

Education, Socialization, and "The Culture of Poverty"

by Eleanor Leacock

The assumption that a "culture of poverty" explains the low level of school achievement among children of the poor, and especially of the Black poor, has become widespread in the past few years. The theory affords a neat explanation for the school's failure to educate the children of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and it is far more polite than straight racist theories of inherited inferiority. (We are in for a spate of those as well, however.)

The poverty-culture concept assumes such an early pervasive, and almost irreversible destruction of the intellectual ability, self-image, and desire to cope among poor children that they are irreparably damaged by the time of school entry. Furthermore, the "culture of poverty" idea relieves not only the school but our social system itself from blame; according to the theory, it is not the poverty itself which is so destructive, but the *culture* of poverty, passed down through the family, that does the main damage. At fault are the "values" and child-rearing patterns of the poor, who do not explain things to children but pass on to them a resigned and fatalistic lack of goals for achievement and a habit of living only for the present instead of planning for the future.

As with most socially pernicious theories, the "culture of poverty" is a melange of half-truths. Poverty is grim, but poverty-culture theory focuses primarily on the damage it does to people and ignores the coping strengths and the warmth and humanity to be found among those who are struggling for a decent life. Cultural traditions can be remarkably persistent, but it is those traditions which are in some way meaningful or functional which are preserved; culture is not a bundle of psychological imperatives divorced from socio-economic reali-

Eleanor Leacock 193

ties and historical process. There are class as well as ethnic differences in attitudes toward life goals and toward methods for achieving them; it would be surprising if there were not, since life chances between classes obviously differ. However, the cultural values and goals which are being redefined for themselves by Black Americans, Puerto Ricans, and American Indians look quite different from the "culture of poverty" tabulation of failures to live up to "middle-class" ideals. Furthermore, the image juxtaposed against cultural impoverishment, that of a rational, thoughtful middle class, with stable families and assured egos, is, to say the least, questionable.

It might suffice to say that the whole theory looks silly in the face of contemporary events. Large numbers among those who should, according to it, be fatalistic and of weak ego are organizing to assert their angry demands for redress and their determination to take their lives into their own hands; while at the same time a sizeable proportion of the youth among the secure and even affluent are rebelling in various ways against the forms of cultural impoverishment and dehumanization they find on their side of the fence. In relation to the battle around the schools, however, more than this needs to be said, for the "culture of poverty" assumption is too pervasive and too entrenched to be easily surrendered.

After all, it serves a real function for the confused and fearful teachers. To say that the schools rather than the children are responsible for the children's failure to learn means to most teachers that it is they who are responsible. It may be clear enough that such gross inequities as poor equipment, overcrowded classrooms or, where class size has been reduced, double-session schools, etc., are critical. However, even under bad conditions some teachers fare better, some worse; some try harder than others; some really reach the children, although most do not. If it is a nagging feeling of guilt and inadequacy which causes those who fall short to grasp all the more eagerly at arguments that assert it is the children who are at fault, how much more strongly they must clutch at such justifications now that they may be threatened with having to answer for their failure to the children's parents—people they have learned, in

their middle-class smugness, to look down upon. (It has often been remarked that the fact that their own parents may have been such people does not at all improve matters. Mixed with the sense of guilt they also feel anger, anger at what they assume to be the stubborn and perverse refusal of children to be taught.)

The tragedy is that the teachers are, like the children, also being cheated. Most of them start out trying, and most would doubtless like to be successful at their trade. But they defeat themselves as they take part in what is one of the many divide-and-rule games which prop up our system. The rules of the game are simple! People find their places in society according to their individual dispositions and abilities, and society consists somehow of a product of these. Thus society and what happens in it are projections of the wishes, abilities, and virtues of the people who make it up. Some of these people, "we," are good guys; "they" are bad guys. Some (we) are competent. Some are virtuous; others are not. Problems occur because all men are not competent and of good will. Solutions would be possible if men of good will sat down together and worked things out, but the bad and incompetent get in the way.

