

DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

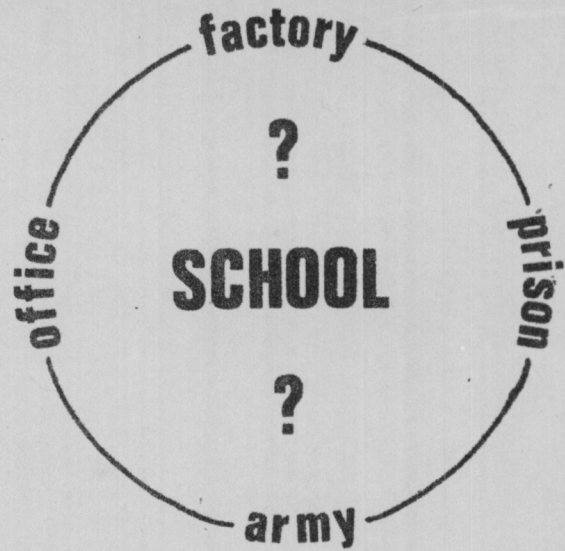
BOX 11 OF 16

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STAIRCASE

TRACKING IN SCHOOLS

by richard rothstein
new university conference

50 CENTS

reprinted by **CONTROL, CONFLICT & CHANGE**

DOWN THE UP STAIRCASE

THE ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK1

Upward mobility is limited; everyone can't get ahead of everyone else....We teachers were tracked into teaching....The American occupational structure makes rigid school tracking necessary.... If the occupational structure is not challenged, a meritocratic (equal opportunity) tracking system would be the best we could hope for....With only limited occupational privileges available, tracking preserves those privileges for the rich, for men, for whites.

MECHANISMS OF TRACKING7

The differences between suburban and inner city schools are the most important aspect of tracking...."Ability grouping" within working class schools is also an important way of separating students by race and social class....Black children get tracked by their failure in reading....Schools oppress black kids much more than schools oppressed immigrant kids in the early 20th century....The job of school counselors is to get kids to adjust to the "realism" of a rigid social structure.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY REFORMS11

Educational planners are divided about whether to attempt to remove race and class bias from tracking. Some liberals have proposed desegregation or decentralization....Performance contracting is another liberal strategy attempting to offset tracking bias against the poor....Compensatory education, experimental schools and open admissions have also been tried as meritocratic reforms...."Meritocratic" tracking reforms are usually elitist--the rich will keep the top privileges while white and black workers fight it out for middle positions.

FALLACIES OF TRACKING16

Even a "fair" tracking system would rest on dubious assumptions; e.g., that "objective" ability testing is possible in this society....The assumption that school success is a rational job certifier is also false....The occupational structure on which school tracking rests is irrational in this era.

TACTICS FOR CHANGE19

Track hierarchies warp teachers, too....Though victory is a long way off, radical teachers should expose and challenge tracking wherever possible.

APPENDICES23

- I- TRACKS AND FREE SCHOOLS.
- II - IS THERE A NATIONAL TRACKING CONSPIRACY?
- III - TEACHING THIS PAMPHLET
- IV - TRACKING IN A NEWTON SKOOL

THE ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

From the Post Office rack, you can get this glossy pamphlet:

WOULDN'T IT BE THE SMART THING FOR YOU TO STAY IN SCHOOL?

It's a great, big world out there.
And there's a place in it for you.
Trouble is, a lot of other guys will be out scratching for the same spot.
It's sort of like a basketball, football or baseball game.
You've got to have the moves to beat out those other guys.
To get out into the open and score. Or make the double-play or hit it up the alley.
And you know what that takes.
Training. A stick-to-it attitude. An education. The kind you're getting right now by staying in school.

SAY YOU DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL TO LOOK FOR A JOB?

You ought to be able to get a job of some kind. Whether it's what you want, or would like to keep, is another question.
As a high school drop-out, you'll have three general types of jobs open to you.
Farm jobs. Unskilled labor. Service jobs.
Openings in these jobs seem to increase slightly year after year. But then, so do the number of people looking for them. So even here, you'll have to beat out the next guy.

(Prepared and distributed in the public interest by the United States Army)¹

Most Americans accept the assumption of the Army pamphlet: that people can rise in life by getting an education; that to get a better job, stay in school. This belief in upward mobility through education is widely accepted not just for individuals but for groups as well. In the late 1960s liberal Americans held that black ghetto poverty resulted from the failure of blacks to obtain a good education which would prepare them for good paying jobs. As the Kerner Commission said, "the schools have failed to provide the educational experience which could overcome the effects of discrimination and deprivation."²

Upward Mobility is Limited -- Everyone Can't Get Ahead of Everyone Else.

However, widespread mobility through education is mythical. And like many social myths, this myth retains its strength not by its sophistication but by our failure to question an obvious contradiction. The emperor has no clothes. In any "basketball, football or baseball game" there are as many losers as winners. When you make the double play, two other guys are out. And while a pep talk can sometimes determine which side wins and which side loses, it can never make a winner out of everyone. If the same pep talk is given to everyone, it probably won't even affect who wins.

