

THE CRY FOR BLACK COMMUNITY CONTROL
OF EDUCATION IN THE BLACK COMMUNITIES
OF NEWARK

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DATE: DECEMBER 16, 1969
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THE CRY FOR BLACK COMMUNITY CONTROL OF EDUCATION IN BLACK COMMUNITIES OF NEWARK.

Introduction

In every conversation with representatives of various segments of the Black community of Newark, including parents groups, the question of who should run the schools in Black communities of Newark seemed to be of immediate concern, and is probably the problem that will be seen more and more at the forefront of Newark's educational system.

In other cities, cries of decentralization and community control have already been heard. For the most part, school personnel seem to lack perception regarding this current development. In Newark, as in other cities where large numbers of Blacks are found, Black people seek educational self-determination in their own communities; which could only result from community control, rather than decentralization.

In view of the fact that the thrust toward this type of participation in the educational process is in its infancy in Newark, I have found it necessary to take a look at what has happened in other cities which have similar problems, as well as what many of the problems are which have led to such a movement on the part of Black communities in Newark, and elsewhere. *Of major*

Of major importance, also, are the attitudes and assumptions which are included in this paper and represent those expressed by the people interviewed. Most people interviewed seem to lean toward the New York, Ocean-Hill-Brownsville, case as a model for what should happen here. It is for this reason, that particular attention has been given to a portion of that thrust.

PROFILE OF NEWARK

Population:

- I. Household population* of Newark estimated at 402,000 in 1967.
 - A. Negroes comprise 52 percent of total household population; 45 percent of those persons age 21 and over.
 1. 40 percent of Negroes over 15 have lived in Newark less than 11 years.
 2. About 43 percent of the Negro population are under 16, and only 8 percent are over 54.
 3. Nearly two-thirds of the Negro males have not completed high school.
 4. A majority of the Negro population lives in the 25 central Newark census tracts, while the remainder (estimated to be about 35 percent) live in the remaining 75 census tracts which are referred to as the Frame and surrounds the Core, or central Newark census tracts.
 - B. Whites comprise 38 percent; 47 percent of those 21 and over.
 1. 18 percent of Whites over 15 have lived in Newark less than 11 years.
 2. 22 percent of the White population are under 16 and 27 percent are over 54.
 3. Half of the White males in the over-25 age group have not completed high school
 4. A majority of the white population lives in the Frame (75 census tracts which surround the 25 Core tracts). Whites and persons of Spanish-speaking origin combined comprise only 16 percent of the Core population.
 - C. There are about 38,000 persons of Spanish-speaking origin in the city; nearly 10 percent of the population.
 1. Persons of Spanish-speaking origin constitute about 8 percent of those in the population 21 and over.
 2. Over 70 percent of persons of Spanish-speaking origin have not completed high school.
 - D. Among persons with no more than an eighth-grade education, Whites tend to be older persons, while Negroes and those of Spanish-speaking origin are relatively young.
 1. Residents of the Core area have completed less formal education than residents of Newark as a whole. This is true for all three ethnic groups in the Core, and for both men and women.

School Population:

- I. Approximately 77,000 pupils in 75 schools
- II. Approximately 3500 teachers, between 60 and 70 percent of whom are White.
- III. Approximately 82 percent of the students in Newark schools are non-White. (73 % and 9% Black and Spanish-origin, respectively).

* The household population should not be confused with the total population. It excludes approximately 9 to 10 thousand persons living in institutions, dormitories, or other places of public accomodation. In this report "population" refers to household population.

1. City of Newark population information taken from Rutgers University research report. (See Bibliography)
2. School population information received from Newark Board of Education personnel.

Decentralization or Community Control?