¶ This is the American myth, echoed by politicians, taught in school, and reinforced by the media. For a most sophisticated rendering of this myth, consider Nathan Glazer's article, "For White and Black, Community Control Is the Issue," in the *New York Times Magazine* of Sunday, April 27, 1969. After noting inter-ethnic conflicts around the world—in such places as Belgium and Switzerland as well as in the United States—Glazer suggests that the prevalence of such similar "irrationalities" means a widespread movement against centralized bureaucracies. Bureaucracies can work, he feels, when people have faith in them. Since people have lost faith, the bureaucracies must be replaced by decentralized government. "Most of the people who man the bureaucracies are men of good will," Glazer writes, but to the "increasingly dissident and violent minorities, the bureaucracies are seen as foreign." Nowhere is there mention of any real conflict of interest, or of the possibility that it is the

frustration of oppression and exploitation by an upper class which is being expressed in inter-ethnic frictions.

According to Glazer, it is the dissidents themselves who, by their very lack of faith, cause the malfunctioning of the system. Although government representatives are elected, our democracy may be "considered by many as oppressive as if it were a dictatorship." Such wide support can be gained for disruption that even "the police of a democratic state can be cast in the role of oppressors." As a result, the police in Black neighborhoods "are very often torn between the impossible choice of using violence, physical violence, in making arrests to uphold the law, or of simply abandoning any effort to uphold the law." Thus it is the lack of faith in the protectiveness of the police which has led ghetto residents to their present dilemma. There is no hint of such nasty possibilities as, for example, collusion of the police with a narcotics industry that is ultimately responsible for the majority of robberies and muggings from which ghetto residents seek protection.

To Glazer, community control is already being instituted, both in the Community Action programs around the country and in the Model Cities programs. However, a major problem in the "new small governments" will be the "rise to power . . . of black militants who will teach race hatred and an illusory and false view of history and reality." But although this is a real danger, we must rely on the good sense of the majority. And, being good people, we will still go out of our way to use such programs to hire more Black leaders and Black civil servants and to "increase the control of Blacks over branches of government that affect them." After all, we must remember that in giving opportunity to new Black leaders and helping them gain experience and political skills, we help them "see their future as dependent on their ability to deliver services to people, rather than on their ability to arouse them to a destructive rage."

I wonder if this is Glazer's actual view of ethnic conflict and its resolution in the United States. I cannot help suspecting that he himself has a fuller insight into racism and its links to some

fundamental dilemmas of our socioeconomic structure. But his good-guy-bad-guy view is truly that of most school teachers who, like most other Americans, have been given no idea of how in fact a system operates. Teachers know that some of their difficulties as teachers arise from deficiencies in school plants and equipment in poor areas, but they see these as the unfortunate result of the overcrowded slum neighborhoods caused by the very existence of the poor themselves. The last thing teachers are attuned to consider is how they themselves fit into a system *which functions to train the children of the poor to accept their station in society as poor.*

With the spread of mass education, the schools have become a custodial and socializing agency with the primary function of rearing children to accept our system and their position in it. Some aspects of the way in which this agency operates in the city of New York can only be suggested here. Bureaucratization impedes a direct concern with educational aims; the political reinforcements of redbaiting and the firing of nonconformist teachers creates a fear about discussing any serious question in the classroom; various interest groups influence the curriculum both directly and indirectly; and so forth. And teachers, like most people, go along with the status quo. To go along with a system which is unsatisfactory, even though one knows or senses that something is wrong, is after all the norm; even when one is committed to change, it is hard enough to see how to bring such change about. And most teachers have been especially trained in teacher-training colleges not only to "go along" but to promulgate the myth Otto Klineberg has called "Life is fun in a smiling, fair-skinned world."¹ It is informative to compare texts for courses in "how to teach" certain subjects in elementary school with the texts for the subjects themselves as taught in college. Watered down though the latter may be, they are downright radical when compared with the former. Furthermore, the materials on child psychology and on teaching itself have little relevance to the actuality of the classroom, as is evidenced by the few existing studies on this subject. Only recently have these materials become more "realistic"—and here we come full circle, for the "reality" of classroom life in poor districts

is dealt with in the "culture of poverty" terms we have discussed.

