deemed important and desirable in that select group. In turn, the students responded with the behavior which helped them from the beginning to gain the attention and support of the teacher. Thus, the Table 1 students perceived that verbalization was an ability that the teacher admired and so persisted with high levels of verbalization throughout the year. The cycle completed itself as the teacher again focused even more specifically on the Table 1 students, in whom she found the behavior she desired. The end of this process was the creation of an interactional scheme in which certain early forms of behavior exhibited by the students came to be permanent behavioral patterns, continually reinforced by the teacher.

A concurrent behavioral process went on between the teacher and students placed at Tables 2 and 3. These students came into the class possessing a series of attributes, both behavioral and social, which the

teacher perceived as indicative of "failure" within her frame of reference. By reinforcing her initial expectations, she made it evident that she did not consider them similar or equal to the students classified as fast learners. Those marked as potential and probable failures responded accordingly. That is, because of the teacher's use of control, her lack of verbal interaction and encouragement, her allocation of a disproportionately small amount of her teaching time, and her various techniques of exclusion, this group of students withdrew from classroom participation. The final stage was the cyclical repetition of solidifying behavioral and attitudinal characteristics initially labeled unacceptable. Like the students in the first group, the anticipated failures were not objectively tested before they were tracked.

Generally, one might assume that the students in the class as a whole possessed the range of potentials and abilities necessary to cope with the demands and routines of schooling. Yet without ascertaining those potentials, the teacher responded on the basis of social class criteria which inhibited two groups of students from changing positions—those in the higher group who in fact did not have the potential and those in the lower groups who did. This analysis should not be misconstrued to imply that segregation resulting from ability tracking in the classroom on the basis of objective criteria would be acceptable. What I do suggest is that the teacher by her actions may have created a situation in which those in the higher group who might not have been expected "objectively" to perform at the high level came to do so and those in the lower group from whom one "objectively" would expect more came to give less: all in accordance with the teacher's expectations.

From a different perspective one might argue that the teachers in Attucks School created their tracking systems not because they believed their students to be so dissimilar that they required entirely different treatment, but because they were quite similar. That is, the teachers may have assumed that the conditions within the black community were so strongly inhibitive to the development of successful middle-

class life styles that it became absolutely necessary to "save" those few whom they perceived as having even the slightest opportunity. The patterns of classroom segregation were created to protect the high group from the lower groups, with their interests in the "streets," their use of "bad" language, and their lack of regard for school. One teacher, in fact, stated that the school had two types of students—those with "street blood" and those with "school blood." The pathos and the sense of the tenuousness of success in the black community that are evident in these assumptions are not entirely without foundation. As Jencks (1972b) has so amply demonstrated, the middle-class black father has less than half the opportunity of the middle-class white father to pass on the benefits of his position to his offspring, in terms of both occupation and income.

Within the classrooms, one of the seemingly inescapable consequences of the segregation systems was that the children themselves quickly picked up what it meant to be on one side of the barrier or the other. Each group of students began to emulate the teacher's treatment of the other. The high group followed the teacher in their ridicule, belittlement, physical abuse, and social ostracism of the lower groups. In short, middle-class students were learning, very early on, the mannerisms and techniques of how to deal with the lower class. The lower-class students displayed patterns of deference and passivity toward those of the high group. They seldom returned the ridicule in kind and infrequently began any sort of conflict with the high group. Thus the middle-class students were learning to control the poor, and the poor students were learning to shuffle. The classrooms became microcosms of the larger society in which cultural values were transmitted and put into operation so as to legitimate the attitudes and assumptions necessary for the perpetuation of inequality.