Think about the Army pamphlet for a minute. What if every kid followed its advice and stayed in school? Would the number of farm jobs, unskilled jobs and service jobs decrease? Ultimately, the pam-

phlet's myth of upward mobility implies that these jobs will disappear if everyone graduated from high school. If they all went on to college, we would have a society where everyone was a doctor, lawyer, teacher or business executive. Nobody would have to car-hop, run a punch press, or harvest lettuce. Absurd.

If everyone stayed in school, what mechanism would neatly choose those most qualified for the better jobs? Everyone can't stay in school if the system is to function. The effect of the Army pamphlet depends on the refusal of large numbers of young men and women to heed its advice; moreover, they must know that they refused to heed it. For an essential ingredient of this nation's man and womanpower channeling system is the belief by those stuck with lousy jobs that it's their own fault -- I can't do better than a farm, unskilled or service job because I was too dumb to stay in school. If only I'd listened to that pamphlet ...

If the poor believe that their poverty and alienation is the result of their own stupidity, their own failure to achieve, and their own unwillingness to stick it out in school, they will be less likely to squawk about their condition and less likely to question the occupational structure which assigns poverty and alienation to those who do the majority of the country's necessary work. And if those who are secure financially believe their success is the result of hard work rather than a favorably stacked deck, they are likely to be more self-righteous and rigid in defending the

status quo.

The economic structure of our society requires a system of vastly differentiated educational opportunities for those destined for different jobs; combined with the myth that the top educational opportunities are open to all who try to make it.

In the elementary and high schools of the nation, *tracking* is the mechanism which fills this function. Students are assigned to tracks; the track sizes are proportional to the job openings in the occupations to which those tracks lead. We will show in this pamphlet that students are effectively assigned to reading groups, special classes, and special schools on the basis of income, race and sex. Yet there is a complex mechanism which persuades those involved (teachers as well as students and parents) that the assignments are made on the basis of "ability."

Tracking is not unique. It is similar to other systems whose purpose is to manipulate people to adjust to national economic policies. In 1965, the Selective Service System issued a memorandum to local draft boards justifying the use of draft deferments to pressure men into civilian occupations which were short of voluntary manpower:

From the individual's viewpoint, he is standing in a room which has been made uncomfortably warm. Several doors are open, but they all lead to various forms of recognized, patriotic service to the nation. Some accept the alternatives gladly-- some with reluctance. The consequence is approximately the same...

The psychology of granting wide choice under pressure to take action is the American or indirect way of achieving what is done by direction in foreign countries where choice is not permitted. Here, choice is limited but not denied, and it is fundamental that an individual generally applies himself better to something he has decided to do rather than something he has been told to do.³

Tracking is the "American or indirect" way of assigning occupational roles through manipulation of the school systems of the country. This pamphlet is about how tracking works.

We Teachers Were Tracked into Teaching.

The fundamental principle of the tracking system is that *educational opportunities adjust to the needs of the occupational structure, and not vice versa.* A helpful way to understand this principle is to look at our own experience as teachers and students in the last 15 years. The number of teachers in this society is not determined by the number of students who choose teacher train-

ing in college; rather, the number of students to whom teacher training is offered is determined by the number of teacher job openings.

Three years ago, nearly every school district in the country was begging for teachers. There were radio advertisements trying to induce housewives to teach, and men could get high school jobs even if they couldn't coach basketball. But in 1970 there were 38,000 teachers who couldn't find jobs, and it will get worse: the U.S. Office of Education predicts a surplus of 55,000 teachers a year by 1975.⁴

School administrators like this situation. They can afford to be fussy, get rid of teachers who exhibit the slightest independence, and cut back on improvements in teacher working conditions that teacher unions won in the 1960s.

The present teacher glut was created by a tracking plan that was stimulated by the Ford Foundation and Federal Government and extended down to every high school counseling office in the country. Not every administrator and official fully understood the role he was performing; many in the lower levels of bureaucracy undoubtedly believed the myth of unlimited mobility which we described earlier. But for students in the 1960s, the tracks to the teaching profession were opened wide.

In the late 1950s, high level national decisions were made to increase the supply of teachers. This was largely due to the Pentagon needs for teachers of educated workers in industries which could feed the post-Sputnik space program; the increasing automation of American industry which reduced job growth and made it necessary to have more teachers to keep children in high school and off the job market longer; and the expansion of schools in the wake of the post-war 'baby boom'. New colleges to train teachers were built at a breakneck pace. College enrollments jumped from 3.2 million in 1958 to almost 7 million in 1967-68.⁵ In 1957, about 9,000 Ph.D.s in all fields were granted; in 1971, more than 30,000.⁶

In the early 60s Admiral Hyman Rickover, developer of the nuclear submarine, became one of the leading educational theorists of the country. He warned that the U.S. would lose the Cold War if more effort were not devoted to expanding education for the "gifted" who might become scientists and engineers.