The last part of the socialization process for teachers takes place during their first year of teaching. It is particularly depressing to observe the way in which those who have the credentials to be hired in a "good" (i.e., middle-class) school, but who prefer to make a contribution in a ghetto neighborhood, either become battered into shape or discouraged enough to leave. The sheer difficulty of mustering energy for a demanding job is compounded by the limitations of time and of facilities, by the school's demand for quiet and order above all else, by the lack of freedom in curriculum planning, by the pressure from other teachers who find any originality a threat, and by the difficulty of overcoming a past history of built-in expectations—or lack of them—on the part of the children. Some teachers survive; there must be hundreds of unknowns for every Herbert Kohl and Jonathan Kozol.* But consider what happened to Kozol: when he attempted to make use of his experiences he was dropped by the Boston school system. In this regard we might mention the not atypical case of a woman who left an excellent teacher-training school some years back to teach in a ghetto school. She worked steadfastly with several bright girls to help them overcome the shortcomings of their previous education and to prepare them for a competitive examination which would permit admission to a good college-entrance high school. She felt sure of success. However, the time for the examination came and went. It was never sent to this Harlem school. She eventually gave up and left; most teachers simply lower their standards and go along with the set-up.

Thus when one comes down to the ghetto classroom itself, the problem is not to see how nasty and punitive teachers destroy children, though there are some who try. For the most part it is rather to see how well-meaning and hard-working teachers fall into a pattern which also helps destroy children. What one observes is that these well-meaning and hard-working teachers can also teach the children of the poor and the Black that they are *not* supposed to learn, or at least not supposed to learn what school is theoretically supposed to teach them.

* The authors of *36 Children* and *Death at an Early Age* respectively.

I had a chance to observe some of the ways in which this was done—some of the ways in which teachers unwittingly defeat themselves—when I was making a comparative study of second- and fifth-grade classrooms in each of four schools that were chosen to represent contrasting urban neighborhoods: middle-income black, middle-income white, low-income black, low-income white.² The gross differences referred to in the preceding articles were there. When selecting the schools, the concordance between the dark red (or grossly overcrowded schools) and the boundaries of ghetto areas was startling. The color faded off into neutral gray, and then turned to dark green (third degree underutilized) in such areas as Manhattan's East Side. Other contrasts made themselves evident, as in the fact that the ten schools at the white end of the spectrum in Manhattan averaged 740 pupils each, while the ten with the highest percentage of Black students averaged 1,325—almost double.

My research team was critical of extant "culture of poverty" theories and well aware that differences in performance levels between middle- and low-income children could be attributed in great part to the gross inequalities that exist in the schools both attend, such as greater overcrowding in low-income schools, less experienced teaching staff, less adequate books and materials, and so forth. However, a national study of various school characteristics which correlate with higher and lower educational achievement, known as the Coleman Report, has suggested that the gross inequities that exist only explain in part the differences in average educational level found between middle- and low-income children. Initially I assumed a so-called value clash would be significant and that the "middle-class" character of the schools would find a ready response from middle-class children, but would create difficulties for poor white and Negro children who hold "lower-class values." As the research progressed, however, it became apparent that this oversimplified the case to the point of distortion. Instead, as the socializing institution second only to the family in our society, the school differentiates in its treatment of children according to the position of their parents in the social status

system. This differentiation is such that the school takes an active part in defining for poor children a role as outsiders and failures.

Teachers are not as sensitive to low-status children as individuals, do not respect them, and are not as prepared to listen to them as they are to middle-class children; *and not so much because these children have "lower-class values," as because they are lower class.* For the phrase "middle-class values of the school" to have real significance, it must include as primary the evaluation of people according to income and the assumed inferiority of anyone who is poor and who is not white. The resulting behavior of teachers is to fall into the dominant social pattern of constantly downgrading low-status children and undermining their confidence. When we looked closely at a low-income all-Black classroom from the viewpoint of sociologist Robert Merton's "self-fulfilling prophecy,"³ a number of ways were discerned whereby the message was being conveyed to children, "You are relatively worthless and will never amount to much."

First is the absence of these children from school texts and materials, an affront which has lately aroused criticism. In using school materials, low-income Black children are being asked not so much to identify with "middle-class values" as to accept *the denial of their own existence*. Not only do they not exist in texts, but they are also absent from classroom walls. With few exceptions, the poster-type materials made available by the public relations offices of businesses and other institutions and used by teachers to decorate the classroom and inform the students about safety, hygiene, diet, etc., portray fair-skinned children in comfortable suburban settings. This has only just begun to change. Since it is things considered worthy that are put on classroom walls, the message is unmistakable for children who are poor and Black: they are worthless.