An important part of this transmission of cultural values is the definition given to the activities of major institutions. The current institutional arrangements in this society favor the affluent and discriminate against the poor. This holds true whether one examines patterns of political

power, economic concentration, occupational mobility, or access to the goods and services available in the society. Those who benefit are not likely to clamor for change in the status quo. In fact, what often emerges is an attempt to rationalize the inequalities as natural, inevitable, and desirable. This, in fact, has occurred in American schools. The patterns of schooling function so as to reward the kinds of activities and interests characteristic of middle- and upper-income students while ignoring or negating the contributions of lower-class students. The rationalizations for this inequality take the form of defending "standards" that are class based, of proclaiming a policy of "equal treatment for all" which does no more than reinforce inequalities, and of laying the onus for lack of success on the individual rather than on the institution. Such assumptions attempt to undercut demands for change in institutional arrangements by implying that the institution is, in fact, benign and that any tinkering would only be detrimental. The only emerges when one comes to take an egalitarian position in defense of inequality. Such is the present state of American education. It should be evident from all that has gone before in this study that teachers play the central role in establishing and perpetuating the system of classroom segregation. The consequences and ramifications of this are several. First, teachers create for themselves a paradoxical position. On the one hand, they view themselves as teachers—as those who seek to aid children to learn of themselves and their world. Yet they respond to the socioeconomic differences in their students in a way that precludes for some the very opportunity for learning. They generate failure in some of their students while believing themselves to desire success for their charges. The way out of this dilemma for teachers and school systems in general is to assume that they have done all they can in the face of overwhelming environmental (and genetic) odds. As Kenneth Clark has noted (1969):

educational officials and teachers have been persuaded—and particularly have persuaded themselves—that the causes of the educational retardation of Negro children are not to be found in the quality of

teaching or school supervision. They have explained this chronic problem in terms of the children's alleged personal deficiencies—hostility and aggressiveness towards authority, low attention span, lack of educational experiences prior to entering school, and low motivation for academic work. The parents are to blame, so the teachers say, because they have "no-books-in-the-home," because they lack interest in their children's school achievement. Some educators seriously offered as an explanation of student retardation the fact that these parents "do not attend PTA meetings." They assert that the community is to blame because it suffers all the pathologies of ghettos—it has dirty streets, over-crowded and deteriorated homes, and provides no model of academic excellence and reward for children.

Secondly, teachers may be fairly equal in their use of praise and reward with their students and still reinforce differences through use of control. The second grade teacher, for example, gave nearly equal amounts of verbal reward to the Clowns and to the Tigers. Yet the pervasiveness of control-oriented behavior toward the Clowns effectively thwarted a positive learning situation. One might only surmise what consequences the reversal of this situation would have had on patterns of performance within the class.

Third, the teachers' seemingly immutable assumption of the class-based differences in children was grounded not in an attempt to be malicious, but in their belief that "some can do it and some cannot." On one level it is possible to agree with the teachers that profound differences do exist between children because of environment, genetic endowment, and interaction between the two. However, the issue is not so much whether differences do exist, for there are few who would argue that children all come from the same mold, but what, in fact, one does with such information. If one responds in such a way as to assume that initial differences will be manifest as eternal differences, then a determinist theory of man results in classrooms where attempts at minimizing such differences are viewed as useless exercise. In such classrooms, the teacher can do little more than follow the "inevitable." If, though, a teacher acknowledges that children come to the classroom with differences, but that they also are capable of learning of their world, then the teacher-student relation becomes of immense

importance in the pursuit of academic performance and cognitive development. The stagnation of tracking systems can be broken only by redefining what is supposed to happen inside classrooms.

The teachers did not acknowledge the adaptations made by the students placed in the lower groups as having any function in the making of "successful" students. Faced with ridicule from teacher and peers, receiving on occasion as little as one-sixth of the teaching time of the top group, and subject to continual control-oriented behavior, the students developed among themselves patterns of secondary learning, of infrequently giving the teacher the response sought, and often giving no response at all. Teachers saw these reactions as further evidence that the students were "not yet ready" to handle the material being taught to the high group. The reinforcement of the self-fulfilling prophecy persisted when teachers thus misinterpreted student behavior initially instigated, in part, as a reaction to their own behavior.

Finally, and in defense of the teachers, it has not been a contention of this study that the teachers observed in Attucks School could not effectively teach their students. In my estimation, they taught quite well.

