

—Clayton J. Price (*Black Star*).

by JONATHAN BLACK

Like so many large cities, New York is in the midst of educational ferment. The bitter teachers' strike of last year only underlined the terrible failure of formal education to reach the children of the ghetto. Those ghetto students who do persist through the indignities and irrelevancies of the public school system generally end up with a fairly worthless scrap of paper—the general diploma. Those who graduate with an academic diploma may be scarred in subtler ways, with their imaginations blunted, their enthusiasm cauterized, and their hostilities toward the system aggravated beyond repair.

The imposition of decentralization from above has proved a decisive political failure in New York, and it may be some time before the experiment of community control can regain its momentum. But there is a dynamic decentralized school system sprouting from below, a string of storefront

schools in three boroughs, that threatens to restructure the roots of education.

The idea of storefront schools is derived partially from economic and physical necessity, but more significantly from a belief in the critical relevance of education. Schools *should* be only a step off the sidewalk. Where the step between a community and its schools has widened into a chasm, it is crucial that that intimacy be restored. The ghetto school has only a fragile hold on its children, and if the realities of ghetto life are ignored, even that tenuous communication is lost.

Street academies are storefront schools. They are schools for high school dropouts. Each academy has from fifteen to thirty students, three teachers, and usually one street worker. The academy program envisions a three-step process: several months at a local street academy, additional time at a more formalized Academy of Transition, and finally "graduation" to either Newark or Harlem Prep (privately funded high schools, the latter a recent outgrowth of the academy system). But college education, although it may be the ultimate goal, is only one of the levels on which acad-

emy staffs operate. The genesis of the academy idea is in street work, putting together a dropout so he *wants* to get his high school diploma. The academies are built up from the kids, shaped by their needs. The street worker is not a seven-hour-a-day caseworker. He lives in the dropout's world, shares his sidewalk and his problems, and not infrequently ends up in night court with bail money. Eventually, if he is good, he may succeed in coaxing the kid to an academy where he can start picking up the pieces of his education.

There are now fourteen operating academies, eight in Harlem, the others elsewhere in Manhattan and Brooklyn. The style of one academy may differ substantially from the style of another. Sometimes this is dictated by the demands of the neighborhood, sometimes by financial expediency, and frequently by the individual preferences of the head teacher who still retains a high degree of autonomy in the academy system. At one of the Harlem storefronts, the teacher explains his line: "How do you get these kids to college? I tell 'em, dig me. You want money, you want to talk black power, you want to make it in the system? You

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gotta have that degree. These kids have to be hip to a lot of stuff: the Jews, the Mafia, basketballs. Every cat bouncing a basketball around Harlem thinks he's gonna be a pro. Forget it!" Educational philosophy? "These cats are bored. Everyone's bored. You gotta excite 'em. You give them pride. You make them think black is worth something."

A typical social studies lesson in this academy was an informal rambling brew that slid over Vietnam, Biafra, the French Foreign Legion, the concept of civil war, capitalists in Texas, Indians in Mexico, drugs in Mexico, academy students in Mexico (a summer trip organized by this teacher), American imperialism, white imperialism, etc. When asked who sponsored this academy—each school is funded separately by a sponsoring corporation—the black teacher leaned over sheepishly and whispered under his mustache, "Chase Manhattan." Obviously, this teacher has a friend at Chase, but the freedom within this academy is apparently typical of a non-interference policy of all sponsoring corporations. And a little illogic is a small price to pay.

The tone of a Lower East Side academy is quite different. The school is housed temporarily in a church while its old building undergoes renovation. There is not much talk of black power, and the twenty students enrolled for the spring term are as mixed as the neighborhood. The head teacher here is white (about one-fifth of the forty-two academy teachers are white), and he puts great emphasis on revitalizing a formal curriculum. His style is more teacher than revolutionary. He believes in a deep personal involvement with his kids, but is skeptical about the practicality of the academy functioning as a full-time family surrogate. As in many individual academies, the effectiveness of this academy's program is difficult to evaluate. This is a transitional phase, and the academy as a fully funded, fully staffed unit is only beginning to gel. The entire academy program is still an experiment, still relatively small, still groping. Its potential is only beginning to be explored.

A Brooklyn academy, located in Bedford-Stuyvesant and sponsored by Union Carbide, exemplifies the program at its best. As in all the academies, the four or five rooms are a pleasant eye-ful, crisply renovated by an imaginative group of young architects called Urban Deadline, sportily furnished and brightly painted—in pale lavender, sky blue, and lemon—with little resemblance to the fermented green of most school buildings. Posters clutter the

walls, and partitioning creates a varied and exciting use of limited space. As in all the academies, there are people just lounging around. And there is a charge of excitement here. "It's just beautiful," says the street worker from the area. "These kids would be lost. Now they're working; they're back in school. They're worth something." Perhaps the most unlikely smile is spread all over a white face, an attorney from Union Carbide now working at the academy. Initially sent for a limited three-week training period, he now stops in at Carbide about once a week and spends most of his time teaching English at the school, taking kids to ball games, and bailing students out of jail.