As a second form of downgrading low-income Negro children, we noted that the out-of-school experiences they referred to in class discussions were not treated with the same consideration or incorporated to the same degree into the lesson as were

those of middle-class white children. A third way in which we observed that teachers differentiate their treatment of middle- as compared with low-income children pertained to the organization of the classroom and allocation of responsibilities.

Finally, the low-income all-Negro fifth grade in our study contrasted sharply with the other classrooms with regard to teacher evaluation of the children's work. Each response a teacher made to a child's performance during the observation periods was recorded and categorized, and evaluative remarks were divided into positive and negative. Negative evaluations, such as "I'm surprised at you," "You aren't even trying," "Speak louder," were usually accorded incorrect answers, but correct answers could be handled negatively with a remark like, "You've left something out," referring perhaps to a dollar sign on an arithmetic example. When positive and negative responses for all teachers were tallied, it was found that the positive equalled or exceeded the negative in all except the Negro low-income fifth grade. In this classroom, negative evaluations by the teacher exceeded positive in a three-to-one ratio, with some correct answers evaluated negatively. Yet the teacher, herself a Negro woman, was not a negative person. The impression of the researchers was that she liked the children, was sincere in wanting to help them learn, and was totally unaware of her participation in the deep-seated social pattern of expressing a negative attitude toward them.

We saw some really bad teachers as we visited various schools in the process of working out our research design. But most of the teachers we observed were working hard to deal with a difficult task, for teaching in the city elementary schools of today's world is not easy whether in a "good" school or a "bad" one. The eight teachers we ended up studying in detail were relatively good ones; principals were not going to have observers studying their poorest classrooms.

Studies have indicated that a teacher's basic style does not change much from one time to another. When observed, teachers will presumably show less anger than they otherwise might, but this was not a major point at issue. Presumably an observed

teacher will put his or her best foot forward, and this was precisely what we wanted to see—the teacher's view of what was the best way to work.

We had initially assumed that schools would vary according to the social status of the children but, having chosen the schools at random, we were unprepared for the precision of the match we found between classroom practices and the children's backgrounds, especially in the fifth grades. The middle-income white fifth-grade classroom was replete with committees, officers, and leaders, and there was great emphasis on taking responsibility and showing initiative—up to a certain point. The teacher took over firmly when "controversial" issues were raised or when it came to judgments on marks and manners. In the middle-income Black classroom, the children were being well taught. Indeed, we observed some of the best teaching in that school—teaching, at least, in the formal 3-R's sense. But there was such restraint on any form of self-expression by the children, such slight supportiveness, and such an emphasis on incessant watchfulness over one's actions ("Now you've had many compliments," the teacher said when telling the children she had seen some a little slow in getting on line in the yard, "but I think we need to stop once more and ask, Is this the best we can do?") that one could only reflect on the kind of demands put upon the token Black person admitted to a white bureaucratized world. In fact, when I described this classroom at a recent conference, a Black educator from Atlanta approached me to emphasize how necessary such training was in such a school.

By contrast, the low-income white classrooms had a pleasantly easygoing atmosphere. However, the permissiveness was not linked with acceptance of children's needs to move around and explore their environment physically, as it would be in a private progressive school. Instead the relaxation was associated with lowered standards set for the children's performance. There was not the same pressure here as in the middle-income white classroom for the children ultimately to be prepared for college. (Interestingly enough, outside influences of a predict-

able nature affected this school during the course of the two years in which we were visiting it. Rezoning and middle-income housing projects were being instituted to keep the school white in a working-class area which housed increasing numbers of Negroes and Puerto Ricans. The fifth grade we observed during the second year of the study was distinctly more "middle class" than the second grade had been.)

Finally, there was the low-income all-Black school. Again, in contrast with both middle-income classrooms, there was an easygoing and relaxed atmosphere. Again, however, it was coupled with low educational goals for the children. Both the second- and fifth-grade classrooms in this school afford a good illustration of how well-meaning teachers may unwittingly defeat themselves by compounding the undermining effects of a system in which their students are already at a disadvantage. The school itself fed into inadequate junior high and high schools; even if the children did reach a good sixth grade standard of performance, there would be virtually no place for them to go. Classroom texts and materials, as we observed above, reflected the children's status in a racist society, totally ignoring their very existence. And the teachers we observed—one white and one Black—reflected both the school structure and the ideology accompanying it.