*Competence, however, is not the issue. The issue is the unequal accessibility to students of that competence.* Students who came to the classroom from middle-class homes experienced a positive and rewarding learning situation where they were given large amounts of teacher attention, were the subject of little control-oriented behavior, held as models for the remainder of the class, and continually reminded that they were "special" students. Hypothetically, if Attucks School had contained only those students perceived by teachers as having the traits necessary for middle-class status and future success, I would anticipate that the teachers would have continued to teach well, and in these circumstances, to the entire class. The consequences of reserving their teaching for those whom they believed were destined to become winners necessarily resulted in the avoidance of those destined to become losers. And losers are what they became.

### What is to be Done? Reflections on Policies, Priorities, and Options

What follows is predicated upon one basic assumption: that an advocacy of the rights and freedoms of children supersedes the need to legitimate or perpetuate any educational institution touching their lives. Thus it is not the system that must be preserved, but the integrity of the child; not the administrative positions, but the environment for learning; and not the necessity of adapting for institutional survival, but the gaining and sustaining of individual freedom.

Asking the question, "What is to be done with American schools?" is like opening a Pandora's box. The alternatives may range from a return to "traditional" emphasis upon such skills as reading and writing, to the creation of "discovery centers" where children would be free to plot and chart their own courses in what they seek to learn, to the ultimate disbanding or disestablishing of schools as a distinct institution. There is, of course, the additional possibility of allowing schools to continue as they are. To provide some delineation for a discussion of options in American education, the following propositions are offered as a context within which various policies and programs might be evaluated.

First, the school as a state-financed institution requiring attendance will be with us into the indefinite future. This does not rule out the continued existence of private, parochial, or "alternative" schools. But the realities of large and increasingly powerful teacher organizations; of communities with tens of millions of dollars invested in buildings, equipment and supplies; of parents who want someone else to "teach" their children; and of an industrial society which utilizes educational credentials as a means to sort and categorize persons for different social class positions, all lead me to believe that the bureaucracy of public schooling will persist. Further, the chief means by which this bureaucracy has retained its clients has been compulsory attendance. I do not envision schools becoming so free as to offer children and parents the option of whether or not to attend.

Ivan Illich (1971) has argued that schools should be "disestablished" or else society should be "deschooled" so that learning ceases to be the scarce commodity held by a few and distributed at their discretion. The end result, Illich argues, of such differential access to "learning" is the perpetuation of inequality between those who possess it and those who do not. I agree with his critique of education as "commodity," but as Gintis (1972) has noted, there is yet a step beyond negating the current educational systems. A new synthesis is reached by recreating in such a manner as to transform their functions. Gintis suggests that it is irrelevant to speak of "deschooling" when American society chooses not to talk also of the means by which to "de-office," "de-factory," or more generally, "de-bureaucratize." He proposes that the issue is not whether schools are going to wither away, but whom they will serve. Gintis assumes, "... Schools are so important to the reproduction of the capitalist society that they are unlikely to crumble under any but the most massive political onslaughts." Thus, so long as the current institutional arrangements in schooling continue serving the ultimate stratification functions they presently do, the central arena for educational change becomes the political arena. Political, for the aim is not to abolish, but to transform so as to work toward the creation of a new social system. He notes:

The only presently viable political strategy in education ... is what Rudi Deutchke terms "the long march through the institutions," involving the localized struggles for what Andre Gorz calls "non-reformist reforms," i.e., reforms which effectively strengthen the power of the teachers vis-a-vis administrators, and of students vis-à-vis teachers. ... In other words, the correct immediate political goal is the nurturing of individuals both liberated (i.e., demanding control over their lives and outlets for their creative activities and relationships) and politically aware of the true nature of their misalignment with the larger society.