Advanced placement and honors tracks were set up and expanded in high schools to encourage college application and rapid matriculation. Corporations made vast sums available to the kids in these tracks for college scholarships (for example, the Merit Scholarship Program). The Federal Government established a student loan program (N.D.E.A.) which could be paid off by tea-

ching instead of money. The Ford Foundation (through its Woodrow Wilson Program) undertook to finance the cost of graduate school for bright students who would promise to enter the teaching profession. And the Selective Service System established a draft deferment for young men who went into teaching.

All these mechanisms created a teacher glut, so today opposite mechanisms are being set in gear. The teacher supply is now being constricted to adjust to the glut - but not constricted so fast to eliminate administrators' freedom to choose. Public college tuition is being increased by state legislatures all over the country, discouraging and prohibiting working class kids from trying to become teachers. College expansion and construction has slowed. Counselors are now directing high school students into vocational programs at two year colleges rather than to four year teacher training institutions.

Normally, schoolteachers administer the tracking system, unwittingly channeling their students into fields which the military and corporate employers wish to fill. But today's job glut is making many teachers realize that, as students, they were at the receiving end of the tracking system; tracked while being trained to track.

The American Occupational Structure Makes Rigid School Tracking Necessary.

Here is a table, prepared by the U.S. Dept. of Labor, showing how the various occupational groups will grow between now and 1980.

As the economy continues to automate, and as more and more resources are directed to sales and service from production, the relative number of blue collar workers (operatives) and craftsmen will decrease. To take their places in the occupational structure, there will be vastly increased numbers of service workers, clerical workers, sales workers and professional/technical workers. When we consider that approximately 20% of the professional/technical category will be specialized workers (engineering technicians, laboratory workers, etc.)⁷ with a minimum of training -- often only a few months in a "vo-tech" program of a junior college -- we see that the growth in the labor force in the next decade will be overwhelmingly in boring, alienating, low skill jobs which involve no more decision making or earning power than the assembly line jobs they replace (though workers who wear white collars rather than blue may be temporarily

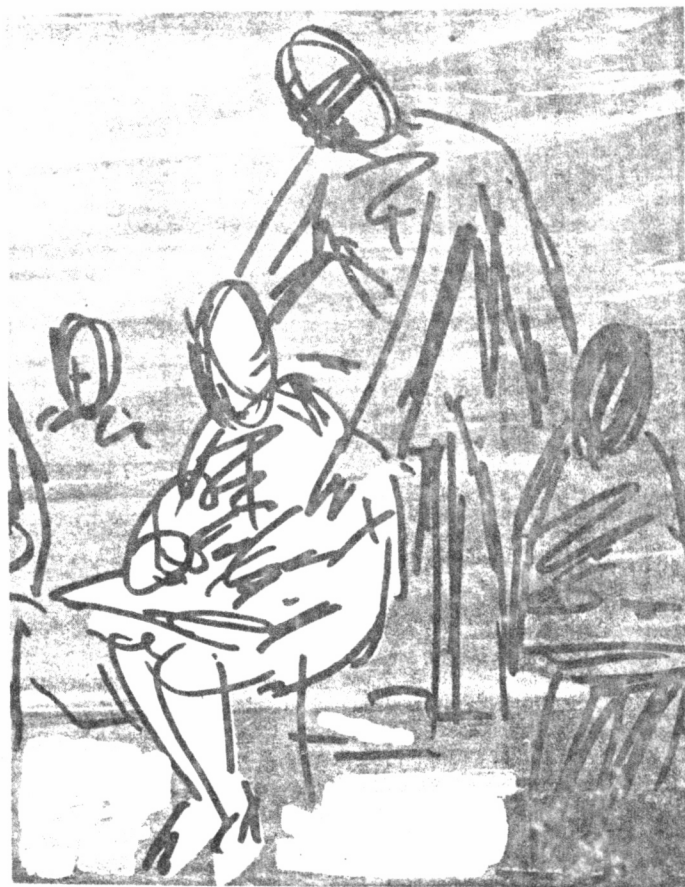


TABLE 1. GROWTH OF OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES

Jobs (millions)	Occupational group	Percent change
1968	1980	
75.9	95.1	All workers 25%
10.3	15.5	Professional & technical 50%
7.7	11.1	Service 45%
12.8	17.3	Clerical 35%
4.6	6.0	Sales 30%
7.8	9.5	Managers 22%
10.0	12.2	Craftsmen & foremen 22%
1.7	2.0	Private household 15%
14.0	15.4	Operatives 10%
3.6	3.5	Non-farm laborers -2%
3.5	2.6	Farm Wrkrs. -33%

SOURCE: U.S. Manpower in the 1970s - Opportunity and Challenge (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1970).

TABLE 2. MAJOR OCCUPATION OF EMPLOYED PERSONS WHO WERE SCHOOL DROPOUTS WHO LAST ATTENDED SCHOOL IN 1968 OR 1969, OCCUPATION IN OCTOBER 1969.