In the second grade, a warm and motherly woman consistently downgraded the children by her virtuous commitment to teaching them to denigrate their own life experiences in order "to do better." When asked about readers for these children, she said that their backgrounds were so limited, "there's very little that you can base a reader on." The "fairyland" of school readers was good, she stated, because "it enriches their experience in reading these things and talking about them. Maybe it will give them a few ideas on how they would like to live when they grow older. Maybe it will inspire them to do better." She went on:

Books have children with such lovely toys and mother is so sweet and they have a dog and a cat and go shopping. They have a real telephone, and a car and they go to visit grandmother and grand-

father who live on a farm. The children enjoy reading these stories and love to talk about them.

The teacher did not say anything to us or to the children about a comfortable standard of living being unjustly denied Black children or about the necessity for social change. Her message to the children was clearly that they as individuals were not worthy of such amenities unless they made themselves good enough to win them.

All of this would be only too predictable from a white teacher who has accepted the racism of our society. However, a similar lesson was also being taught by the fifth-grade teacher, herself Black but no less a prisoner of the system. The teacher liked the children in her class and wanted to do what she could for them. She expressed a critical view of the majority of the teachers who were white and, she felt, antagonistic to the children. She suspected that the parents "might feel that here in a Negro community . . . with very few, percentage-wise, Negro teachers, they might ask are these white teachers doing the best they can for these children." She regretted that if they thought a Negro teacher "would put more into it," "they don't come out [to PTA meetings] to say these things." She expressed particular anger at an assistant principal who had one of her students shine his shoes.

However, the study was conducted prior to the liberating assertion that "Black is beautiful," and before the widespread demand by Black people for either really equal opportunities or for the possibility of running their own lives and seeing that their own children are educated. The teacher still phrased her role as one of doing the best she could for the children in terms of their individual self-betterment. "I try to drive into them to be somebody, to try to make something of themselves . . . [to tell them] that they will not be children all of their lives, that what they do now and how much you learn will shape your adult life." The level of the curriculum was often clearly below the children's ability and the academic goals stated by the teacher in her interview were low. She hoped they would learn some math so that they would not be cheated in a store; she

hoped discussion of the news would encourage them not just to look at the comics on TV; "If they remember something [of science]," she said, "that will make me feel good."

When asked what she felt the children in her class should be getting out of school, the teacher answered, "First of all, discipline." She continued:

They should know that when an older person talks to them or gives a command they should respond, that they should listen; that there are times when we do things; there's a time for fun; there's a time for play; then there's a time when we should get down to work. I feel that they should learn values—moral and social values; that a teacher is not here as a policeman but as someone to help; that maybe they might not remember everything they have learned in school but I think they should remember the nice things that happened to them in school.

This teacher's view contrasted sharply with that of the teacher in the fifth-grade middle-income white classroom, who spoke of the children's social development as well as the importance of their learning, and who stressed, in other parts of her interview, that these children should know how to handle leadership and responsibility. The irony was that the teacher in the low-income Black classroom was not authoritarian in her relationships with the children. There was more "neutral" interaction between her and the children than in any other classroom in the study, and the children felt free to speak up, though she felt equally free to ignore raised hands when she chose.

This Black teacher indicated in her interview a mixture of frustration and a feeling of inadequacy in relation to the overgenerality of the social studies curriculum, where she felt the children needed "more of the specifics." Yet, like other teachers we observed in ghetto schools, she went along with the banal and inane treatment of history and society embodied in school texts and directives. The level of a social studies committee "research" on slavery was below that with which the children could readily cope. Questions were "How did slavery begin?", "Where did the slaves come from?", and "How did the slaves

dress?" The sources available to children for the "research" consisted of one—their text.

The type of approach noted here pervaded other discussion sessions observed in this classroom. The level of questioning by the teacher when children reported from their reading on a character in the story they would not like to be, was equally inadequate. Some of the children's reports were full and eagerly given, but the teacher's response was to tell them to stand tall, stay to the point, and not to forget the author and title of the book, or to question them perfunctorily about factual details. The floor was never opened up to enable the children to raise their own questions about the story.