A second proposition, which follows in part from the first, recognizes that, as Jencks (1972b) has written, "schools serve primarily to legitimize inequality, not to create it." As was manifestly evident in Attucks School, the inequalities, for example, with which Laura and Lilly came to school were reinforced, not reduced. The social class configura-

tions of the larger society were mirrored and affirmed in the patterns of organization within individual rooms. Jencks notes: "... Schools serve primarily as selection and certification agencies, whose job is to measure and label people, and only secondarily as socialization agencies, whose job is to change people." (p. 135)

A wide range of major research findings, including the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey, a study of the ninety-one high schools included in the Project Talent survey, and the Census Bureau studies of social mobility and income distribution, all provided Jencks with evidence. Given the seminal importance of Jencks' work, it is crucial to recapitulate his major findings and implications for American education. They may be summarized in five points:

1. Access to the resources of schools is distributed quite unequally, being directly related both to social class position and length of time spent in school. Access also varies with race, whites benefiting more than blacks.
2. "We found that both genetic and environmental inequality played a major role in producing cognitive inequality. We also found that those who started life with genetic advantages tended to get environmental advantages as well, and that this exacerbated inequality. ... We found no evidence that differences between schools contributed significantly to cognitive inequality ..." (pp. 253-254)
3. The family background of an individual was more influential in determining how much schooling he received than either intelligence (measured by IQ) or quality of schooling.
4. The occupation one eventually attains is directly affected by educational background, and educational background is influenced by family background. Thus family background becomes the more important of several factors ultimately influencing occupational status.
5. Education influences the options one has for first entering a particular occupation, but it does not have much effect on earnings or competence within that occupation.

The implications of these findings for the future of American educa-

tion and for the issue of inequality in general create the basis for a third proposition: that reform within the schools can ultimately have only marginal effect on the inequality that exists outside schools. *Consequently, if one wishes to reduce the present inequality in American society, it is more advantageous to attack it directly than to attempt to ameliorate it through manipulating the institution of school, which is only tangentially related to the creation of that inequality.* If one wishes to make the situations of adults more equal in income, opportunities for mobility, and job security, then it is necessary to address oneself to the consequences of differential family backgrounds in terms of socioeconomic variables rather than school curricula, teachers' credentials, size of gymnasiums, presence or absence of language laboratories, number of foreign languages taught, and the like. As Jencks summarizes:

There seem to be three reasons why school reform cannot make adults more equal. First, children seem to be far more influenced by what happens at home than by what happens in school. They may also be more influenced by what happens on the streets and by what they see on television. Second, reformers have very little control over those aspects of school life that affect children. Reallocating resources, reassigning pupils, and rewriting the curriculum seldom change the way teachers and students actually treat each other minute by minute. Third, even when a school exerts an unusual influence on children, the resulting changes are not very likely to persist into adulthood. (pp. 255-256)

Applying these findings to the realities of what occurred in Attucks School, the best hope for those who sat at the Clown table lies not in anything that might be done for them within the classroom (though for humane reasons alone, change is necessary), but what might instead be done about the social class position of their families in American society. It is here that Attucks School weaves itself into the national pattern of generating educational winners and losers. Schools do not exist as agents of change, but as institutions which have been created to sustain, reinforce, and affirm existing structural and ideological arrangements. They have been created to reflect this society, not to

transform it. It should not be surprising, then, if the income differential between the top fifth and the bottom fifth of American workers is 600 percent, that schools would mirror such inequalities. The point is that inequalities in the political and economic spheres of this society intrude into the space of the schools and are there reinforced. Consequently, the elimination of massive differentials in income and salary, in the control of property and assets, in the accessibility of mobility, in the possibilities for securing meaningful employment, and finally, in the ability to pass on the benefits of one's labors to one's children must be dealt with as the political realities they are, and not as the pedagogical issues they are not.

If we accept the correctness of these three propositions—that compulsory public schooling will be with us for the foreseeable future; that the organizational arrangements inside schools legitimate current patterns of inequality, but do not create them; and that reforming schools does not necessarily imply dealing with the inequalities of the larger society—then we might consider the following implications. First, we can liberate ourselves from the shackling myths of what schools are supposed to be doing, both for the benefit of the students and for the larger society. We can put down the notions that schools are the "great equalizer" that provides everyone equal access to the mobility escalators. Rather, we can recognize the realities of how schools reinforce social class differences and act to preserve the current arrangements. There is little possibility of transforming the schools to the point where they do not serve this legitimizing function if it is not first acknowledged that in fact they do.