Major Occupation Group	% distribution of persons 16-24 years of age.		
	Both sexes	Male	Female
All workers	100.0	100.0	100.0
Prof.-technical	1.3	1.6	0.7
Managers	.9	1.3	-
Clerical	12.0	6.9	23.1
Sales workers	4.3	3.5	6.1
Craftsmen	9.2	11.9	3.4
Operatives	30.5	34.0	23.1
Laborers	16.1	23.3	.7
Private hsehold	3.9	-	12.2
Service workers	15.3	9.1	28.6
Farmers	.2	.3	-
Farm laborers	6.2	8.2	2.0

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Special Labor Force Report #121, August 1970 (Table D)

lulled into feelings of upward mobility)

Here are two more tables from the Dept. of Labor. The first shows that in 1969, over half of the employed high school dropouts in the work force had blue collar jobs of a kind which are becoming relatively less numerous in the economy (craftsmen, operatives, laborers). But the next largest employment fields for high school dropouts were service work and clerical work -- fields which will have great expansion over the next decade.

The next table shows similar figures for high school graduates who did not go on to college. Over half the workers with high school diplomas only are in the expanding clerical, sales and service occupations;

TABLE 3. MAJOR OCCUPATION GROUP OF EMPLOYED HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES NOT ENROLLED IN COLLEGE, OCTOBER 1969 - FOR PERSONS WHO GRADUATED IN 1969.

Major Occupation Group	% dist. of persons 16-24 years old.		
	Both sexes	Male	Female
All Workers	100.0	100.0	100.0
Prof.-technical	2.0	2.7	1.5
Managers	1.0	1.1	.8
Clerical	34.5	10.4	57.1
Sales workers	6.9	4.7	9.0
Craftsmen	6.1	11.8	.8
Operatives	24.9	39.1	11.7
Laborers	9.8	19.1	1.0
Private hsehold	2.2	-	4.2
Service workers	10.3	6.4	14.0
Farmers	-	-	-
Farm laborers	2.3	4.7	-

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Special Labor Force Report #121, August 1970 (Table C).

when we add to these the blue collar operatives category, 75% of employed high school graduates are in low status, low pay and low interest jobs.

In order to service this changing economy, what can we expect school systems to do in the next few years?

First, we can expect that there will be some increased pressure to get potential school drop-outs to stay and get a high school diploma, since employers in the clerical, sales and service fields will require diplomas to a somewhat greater extent than the factory blue collar employers they are replacing. On the other hand, schools will not try to eliminate the drop-out phenomenon altogether, since significant numbers of jobs in the expanding fields can be filled by drop-outs. If too many students get diplomas, they will be dissatisfied when forced to take jobs which they (and their employers) associate with school failure.

Employers are aware of this, and the job market exerts considerable pressure on schools not to "over-educate" students in low tracks who must be trained to follow orders blindly. "If you take a controller and put him into a menial bookkeeping job," a Gillette personnel man asks, "how long will it be before his ego will cause a clash with the middle managers above him?" So long as menial jobs exist, schools will have to produce employees who won't be dissatisfied -- students will continue to receive elementary and middle school educations which do not prepare them for high school, and will continue to accept the judgements of their schools, teachers and counselors that they are "dumb".

Second, we can expect increased efforts to track women high school students into bookkeeping, shorthand and typing courses. In 1969 (Table 3), although 34.5% of employed high school graduates were in clerical occupations, 57.1% of employed women high school graduates were in those jobs (with another 9% in sales, and another 14% in service).

Third, we can expect college placement tracks in many high schools to narrow, or at least to cease growing in the way they did in the 1960s. This will be particularly true in those working class high schools whose college placement tracks fed mainly into local public teacher training colleges. Instead, we can expect high schools increasingly to prepare graduates for entrance into technical schools and technical programs in junior colleges. For example, in Chicago, 17.5% of the full time students in the seven junior colleges are now vocational-technical. The rest of the students are prepared for transfer to four year teacher training or engineering institutions. But the City College Master Plan proposes to increase the vo-tech program to include

60% of the full time students in the next few years.'

Fourth, we can expect corporations to take a more direct hand in the education of students, since the technical skills of production are more specialized than the assembly line blue collar work they replace. Educational experiments are being funded by foundations and the federal government (such as the Parkway school in Philadelphia) which allow high schools to pay corporations to train their own specialized labor force on school time: students go downtown to corporate offices for their classes. Already, a number of non-experimental high schools have reduced craft shop instruction (woodworking, metal crafts, etc.) and initiated "distributive education" programs: students earn high school credit by doing part-time routine clerical work in business offices. Other high schools have added "office skills" classes which teach manners and disciplinary rules for office clerical workers.

Within the lower (black and white working class) tracks, increasing numbers of students must be directed to highly specialized but routine technical fields (computer programmer aide, x-ray technician, etc.). As a fifth adjustment, elementary schools in poor communities can be expected to place increasing reliance on teaching machines and programmed learning systems which can communicate bare technical skills without creativity or reflective ability. Already there are a number of ghetto school districts (Texarkana, Gary and others) which have subcontracted their elementary schools to corporations which are eminently (and solely) qualified to teach bare skills by machine. At the other end of this track, junior colleges are rapidly moving toward the substitution of "learning managers" for teachers, skill programs for classes, as they eliminate college transfer programs and build up "vo-tech" (and incidentally, shifting the cost of apprenticeship training from the employer to the taxpayer).