Decentralization and Community Control are terms that have been heard very frequently during the past year or two in many urban areas. Some people use the two terms interchangeably; however, those involved in the Black community see them as being very different. Preston Wilcox, chief consultant for the I. S. 201 complex in New York, sees decentralization as a process that reduces the system to subsystems, or branches, with no measurable restructuring of the relationship between central board and the reduced unit. Wilcox states that community control should represent a redistribution of power with a set of exclusive powers being assigned to the local community boards.¹ It is community control that is the desired goal of many black communities across the country. Early examples of this thrust include Ocean Hill-Brownsville in Brooklyn, Morgan Community School District in Washington, D. C., and I. S. 201 Complex in Harlem.

¹ Preston Wilcox, "Decentralization: A Listing of Some Ideas and Issues" (440 Riverside Drive, #101, New York, New York 10027, 1968), p. 2. (Mimeographed.)

Why the Surge for Community Control?

Why has this phenomenon developed in the black community? Urban schools across the country have continuously failed to educate the poor and the black. The debilitating effects of urban education on poor children is reflected by the fact that so many of the children cannot read or do arithmetic computations.

Results of Reading Comprehension (Paragraph Meaning) on the Revised Stanford Reading Test for the 1967-68 school year, as reported by the Newark Board of Education, indicate that in grade 3, 6 out of every 100 pupils were at or above the national norm and 94 were below the norm; 72 out of every 100 were one year or more below the norm. In grade 6, 9 out of every 100 pupils were at or above the national norm and 91 were below the norm; 82 out of 100 were one year or more below the norm; 58 were two years or more below the norm. At the third grade level, 42 of the 50 elementary schools had an average reading comprehension of one or more years below the norm. At the sixth grade level, 41 of these schools had an average reading comprehension of one or more years below² the norm.

Data provided the Bundy Panel by the New York City Board of Education indicate that 25.6 percent of the City's fifth grade pupils are one year and eight months behind national performance norms in reading, as compared to 16.0 percent for the country as a whole. The proportion of pupils retarded in reading increases to 42 percent for seventh graders and changes to 36 percent among eighth graders.³

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2. Newark Board of Education, Data Sheet For Newark Schools. (Prepared by Department of Reference and Research, 12/11/67. p. 3
 3. McGeorge Bundy and others, Reconnection For Learning (Mayor's Advisory Panel on Decentralization of the New York City Schools, 477 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022, 11/9/67), p. 5

Of the 64,117 students admitted to New York City's high schools and scheduled to graduate in the class of 1967, only 43,864 graduated. Of those graduating in 1967, 21,364 received academic diplomas. This means that only one third of the students admitted to high schools in New York City received the minimum preparation for college entrance. Nationally over 43 percent over 43 percent of students admitted to high school go to college.⁴

The figures cited above are indicative of what is occurring in Newark and most other urban centers and documents some of the failure of city schools to educate poor children. The declining quality of urban schools is a prime motivating factor in the increased community involvement in urban schools.

Another reason for the surge to community control is the failure of school integration. During the early 1960's, black and white liberals programmed the civil rights movement with efforts to send black children to white schools. Responding to the realities of white racism, politicians have found it politically expedient not to integrate the schools.⁵ The ~~realities~~ ^{reality} of segregated housing and the geography of the ghetto has also been a factor which hindered integration.

Few questioned the curricula of that education. What kind of "integrated education" was it that taught black children the great achievements of Italian explorers, Greek philosophers, French revolutionaries, and English kings, while ignoring or dismissing black greats as "barbaric?" What kind of "integrated education" was it that made heroes of slave owners like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, while slurring over black heroes like Nat Turner and Frederick Douglass? This kind of "integrated education" taught white supremacy in an infinite number of ways.⁶

4. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Alex Poinsett, "Battle To Control Black Schools," Ebony, XXIV (May, 1969), p. 46.

6. Ibid.

Decision Making and Accountability

Traditionally, the masses in the black community have not involved themselves in the affairs of the school. This non-involvement in school affairs is a part of a larger picture of non-involvement on the part of black people, in the affairs that affect their lives generally. Black people have been powerless to make decisions in matters that determine their destinies. This condition has developed during a 400 year period of slavery, degradation, segregation, discrimination, deprivation, poverty, and systematic institutionalized racism.