Second, given the central stratification functions which schools serve for our economic system, it may be the most we can hope for—short of a major restructuring of economic institutions—that schools be organized in such a way as not to exacerbate the inequalities present in the society. I seriously doubt that schools are in a position to overcome the current economic and political inequalities, but it may at best be possible to withdraw schools from their legitimizing function through

such means as the refusal to label any child by whatever negative traits he or she might have and the refusal to establish tracking systems. These types of changes may not appear to be systemic, and they are not, with regard to the magnitude of inequality in American society. But then again, the schools are not at the root of adult inequality. Thus we arrive at the fact that resolving school problems does not present itself as necessarily an effective means to resolving societal problems. Third, the foregoing allows us to begin to approach schools as an end in their own right, not as a mechanism designed to serve some alternative motives. We can begin to ask questions about how the time that children have to spend in schools should be organized so as to maximize the benefits for them. If schools are no longer assumed to have to provide the means to reach mobility escalators, because such escalators are not even primarily related to schooling, then what one does with twelve years of a child's life takes on a new dimension.

Bereiter (1972), for example, suggests that we split the current elementary school system into two, one part of which will provide training in spelling, reading, calculation and writing, while the second will provide child care areas where the child is free to explore as he wishes without the pressure of an adult attempting to "teach" something. Once we disabuse our thinking of the mythical functions of schools, we can begin to meet the needs of children in a humane way that does not require them to be more than simply children.

As we give up our grand illusions, we can set goals which more realistically fit what can be accomplished by teachers and students doing something together. Perhaps the most basic goal would be to provide outgoing students with the necessary means to function in this society. I am thinking particularly of insuring that within those twelve years, children learn to write, to spell, to do arithmetic, and to read. In San Francisco a lawsuit has been brought against the city Board of Education by a youth who was graduated with a fifth-grade reading level from a city high school. A good argument can be made that if one is going to be forced to attend a school, then that school should be held

responsible for accomplishing what is supposed to do—in this case teaching a high school graduate how to read at the level of high school graduates.

Establishing this sort of criterion for schools would dramatically switch the emphasis from a concern with the initial *input* of the child, for instance, I.Q., social class background, and father's occupation, to the *output* of the school. In short, schools should be called upon during the years of their hold over students to equalize in basic areas of competence those initial inequalities in academic performance with which children first come to school. Schools may not be able to transform the occupational hierarchy of this society, but they can be expected to perform so that the children of low-status parents can read a book as well as the children of high-status parents.

There are no universal antidotes one can offer to insure that all schools will become humane and rewarding places in which teachers and students can spend time together. The task of the future will be to examine the schools, if necessary one by one, to ascertain the needs, the values, and the dreams of those who will be inside their walls. Charles Silberman (1971, p. 208) believes that such schools are possible:

Schools can be humane and still educate well. They can be genuinely concerned with gaiety and joy and individual growth and fulfillment without sacrificing concern for intellectual discipline and development. They can be simultaneously child-centered and subject-centered. They can also stress esthetic and moral education without weakening the three R's.

I should like to think that the time is at hand for learning if Silberman is correct. Depending upon one's perspective, the current arrangements in schools are either working very well or not at all. If one believes that the recent graduate in San Francisco or Lilly in St. Louis deserves, nay, has the inalienable right to leave the school equipped to do what the schools say should be possible, then the current system is simply unacceptable. If we, as a society, choose to shake loose of false assumptions, surreal expectations, and the consequent crippling

of many young participants, we can begin to create settings where, because it is the humane thing to do, children are respected; where learning is valued; and where equality is pursued. In short, we can strive to create a new synthesis of words and deeds.

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