Sixth, we can expect a continued unwillingness on the part of school principals and administrators to tolerate experiments with non-authoritarian teaching methods, particularly in inner city and working class schools. Schools which are training the future file clerks, typists, supermarket checkers and waitresses must, like the blue collar training schools before them, produce workers who submit to authority, who don't question standards of discipline, who don't identify with the problems of fellow workers, who take orders rather than use their own initiative, who are competitive and who don't expect to do creative work. On the other hand, suburban high schools will continue to develop a relatively permissive and relaxed atmosphere which is suited to the autonomy and self-motivation which future professionals must learn. Within some border schools, much more autonomy and teacher experimentation will be

tolerated in the upper tracks and much less permissiveness tolerated in the middle and lower tracks.

If the Occupational Structure is not Challenged, A Meritocratic (Equal Opportunity) Tracking System Would Be the Best We Could Hope for.

Occupational projection statistics are not a secret; they are available to Boards of Education, state legislatures, the U.S. Office of Education and to the major foundations. Just as high school districts got foundation grants in the 50s and early 60s for advanced placement classes to readjust the tracks of that period, similar mechanisms are available today to channel student into work categories where vacancies exist. Special federal programs and foundation money will stimulate the programs (from "vo-tech" curriculum to teaching machines) necessary to bring the tracking system into line.

Many teachers and students are critical of tracking without understanding its broader social function. They tend to see tracks between schools and within schools, as a violation of egalitarian principles by offering different levels of educational programs to different groups of students. But the tracking system cannot be effectively challenged on these egalitarian grounds alone. For a tracked educational system is entirely rational if we accept three widely shared assumptions: First, that the ability or motivation required to attain high levels of educational achievement differs from one individual to the next in measurable ways. Second, that different occupational categories require different levels of educational attainment. And third, that an occupational structure like that projected for the American economy in Table 1 is necessary and inevitable.

Later in this pamphlet we will offer grounds for challenging each of those assumptions. But in the absence of such challenges, a meritocratic tracking system may seem to be a rational solution to the labor channeling problems of a complex industrial society.

A meritocratic system -- i.e., one which assigns individuals to places solely on the basis of "merit" (or ability) -- might work this way: A graduated series of educational programs would be set up in schools, and each program (or track) would qualify students for the appropriate occupational niche in society. One track might lead to prestige professions like medicine, law, science, etc. Another track might lead to somewhat less prestigious but still responsible jobs like teaching or social work. Another track might lead to technical jobs. And so on. Students would be placed in tracks solely on the basis of their objectively tested ability. Safeguards would guar-

antee a student's right to be retested at various stages of school life. The size of each track would be determined by the number of jobs which the occupational structure could be expected to offer its graduates. Thus, if the need for doctors decreased, the size of the track which led to medical school qualification would be proportionally decreased. The ability scores of students would be ranked; the significant score would be a student's percentile rank and not absolute ability score. To use the example just cited, in a period of declining need for doctors, we would expect the minimum ability level of students selected for that school track to rise.

With only Limited Occupational Privileges Available, Tracking Preserves Those Privileges for the Rich, for Men, for Whites.

The tracking system in American elementary and secondary education is not, however, meritocratic. In addition to the rational occupational channeling functions of a meritocratic system, American educational tracking also serves a second function; the maintenance of rigidities in the social class, race and sex role divisions of American society. It is an essential purpose of the tracking system to prevent significant mobility between rich and poor, white and black, male and female. Tracks do insure that schools certify students for occupational openings in the required proportions, but they do this by insuring that the "upper" tracks leading to more prestigious occupations have proportionally more whites, men, and rich students; and that the "lower" tracks leading to blue collar (and now to technical, service, sales and clerical) jobs include proportionally more blacks, women and poor or working class students.

Sometimes this tracking to inhibit mobility is explicit. Most high schools assign classes in home economics and typing to girls and classes in "shop" to boys. Most large cities have special high schools for girls and boys, in which specialized male technical or female secretarial skills are taught.

However, most tracking is more subtle. Because girls are socialized (in school and out) to defer to male intelligence and leadership, they not only learn how to act dumb but become dumb. Girls who are "underachievers" in high school usually begin to be so at the onset of puberty - when social pressures to defer to boys also begins.¹⁰ Boys score about 60 points higher than girls on College Board math aptitude tests. But girls improve their math scores if the same math problems are reworded to deal with cooking and gardening.¹¹

Neighborhood schools are tracks which in themselves inhibit mobility. An academic high school diploma from a black ghetto high

school has a very different value as a ticket to college from a middle class school diploma in the same city. The ghetto diploma, even with high grades, is relatively worthless in the eyes of college admissions officers, when compared with the same grades on a transcript from a "good" white school. Indeed, the correct perception of this situation by large numbers of white middle class parents has been a chief cause of population movements in the last two decades. The massive shift of white families from cities to the suburbs is in large part due to the conscious attempt by these families to nullify the results of increasing "equal educational opportunity." By moving to a suburb with a "good" (i.e., prestigious) school system, families can protect for their children privileges (like admission to prestigious colleges) which would be denied if they only earned an honors urban diploma.