Accompanying the feelings of powerlessness, have been strong feelings of hopelessness. Why get involved when it will not significantly change anything, has been the feeling. The politician will make the political decisions. The businessmen will make the business decisions. The educators will make the educational decisions. These were the feelings. Black people were systematically excluded from politics, business, and education. Consequently, the people making the decisions were not black people.

Not only have black people not been involved in the decision making process in matters that affect their lives, but those making the decisions have not been accountable to the black community.⁷ The fact that a particular ward councilman in Newark consistently takes positions diametrically opposed to the wishes of the majority of his constituents, is an example of lack of accountability in the political arena. The fact that some chain stores direct inferior merchandise from their suburban stores to their urban stores is an example of lack of accountability in the business

7. Joseph Featherstone, "Community Control of Schools - Off to a Bad Start", The New Republic, March 29, 1969), p. 19.

and economic arenas. The fact that schools in most black communities have been extremely hesitant to teach black history and to deal with controversial issues, indicate a lack of accountability in the area of education.

So it is that accountability is at the heart of the total black thrust. Community control and accountability, in this context, may be considered synonymous with black power.

The Larger Issues

The drive for community control in Newark, as in many cities across the country, is an integral part of an attempt on the part of black people to control their community. This appears to be a conservative and reasonable goal; however, control of the black community is very often a billion dollar business. Consequently, those presently having power do not want to lose or even share it. Rhody McCoy, unit administrator of Brooklyn's Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district clearly illustrated this point when he said that the New York teachers were on strike because of politics and labor, rather than because of educational issues.⁸ Black people are concerned about politics and power; however, they are also concerned that the cycle of inferior education for their children be broken.

In many cities across the country, the public school population consists of a high percentage of black students, and in Newark as in other cities, a black majority. In New York City, greater than 50 percent of the public school pupils are black or Puerto Rican.⁹ According to figures

8. Wallace Roberts, "The Battle For Urban Schools", Saturday Review, (November 16, 1968), p. 97.

9. Ibid.

submitted to the State Department of Education by the Newark Board of Education in November 1968, 72.5 percent of the students in Newark schools were black; 8.3 percent were puerto Rican, .4 percent were from other minority groups and 18.8 percent were white.¹⁰ Ninety three percent of the students in the public schools of Washington, D. C. are black or from other minority groups;¹¹ more closely resembling the Newark system.

A contributing factor to the lack of accountability, unresponsiveness and the failure to educate in most cities is the size of the school districts. New York consists of a \$1.4 billion school budget, 1,100,000 students, 57,000 teachers, and 3,700 principals and other administrators. As was previously mentioned, more than half of the students are black or Puerto Rican. Greater than 90 percent of the teachers and about 95 percent of of the administrators are white.¹² There is a strong feeling in the black community of Newark that racial composition (teachers and students) caused many of the problems with regard to quality of education and accountability.

The decentralization plan passed by the New York State Legislature April 30, 1969 provided for New York City to be divided into 30 to 33 districts.¹³ The average student population of each district would be approximately 27,000. This would make any of the sub-districts the fourth largest city school district in New York State.¹⁴

10. Newark Board of Education, School Membership Report of Minority Groups (Data based on eye inspection, November, 1968). p. 1

11. Washington, D. C. Teachers Union, A Position Paper On Community Control (9/24/68). p. 2.

12. Wallace Roberts, "The Battle For Urban Schools", Saturday Review, (November 16, 1968), pp. 97-98.

13. News item in the New York Times, May 1, 1969.

14. Gregory R. Anrig, "The Decentralization Controversy", American Education, (February, 1969), p. 2.

Newark has a total day school enrollment of approximately 75,900.¹⁵ Although not as large and complex as New York City, size compounds Newark's educational problems, in terms of a lack of accountability, unresponsiveness and failure to educate. One of the recommendations of the Governor's Select Commission on Civil Disorder - State of New Jersey was that, "a comprehensive plan for the decentralization of the Newark public schools should be developed and implemented."¹⁵