The message that they were not expected to learn very much, an expectation built into the structure of the school system, was being channeled through the teacher, as its direct—although unwitting—interpreter to the children in a number of other ways. Her statements to the class, setting goals for them, were few in number by comparison with other classrooms. Admittedly they were also devoid of the sentimental moralism found in some other classrooms, but few involved any goals for learning, and these few were phrased negatively: "Do your homework. . . . You need to read desperately." This was one classroom where work itself was used as punishment. "One of my pet things has been getting the dictionary and beginning at some part of the alphabet . . ." the teacher said in answer to a question about punishments. "Even the thought of it, I think, the dictionary and writing, having to look back and forth, I think to them is tedious. It's not 'I must behave myself on the fire drill' type of thing where they will put a line in and this is almost fun . . ."

This teacher had a far smaller number of exchanges with her pupils pertaining to the curriculum than the other study teachers did, both in absolute number and in number per child, despite the smaller size of this class. Furthermore, whereas in other classrooms, as we have indicated above, evaluative responses to children's answers were evenly distributed between positive (good work, right, you have it, etc.) and negative (you're not trying, what is the matter with you, etc.), or were

more commonly positive than negative, this classroom stood out in that negatives were three times more common than positives. A number of times a child's correct answer was transformed into an incorrect one through negative evaluation. The teacher did not make negative remarks unduly punitive; she was on the whole straightforward with the children. However, the cumulative effect of such remarks is only to add to a sense of failure.

Despite her concern for the children, the teacher of the low-income Black fifth-grade class did on the whole have a negative view of them, as indeed did all the teachers of Black children. All of the comments made on each child in each teacher interview were rated and a far higher percentage of Black children were found to be viewed negatively than were the white children.

Furthermore, where the teacher in the middle-income white fifth grade took failures as her own shortcomings, the Black teacher projected failures on the children. In answer to "What if they're not paying attention?" the former teacher answered that this was a "message" for her that the children were "either tired or bored," or "not interested." The children were "a sort of barometer," she said, to see whether "I am being interesting enough." By contrast, the teacher of the low-income Black fifth grade commented on the lack of motivation shown by the children. She said, "In the lower classes [of the grade] there is very little incentive for the children as far as learning is concerned and the children mirror the parents' sentiment." She also said that "mother has so many children at home that they are lost in the shuffle in most cases." Yet when asked in another context whether the children in her class were from large families, the teacher answered, "I would say that they are average. Perhaps one or two of the children might be of large families and the others have just one or two."

In all other classrooms somewhere on the walls one noted a list of class officers and monitors. In the classroom under discussion, although children were observed to take various responsibilities in the carrying out of classroom life, there was no such list. Instead, the only list posted was in the envelope which contained the names of "free lunch children." The middle-

income white classroom teacher talked at length about her classroom organization, with officers with various responsibilities, and a good deal of committee work. By contrast, the teacher of the low-income Black fifth grade was little interested in the subject and was not sure who one of the class officers was. Again one notes a mixture of school influence and her own adjustment to it. She said, "I try to keep the monitorial down as much as I can because of the out of the room business . . ." and the problem of quiet and order in the hallways.

The cumulative effect on the children of meaningless lessons, coupled with the undermining of their attempts to learn, was seen as a fidgety, distracted, drowsy toleration, a bored uninterested compliance. This contrasted with the liveliness still shown in the second grade. However, in the fifth grade too there was a sharp contrast between the generally listless manner of the children and their spirited interchange in more autonomous moments as they moved about, as well as with their eagerness to speak and elaborate on a topic when a chance was given, and with the responsibility and initiative they showed when carrying out independent tasks. The style with which they moved, often with a skip or a twirl, bespoke their untapped energy and enthusiasm.

The children's responses to a short questionnaire illustrated the active role the school played in structuring their goals and motivations. While the children's reports on their own ability in the middle-income white school was higher in the fifth than in the second grade for reading and stayed about the same for math, this was not true in the low-income Black school. Here the feeling of the fifth-grade children about themselves was lower in this respect. It is true that fifth-grade children have in fact dropped further behind grade level but, according to the culture of poverty theory, this is supposed to be the result of an initial feeling of inadequacy and not a reflection of school life. That the feeling was diffuse, however, and not related to goals for achievement set by the teacher was indicated by the fact that no mention of bad marks given by the teacher was made in either the second or fifth grades in the low-income Black school. Such answers were made by from 19 to 41 per-

cent of the children in the other schools. As a reflection of the weak goal definition set by the teacher, there were also fewer explicit answers to questions about what the teacher liked and disliked in the low-income Black fifth grade.