Sometimes this tracking to inhibit mobility is suspiciously coincidental. For example, we noted that tracking rigidity within schools was increased rapidly after 1958. Throughout the country, high schools were divided into advanced placement, honors, academic, vocational, general and essential tracks. School systems received extra government and foundation grants if they would set up special programs for the "gifted child." We suggested earlier that this was inspired by the military decision to invest rapidly in space technology and the need for increased numbers of engineers and scientists to make American rocket capacity competitive with Russia's. But the late 1950s was also a period when racial integration was becoming significant in large urban areas. Migration of blacks from the south to northern cities had reached a level where the participation of black children in many formerly white urban schools was no longer "token". The beginning implementation of the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation decision seemed, to many whites, to "threaten" even more widespread school integration. In the face of these racial trends, the increased emphasis on "ability" tracks within schools had the effect of nullifying racial integration. Segregation was transformed from an inter-school phenomenon to an intra-school one. "Honors" and "general" tracks served to provide a convenient mechanism for separating white from black students within a school, while at the same time providing a seemingly objective ability test which monopolized college and career privileges for the white students in the honors tracks.

Men and women were also segregated by this tracking. As "advanced placement" and "gifted children" tracks were established in high schools, A.P. science and math classes were overwhelmingly populated by boys, while girls filled the new high school poetry or comparative literature classes. (There was some mixture in what were usually called

"problems of democracy" or "contemporary civilization" a.p. social studies classes.) Today, the male products of 1960 advanced placement tracks are engineers, while the female graduates are most often highly literate secretaries or housewives.

Explicit, near-explicit and "coincidental", the results are clear:

TABLE 4. PER CENT OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES GOING TO COLLEGE THE FOLLOWING YEAR, BY ACADEMIC APTITUDE, SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND, AND SEX, 1960.

Academic aptitude	Socioeconomic status					
	Low	low-mid	mid	up-mid	high	all
Males:						
Low	10	13	15	25	40	14
L-Mid	14	23	30	35	57	27
Mid	30	35	46	54	67	46
U-Mid	44	51	59	69	83	63
Upper	69	73	81	86	91	85
All	24	40	53	65	81	49
Females:						
Low	9	9	10	16	41	11
L-Mid	9	10	16	24	54	18
Mid	12	18	25	40	63	30
U-Mid	24	35	41	58	78	49
Upper	52	61	66	80	90	76
All	15	24	32	51	75	35

SOURCE: Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution* (New York, 1968), p.103.

Rich men have more than three times the chance of going to college of poor men(81:24).

Rich women's chances are five times greater than poor women's (75:15). Men's chances are 40% better than women's (49:35); a rich man's chances are 540% greater than a poor woman's (81:15).

TABLE 5. SELECTED MEASURES OF SCHOOL RETENTION, BY COLOR AND SEX, 1959.

color & sex	ratio of h.s. seniors to 100 persons 17 years old.	% of h.s. seniors who graduated.	% of h.s. grads who enrolled in college
Male:			
white	82.9	84.9	46.4
nonwhite	62.3	76.0	40.5
Female:			
white	81.0	91.9	37.4
nonwhite	60.8	84.4	38.2

SOURCE: James S. Coleman (H.E.W.), *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, p. 451.

White children have a 30% greater chance of getting to the last year of high school than non-white children (and within the non-white group, the figure for blacks - as opposed to Orientals - is much lower); and once seniors in high school, whites have a greater chance of graduating and of entering college. If we had statistics by which college entrance could be weighted by quality of institution, the advantages of white students would be even more marked.

MECHANISMS OF TRACKING

The Differences Between Suburban and Inner City Schools are the most Important Aspect of Tracking.

From elementary school to university, tracking is mainly a question of differences in quality between entire schools. Suburban schools are newer, better equipped, with better "reputations" and prestige among admissions and employment officers than are urban, particularly black schools. In many cities, teacher seniority transfer policies allow teachers to choose their assignments after an initial period of "internship" in a "difficult" school. In some cities, principals can choose their own teachers directly. With either method, the result is that experienced teachers are found in white middle class schools within a metropolitan area and that inexperienced, temporary teachers are found in urban black and working class schools.

The importance of inter-school tracking

is illustrated by this table, which shows how, shortly after Sputnik, students were

TABLE 6. PROGRAM FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

Income group	# of gifted children chosen	rate per 10,000 students
I (below \$5000)	0	0
II (\$5000 -)	4	1.1
III (\$6000 -)	41	6.1
IV (\$7000 -)	120	20.1
V (\$8000 -)	123	36.0
VI (over \$9000)	148	78.8

By income halves, the rate per 10,000 students was:

A (under \$7000) ... 3.7
B (over \$7000)..... 34.4

SOURCE: Patricia Sexton, *Income and Education* (1961), p. 60.

chosen for a city-wide "gifted children program" in a major Northern city.

Not a single student from a school which served a neighborhood where families made less than \$5000 was chosen, whereas nearly 1% of the students from schools in the richest communities were chosen.