Administrators

How will the thrust for community control affect principals? The major stated concern of groups of teachers and administrators in the community control controversies has been "due process." The last teacher strike in New York occurred ostensibly because 13 teachers were dismissed from the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district.¹⁶

Writing in the New York Times April 8, 1967, Fred Hechinger said, "of 54,235 teachers in the system, in the last five years, only 170 regular teachers and only 82 substitutes have been given unsatisfactory ratings and in the last five years, the tenure of only twelve teachers was discontinued."¹⁷ This statistic is indicative of what has transpired in many cities. The quality of the work done by teachers and administrators in urban schools, has not, for the most part, related to continuance in the positions.

The black community, like any other, expects its principal to share a cultural and emotional bond with the people. This would mean that

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15. Governor's Select Commission On Civil Disorder - State of New Jersey, Report For Action (February 1968), p. 171.
 16. Martin Mayer, "The Full and Sometimes Very Surprising Story of Ocean Hill...", The New York Times Magazine (February 2, 1969), p. 23.
 17. News item in the New York Times, April 8, 1967.

instead of being committed to the elimination in his pupils of all that he feels is repulsive in their backgrounds and values, the principal would be committed to utilizing these values as a resource for education. ¹⁸

A natural outgrowth of this would be the fact^{that} the principal would understand the great need for focusing on the richness of Black culture. The principal would be expected to attend and participate in community affairs. If there is a local board, then the community would expect the principal to pledge his allegiance, responsibility, and responsiveness to the local, rather than the central, board. A major responsibility of the principal, working in concert with the community, teachers, and students is to establish educational goals and insure their implementation.

The successful principal will undoubtedly exercise non-directive leadership as opposed to authoritative direct leadership. This means that the principal will have to be able to stimulate self-direction and philosophical development in others. It means that students, teachers and the community must work as a team. ¹⁹

Teachers will require a great deal of help in this area because they have been trained to follow orders rather than to participate in shaping them. Principals will require help also, because they have been conditioned to pass on orders, rather than to accept staff help in shaping school policy. Additionally, principals will have to learn to deal with self-directed parents as well as puppet-type parents.

One of the demands of community control is that the principal be selected by the community. ²⁰ In some city school systems this could not occur because of city examination procedures. In New York a special

18. Preston Wilcox, "The Controversy Over I. S. 201 One View and a Proposal" Urban Review, (July, 1966). p. 13.

19. Ibid., p. 14

20. Robert A. Dentler, "For Local Control in the Schools", Atlantic, (January 1969), p. 79.

category was created.²¹ In Newark, the change of method of hiring principals, as instituted by the Newark Board of Education, is presently being contested in the courts. In other cities across the country, the procedure for selecting administrators is being challenged. Demands for changes of procedure have come about because black professionals have been discriminated against in promotional procedures. For example, as of June 1968 in Newark schools, there were no black principals, one black vice principal, and no heads of departments. It is only after the old personnel procedure for selecting administrators has been altered that an increase in black administrators is noticeable.

The demand for an increase in the number of black administrators is not a demand for all-black administrators, as has been interpreted in some quarters. The black community is interested in administrators who have a cultural and emotional stake in the community and care about the children succeeding. There are black administrators who do not possess these qualities, as there are white administrators who do not possess them. Recently, the parents in two predominantly black elementary schools in Newark fought to obtain the services of a single white administrator, whom both felt was competent and sensitive to the needs of their school. One of these schools had just waged a successful campaign to rid itself of an accused incompetent principal who happened to be white. Although many people claimed race was the important factor in this case, the facts point to the contrary.

So it is important that the principal in a predominantly black school develop an honest and meaningful relationship with the local community.