Carbide has been more than cooperative. Beyond their basic contribution of \$50,000, they have donated three cars, furniture, movie equipment, and an elaborate "wine and dine" affair with Carbide executives when students graduate from the academy. Carbide is considering setting up a completely black-owned factory in the area. And from Carbide's point of view, the association has been equally fruitful. They have a handy information laboratory to test out ideas and familiarize themselves with expansion into ghetto communities and a direct tap on a vast employment pool. IBM, which also sponsors a Harlem school, is as deeply involved with the operation of its academy, and other corporations, notably banks, are taking advantage of the job link for recruiting ghetto employees.

The history of the academy program has been brief, hectic, and explosive. It started seven years ago with a white street worker, Harv Oostdyk—himself a college dropout—and a suburban Christian movement called Young Life. The initial organizers simply picked up kids off the streets and organized a tutorial center for dropouts at the Church of the Master on Morningside Avenue, where the Reverend Eugene Callender was an enthusiastic sponsor. Ford Foundation money—\$700,000 in grants—kept the program alive and growing. The academy was a going thing when Callender, appointed executive director of the Urban League of Greater New York in 1966, took the program under the aegis of the Urban League. Since then, the Urban Coalition has become involved, and through its contacts corporations now provide the lifeblood of funding—about \$50,000 a year to operate each academy; Callender has left the Urban League; Oostdyk has left the academy; and the academy idea, boosted by the enthusiasm of New York Urban League Director Livingston Wingate, is being carried nationwide by the National Urban League.

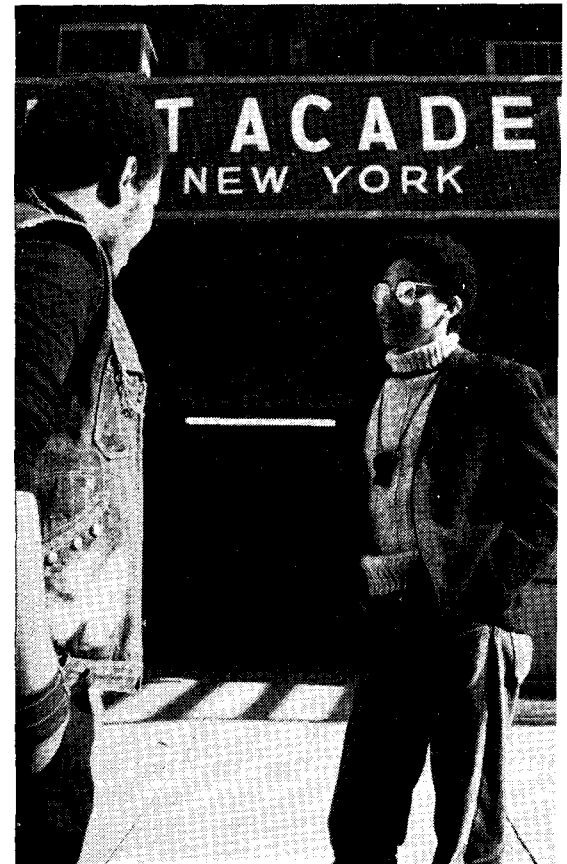
In New York, a variety of expansion plans are under way. There is an informal goal of at least one academy in each of the city's five boroughs, and the possibility of twenty schools by the end of 1969. The role of the street worker is being explored, and an institute to train street workers may be set up soon. There is talk of either expanding Harlem Prep—seventy students graduated this year—or of developing an additional prep school fed by satellite street academies. A committee of sponsoring corporations has been formed and meets once a month to pool resources and evolve new strategies. And finally there are broad plans for meeting the continuing needs of academy students, in school and out, during studies and after graduation. "We're just beginning to look at the total needs of our kids," says Wingate. "We've guaranteed that they'll not only be picked out of the street, but sent through college."

One of the success signals of academy work has been a growing cooperation between storefront schools and the New York City Board of Education. Ordinarily, there is an informal relationship between academy staff and the high schools. Street workers may talk to students outside school,

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"Where the step between a community and its schools has widened into a chasm, that intimacy must be restored."

—David L. Rathbun.



Schools Make News



—Dennis Brack (*Black Star*).