The pressures for internal school tracks *decrease* as the rigidity of the inter-school tracking system increases. Both a suburban white middle class school and an urban ghetto school can eliminate extensive I.Q. testing and ability grouping within the school and within classes, without affecting tracking. In recent years, some such schools have begun to eliminate testing and ranking, in the guise of anti-tracking reform. However, the elimination of tracking within a school which is racially and socially homogenous can have the opposite effect -- to further rigidify the class and race bias of the tracking system by certifying students solely by the community in which they were schooled. Many liberal teachers cannot understand why black ghetto parents fight hard for increased testing, establishment of special classes, and other programs which entrench internal tracking. But the parents can see what the liberal teachers cannot: to eliminate tracking within a ghetto school will more likely mean that *no* student will have a chance at college rather than that all will. In the absence of certified tracks, all students are likely to be considered "average." Special scholarship programs were established in the late 60s for "bright" ghetto youth. But college admissions officers are still not interested in an "average" black kid.

Similarly, many liberal teachers in privileged suburban school systems have been pleased by the willingness of a few of those school systems to experiment with less tracked forms of learning and with less competitive atmospheres. But again, while these reforms may be important for other reasons, they are not really the anti-tracking reforms they seem to be. Any graduate of an "untracked" school in a wealthy suburb will have an assured place in college.

Internal school tracking (or "ability grouping") becomes more essential to the maintenance of class and race stratification in schools which are not socially and racially homogenous. Ghetto border schools, mixed middle and working class schools, changing neighborhood schools -- these are places where internal tracking is most rigid.

"Ability Grouping" within Working Class Schools is also an Important Way of Separating Students by Race and Social Class.

Formal separation of students into classrooms by "ability" usually begins in the very early grades. At that time, administrators begin insisting that the naming of

classes '2-1' '2-2', '2-3', etc. is for purposes of identification only; but students, teachers and parents soon figure out that the euphemisms really mean 2-smart, 2-average, 2-dumb. And even within these classes, intra-classroom tracking, usually in the form of Reading Groups, intensifies the homogeneity.

Reading Groups in the early grades could, of course, be established randomly. Most teachers, however, attempt to make the reading groups homogenous in ability; often the groups will start with different readers. Or the more advanced groups will progress from the more elementary readers faster. The placing of students in ability groups at such an early age must be partly intuitive; it is not surprising that in this society, teacher intuition is affected by race and class prejudice. This is especially the case where teachers are furnished with detailed information about their pupils' family and economic situation. A recent study followed a group of black children from kindergarten to second grade: the children in higher reading groups were also those with small families, high income, employed fathers, families with both parents present, more adequate clothing and light skin (for black children).¹²

Reading is the key to most intra-school tracking. It is by reading scores that students are measured (I.Q. tests are essentially tests of reading achievement); it is by reading proficiency that teachers in early primary grades judge their students and that students learn to judge themselves. It is an interesting sidelight to the controversy about tracking that black children do better, relative to whites, in arithmetic than in reading.¹³

Black Children Get Tracked by Their Failure in Reading.

Since reading is key to tracking, the overbalance of black children in low tracks throughout their school careers becomes a question of why black children don't learn to read.

In the first place, few black children are expected to read by their teachers. This is illustrated not only by the Reading Group study cited above, but by our common sense observations of our fellow teachers. A recent experiment showed that, especially in the early grades, teacher expectations are an important influence on pupil progress. Teachers in a California elementary school were given the names of 20% of their students and told that these students were "late bloomers" and expected to spurt ahead. In fact, the students were randomly chosen, but they did, nonetheless, "spurt" during the experiment: first graders who were expected to spurt gained an average of 27.4 I.Q. points in eight months.¹⁴

Because teachers expect less of low-

track, and especially black children, these children are taught less and learn to expect little of themselves. Thus, being placed in a low track becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Black children in particular do *increasingly poorly* as they move through school. First grade black children have a median verbal test score of 45.4 (where the national average is 50). By the twelfth grade, their median verbal test score is down to 40.9 (not to speak of all the black students who never made it to twelfth grade).¹⁵

Black children's failure is sometimes explained by theories of 'cultural deprivation'. According to this line of reasoning, black children need "compensatory" programs because they are culturally deprived -- usually, in the consciousness of teachers, this deprivation results from the failure of black parents to read bedtime stories to children, to "have books around the house," to take their children to museums, to give children a room of their own to study in, to communicate to their children the "true" value of education, and to speak standard English.

It is true, of course, that black ghetto children are culturally different from white middle class children (and teachers); a pride in black culture has become more legitimate in black communities in recent years. It is also true that reading is a more foreign activity to lower class than to middle class children entering school. Black children speak a dialect whose sentence structure and even spelling does not conform to that of the reading text in school. Black children have not had an extensive imaginary experience with the talking animals and locomotives which appear in infant books of white middle class children; on the other hand, children who grow up in compact urban areas and in non-nuclear families may have greater maturity, more developed problem-solving abilities and a more active emotional life than do white middle class children.