21. Mayer, op. cit., p. 21.

This relationship will guard against unwarranted hostility and pave the way to open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Another responsibility of the principal is to establish an atmosphere for the creative involvement of students. Students must be aided in developing a group consciousness as opposed to only individual interests.²²

This concept can be fostered through the use of group assignments. Students should be encouraged to think of themselves as members of various school and community sub-groups. Student governments should be thought of in terms of community-school governments. Students should be a part of all discussions relative to their education, including curriculum development, as soon as they are mature enough to participate. Participation in these kinds of relationships will enable students to develop inner controls and eliminate the need for control.²³

Some Controversial Issues

Some issues of the community control movement include:

- accountability
- quality of education
- teacher insensitivity
- attitudes
- decision making
- power
- labor
- hiring and firing of personnel
- due process
- racism

As was previously stated, the New York Teachers Union objections to decentralization centered around the issues of due process and personnel selection. It might be noted, however, that the implementation of community control with the subsequent dismantling of the central Board of Education, would mean a disastrous loss of power for the teachers union.

22. Wilcox, "Decentralization..." op. cit., p. 3-4.

23. Ibid., p. 4.

So long as the Board of Education exists, the union can continue to get increased shares of federal education funds, higher teacher salaries, etc., while cloaking itself in so called liberal reform and blaming the Board for miseducating the school children in the city.²⁴

In contrast, the Washington Teacher's Union, in September, 1968 took a position favoring community control, self-determination, and community development. In this regard, the union stated its belief that the following should be the objectives of the schools:

1. To provide for decision-making in regard to the procedures and process of education which will make the schools responsive to the community.
2. To provide the community with absolute administrative and fiscal control of the school.
3. To redefine the function of education so that it is responsive and accountable to the community.²⁵

The Washington union stated its belief that the power to hire and dismiss personnel should be in the hands of the local board. The Washington group further stated its conviction that the union and the local board "can negotiate a collective bargaining agreement that will guarantee all personnel the right to due process and representation in any matters of dispute."²⁶

Apparently, the Washington union places a degree of trust in its ability to work cooperatively with the black community. There does not seem to exist in Washington the same kind of hysterical reactionary fear that has existed in New York City, and in Newark in those instances when

24. Richard Karp, "The Siege of Ocean Hill", Interplay, (January 1969). p. 22.

25. Washington D. C. Teacher's Union, op. cit., p. 1-2.

26. Washington, D. C. Teacher's Union, op. cit., p. 2.

the parents of certain schools attempted to have a voice in the selection of school personnel and the determination of school policy. Perhaps the fact that the membership of the Washington Union is 75 percent black has something to do with the quality of the relationship existing between teachers and community.

Meanwhile, the Detroit Teachers Union, which is 35 percent black, is strongly supporting community control and its teachers are involved in the planning stages.²⁷

There is no reason why teachers, community people, and students can not join in a cooperative venture that would begin to elevate the quality of education in our city schools. This tripartite relationship is required before real progress can be made. It would be impossible for any one of the three groups to do the job alone. The relationship will have to be founded in mutual respect, a common love for the community and a sincere determination that the children succeed.

Curriculum development will be one of the most important jobs that the tripartite will have to tackle. Preston Wilcox has listed the following suggestions for curriculum content in the urban school:

"In-school and extra-school viewed as a single whole.

Focus on creative differences among students rather than emphasizing similarities.

Controversial issues should be discussed.

Cultural content - using home, guest speakers, tours, newspapers, etc., - should pervade the curriculum.

Thinking for oneself should be valued above "correct" answers.

Open discussion of class conflicts, feelings, problems, etc. should be the rule.

Identify values without teaching them; allowing students to define their own.

Student evaluation of learning-teaching process is the key.

Accreditation of outside reading, independent study, etc. helps.

Modify the student-teacher relationship from superordinate-subordinate to coordinate phases, when possible and appropriate.

Focus on comprehension, investment, effort, interest - rather than correct spelling, correct answers. Comments on papers should raise questions, inquire into, not punish obvious mistakes; point to interesting related sources, raise questions about developing interests and patterns, relate subject to real world, offer opportunities for private conferences, etc.

Individual and group conferences - not just about in-school affairs, but about extra-school interests of students.