Gwen Patton, coordinator of the National Association of Black Students—"The Eldridge Cleavers are in exile; the Huey Newtons are in jail; and Malcolm and Martin are dead. The responsibility of black leadership weighs on the shoulders of the young black Americans in our...universities throughout the nation."

Black Priority

THIS FALL more black students enrolled in the nation's top white institutions than ever before. This fall, too, the National Association of Black Students (NABS) was born, the first effort of black students to organize nationally.

As white institutions slowly ease their doors ajar to minorities, blacks are coming to see that many of their interests cannot be served by whites, but only by black people themselves. With this realization, new bids for independent power are emerging from traditionally quiet quarters, such as Southern Negro colleges, Southern Negro public school students, and black college students everywhere.

The group of black students who founded NABS broke from the National Students Association at the NSA annual convention early this fall. NABS coordinator Gwen Patton declared that there are different priorities for blacks and whites, and she urged white students to deal with "educational reform within the white experience" instead of trying to join with black causes. American history and political science courses are good places for whites to start, she said.

NABS will act as a service and information center to provide a communications network for black students. It also plans to set up a legal rights program, visiting lectureships, scholarships, and a pool of teachers who will

help black students launch black studies programs. To begin financing these projects, the new association received a \$50,000 pledge from NSA, which is already in debt but plans a special fundraising effort.

The American Council on Education, at its annual convention last month, was greeted with a somewhat similar move by its black members. Without withdrawing from the ACE, presidents of 111 predominantly Negro colleges announced the formation of a national organization of black colleges to press for more federal and private funds, and to increase the colleges' role in shaping programs for educational opportunity in the country.

Negro colleges have been receiving far less than their share of federal higher education funds, their leaders feel, while large quantities of money have been going to white institutions to help launch black studies programs. At the same time, top students and faculty members are being recruited away from Negro colleges by white institutions. The new association aims to end this neglect, and to put a stop to the brain drain.

Herman Long, president of Talladega College, said Negro schools should be "declared a national resource." Each year they graduate 20,000 students from families with incomes below \$3,900, Dr. Long declared, and the average starting salary of \$7,000 for the graduates represents a "potential \$140-million going into the economy every year."

"We're the only ones who know how to educate the really deprived who have no other place to go," added Dr. Lucius Pitts, president of Miles College; he believes that such colleges will one day be the chief hope of poor whites as well as blacks.

Meanwhile, black high school students in the South have also begun to speak for themselves, no longer gratefully accepting the indignities of token integration that works only one way. In Lexington, South Carolina, a group of Negro students, angry over having to listen to the singing of "Dixie" at compulsory pep rallies, one day unfurled a black-power flag and launched into a loud, competitive chorus of "We Shall Overcome." They were suspended from school.

In Arlington, Virginia, twenty Negro students walked out of a school assembly meeting, protesting the exclusion of blacks from school activities. Fourteen were suspended, and two were expelled.

In Atlanta, Georgia; Florence, South Carolina; New Iberia, Louisiana; and

several other cities across the South, Negro students and parents have boycotted and demonstrated to force white authorities to reopen black schools that were closed to achieve integration this fall. "Black parents feel it is time for the white child to come into the black school and be a minority, instead of it always being the other way around," said a local Negro leader in Florence, South Carolina.

The reluctant, unsteady pace of desegregation and the disappointing results of enforced integration are turning many Southern Negroes toward independent development within the black community. The emphasis is on quality education and control over the decisions affecting black lives. Whether this is achieved with, or apart from, the white community is a secondary matter. What matters to blacks is that at last they are getting themselves together and setting their own direction, without the help of "the man."

Somebody Up There Likes Me

THE ROLE of the federal government in education has been traditionally regarded as passive facilitation for improving education nationally, but recently a few persons have begun to think of the government as a possible proponent of fundamental change. Last month, this view was given increased support as the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare made public an internal report that recommends that HEW and the Office of Education and their respective directors become "advocates" of basic changes in the nation's schools and colleges.

The report was written by a nine-member subcommittee on easing tensions in education, headed by Gregory R. Anrig, executive assistant to the U.S. Commissioner of Education, James E. Allen, Jr., and is quite frank in its analysis: "It is an error to focus public attention on the issue of 'how to cope with unrest.' We cannot afford to underestimate the psychological brutality and irrelevance of life in many of our nation's schools."

Student unrest will continue, the report says, until major reforms in society itself are begun; meanwhile, the unrest can be used as a justification for educational reform.

Specifically, the report recommends that HEW Secretary Robert H. Finch and Dr. Allen speak out on social issues related to education, such as decentralization and community control and student rights, and further suggests that these men "clearly state that repression is not an effective method for dealing with controversy."

The report repeatedly stresses the
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