In their study *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development*, Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson have demonstrated the extent to which children respond to what teachers implicitly ask of them. Children defined by the researchers as likely to "spurt" during the school year, although randomly selected, did in fact show more improvement than those not so designated. My classroom study illustrated some of the ways in which teachers convey their expectations to children, apart, that is, from the direct and obvious, even brutal, ways in which they can consciously denigrate them. The result for the children as shown by my study can be seen in considering correlations among teacher-favor, evident ability as measured by IQ tests, and reading performance. While the average IQ scores of those children favored by the teacher in the middle-income white fifth grade was 11 points higher than that of those toward whom she felt negative, the reverse was true in the low-income Black fifth grade. In this classroom, the children toward whom the teacher felt positive or neutral averaged 10 points lower than those toward whom she felt negative. These latter, despite their higher IQ scores, averaged lower than the others on reading achievement. Unusually creative children have been noted as a problem for the teacher, whether they are "good" or "bad" students, and one can surmise this follows from some combination of their frustration, boredom, and disinclination to comply with the teacher, along with a teacher's own feeling of inadequacy in meeting their questions. Given the lowered standards for Black schools, all of this apparently affects the performance, not only of unusually gifted children but also of the more able and alert.

To summarize, the study of schools in four contrasting neighborhoods was conceived as an attempt to explore the complex nature of classroom influences on children. (The many studies which have set about testing some hypothesis about one or another limited aspect of teacher behavior and its effect on chil-

dren have been quite unproductive; the primary reason is probably their overly narrow psychological orientation to teacher-student relationships and, as a consequence, the superficiality of the teacher behavior they have tested.) Although contrasts observed in moving from one school to another tallied with what we know about our status system, we were but scratching the surface of what could be discovered about the socialization process whereby children are educated for class and caste roles.

A close look at classrooms shows that low educational performance of poor and minority group children is not simply referable to low motivation flowing from "lower-class values" but results in great part from the school's role in socializing children for different social roles. For children who are poor and who are Black, this role is by and large one of marginal employment. It is thus no accident that the present Black movement has focused so heavily on education along with employment opportunities and political representation.

Despite its limited nature, our study revealed enough to indicate the leavening effect community control can have, not only by allowing for the development of a more meaningful curriculum, but also through the sheer shaking up of the status system that is entailed. It was, of course, this very shaking up of the status system which transformed the schools in the experimental "community control" districts into a battleground.

Some of the results have been publicly noted. Jason Epstein, in the *New York Review of Books* of March 13, 1969, discusses the "sense of responsibility to their students and their subjects" and their accessibility to "troubled parents" which characterize better teachers in the private schools, and which he observed beginning to develop in Ocean Hill-Brownsville. And staff reporters McClintick and Sears wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* of April 10, 1969, about the increasing number of parents visiting the Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools and of the greater attentiveness of children in the classrooms and the decrease in disciplinary problems. Of course, utopian demands for quick and complete success are being made of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville schools, so that bases for long-range changes are often overlooked. What will, hopefully, become increasingly clear to those of New York's

teachers who are trying to view the situation honestly, is that the difficulties of the children do not follow from the "values" of an internalized "culture of poverty" but from the direct impact of poverty and discrimination itself, in adding to which the school has been an accomplice. Where the complicity of the school is weakened, it becomes possible to locate those children who need individual attention, either in the form of assistance to their families or counseling or therapy, thus releasing classroom teachers from trying to deal with problems they cannot, in fact, cope with. The expansion of the community control concept from the schools into other areas must of necessity follow if such needs are to be met. Hence the threat to the status quo, for profound structural change is being demanded. Thus we find increasing emphasis on the myth that "cultural values" must be changed before inequality can be effectively challenged.

Notes

1. *Saturday Review of Literature*, February 16, 1963.
2. For a full account of the study, see Eleanor Burke Leacock, *Teaching and Learning in City Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1969).
3. *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp. 60-61.