Learning should be fun, not a chore."²⁸

The curriculum must provide the opportunity for children to establish positive images of themselves as worthy human beings with hope of succeeding in life. One has to be born black, in racist America, to fully understand how the degrading socialization process strips black people of positive feelings about themselves as human beings. All Negroes must go through a stage when they shake off the shackles of inferiority and are reborn as proud black people. That is the reason that the black revolution is being accompanied by a renaissance of black art, music, and culture. The thrust for community control is an attempt on the part of the black community to bring this renaissance into the schools. Every other ethnic and religious group in America has been allowed to develop a pride in their own heritage and culture, save the Afro-American. Before a child can learn anything, he must be comfortable with his culture and himself. In the case of the black child, the school must aid him in becoming comfortable with his blackness.

28. Wilcox, "Decentralization..." p. 5.

Summary

In summary, the surge towards community control of education in the black community is a part of a larger thrust by black people to gain a greater share in the determination of their destinies. Black children are not being effectively educated under the existing structure. The prospect for meaningful integration of schools, in the near future, seems remote. Control of predominantly black schools, outside the South, as well as the black community generally, has never been in black hands. The present power people refuse to relinquish or, in most instances, even share the decision making machinery. Therefore, the stage is set for confrontation.

The black community is anxious to have school personnel directly accountable to them. Principals are expected to be able to work harmoniously with the community and able to relate directly to it. The call is not for all black principals or teachers, but, for a fair number of blacks in all positions. The cry is for persons who care and who possess a cultural and emotional stake in the community.

It is possible that a tripartite, consisting of community people, teachers, and students can develop and work constructively at solving problems of urban education. In order to function in this setting, many white people will have to learn a new role relationship that would include sharing power with black people and listening to what black people are saying.

Hope for the Future

The destiny of all America is inextricably intertwined with the fate of its cities. If the cities of America succumb, America, too, will succumb. If the cities of New Jersey fall, then New Jersey, too, will crumble. If black America is destroyed, white America will burn in the

destruction process. So it is that the oppressors have as much stake in justice for black people as do the oppressed themselves. It could be that considerations of self preservation may be the only thing that will cause the oppressor to relent in justice long denied the oppressed.

Rhody McCoy perhaps sums it up best for black people across the country when he says, "Everyone else has failed,... "We want the right to fail for ourselves."²⁹

My Role

As a black teacher and prospective guidance counselor, my role in all of this as it develops in Newark, and the role of all black teachers and guidance counselors, should be to assist students, community, and educational administrators at all levels, in interpreting the needs, shaping the thrust, and positively directing the movement toward community participation and a certain degree of community control in Newark.

One of the most important contributions that I can make is to aid in keeping the lines of communication open between all factions involved. Where there is communication, there can, hopefully, be understanding; there can be progress - a positive outcome of confrontation.

My study of the problem as it developed and grew in similar communities has given me needed insight with regard to the kinds of issues that must be communicated and the problems involved. A sharing of power is possible when those factions involved in education are talking, listening and understanding each other.

29. Poinsett, op. cit., p. 54.

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A-

It is interesting that your points for
community control and accountability
are good basic democratic

involvement and would help
or any community. However,

educating and awareness of
potential goals by the controllers

will be inadequate. Just as the
~~segregated~~ schools of the South
with Black principals and teachers
were handicapped in producing

well educated students by
lack of adequate equipment, the
motivation of good job of parents

ties and institutional deficiencies, the
So - more is needed for success
than community control. Garshinsky
McCoy wanted the right to try to succeed
for themselves. I'm sure he does, but
the language is negative.

I certainly agree that where there has been failure a new plan must be tried and it must bring community involvement. It must also be related to job opportunities and must somehow be protected from the evils of individual greed, status seeking and political manipulation which are rampant in much of our present system of education.

It will be interesting to see what the Teachers' Union in Newark will do this year and how many ^{teachers} will stand up and tell the Union that bigger salaries for doing a fool job are not the answer. Perhaps the Black confrontation will be the answer.