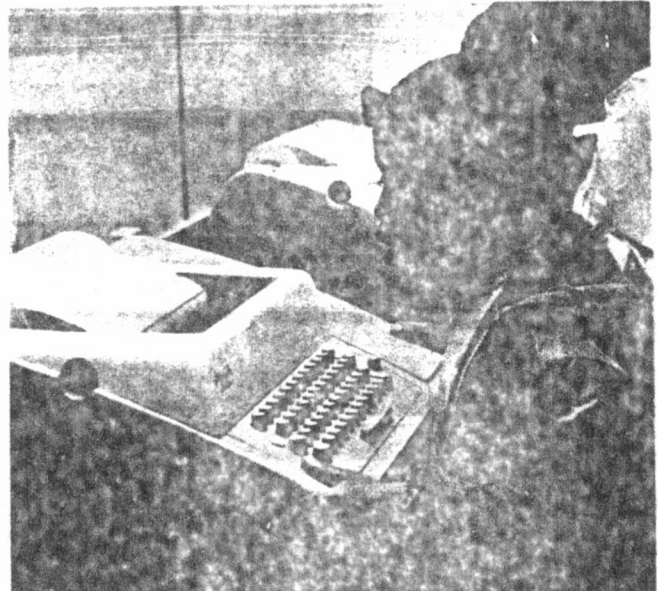
These differences cannot be ignored, but they need not lead to a racist judgement that black culture is really no culture and that black children are culturally deprived ---for this judgement can also make the teaching of reading destructive. In recent years, early childhood readers have been published to replace the all white "Dick and Jane" -- but these readers simply substitute some black faces for white ones. The black faces still manage to speak standard English and be "just like" their little white friends. These phony images are as difficult for black kids to identify with as the white suburban images which preceded them. Occasionally an urban scene is included in the readers, but these too are attempts to transplant the scenery without any of the accompanying emotional or political life which ghetto kids understand so well.

The experimental TV series, *Sesame*

Street, is also an attempt to teach reading to underprivileged children. Sometimes the *Sesame Street* dialogue dips into hip youth slang now common in the white community, but never is there a realistic admission of a cultural barrier between white and black puppets; never is there a realistic urban sequence in which (as in real life) only blacks participate.

In short, integrated readers (or programs) can sometimes involve simply increased pressure or additional tricks to get black kids to identify with the values and life-styles of the white middle class.

Language is culture, and the one place where white supremacy cannot afford to compromise is in dialect and sentence structure. So long as reading continues to mean "standard" English, black kids will find reading to be the most foreign of school-taught skills, the one most threatening to their



identity, the one most important to resist. And as kids continue to be tracked on the basis of their reading (or I.Q.) ability, black kids will continue to fall relative to white kids in the tracking system.

In some urban areas, community pressure has forced school administrators to abandon I.Q. testing as the chief early placement index in school tracks. For it has now become relatively public (though known to educational psychologists for 30 years) that I.Q.s do not remain stable throughout life and are not a foolproof index of "ability" as opposed to "achievement." The response of school administrators to this anti-I.Q. pressure has frequently been to substitute reading tests for I.Q. scores as the chief objective placement index (together with teacher recommendations). This will not, of course, affect the racism of tracking.

Racist teacher expectations and the fact that black kids are asked to read what is virtually a foreign language are two im-

portant reasons why black kids can't read and thus wind up in dead-end tracks. A third reason, applying to school achievement in general and not just reading, is that black kids, their parents and their communities do not believe in the possibility of school success. In fact, black kids do not generally try as hard.

In 1968, the Kerner Commission found that the typical black rioter was a teenager or young adult who was "somewhat better educated than his non-rioting Negro neighbor and was usually underemployed or employed in a menial job."¹⁶ In other words, these were kids who tried a little harder in school and found it didn't pay off. They were the losers who made it possible for the white working class kids in the Army pamphlet to win steady jobs.

Young black children do not need a well worked out theory of black underemployment to make a conscious decision that school sacrifices aren't worth it. A skepticism about the value of education is part of the culture of the ghetto, illustrated daily by the massive underemployment and unemployment of young people, high school educations notwithstanding.¹⁷ The white liberal belief that skepticism about education is evidence of cultural deprivation is in fact the myth; the skepticism itself is supported by realistic evidence about black employment prospects. Blacks have always served as a surplus labor force for the American economy: so long as an employment demand for menial jobs exists in the economy, if the entire black community were suddenly to gain faith in education and succeed in school, the most likely result would be to "upgrade" employment qualifications to maintain good jobs out of black reach. Jobs now requiring high school diplomas would begin to require two years of college. It is logical that, given the economic structure, some people will have to fill the menial jobs. Blacks implicitly suspect it will be them, education or no -- they are almost certainly right.¹⁸

Schools Oppress Black Kids Much More than Schools Oppressed Immigrant Kids in the Early 20th Century.

The argument is sometimes advanced that in the early 20th century, immigrant Catholics worked their way up the economic structure through self-improvement (i.e., education) and blacks can do the same. But this argument is faulty on a number of grounds. First, it assumes that immigrant kids did succeed in school and that this success qualified them for good jobs. But with the exception of a few special ethnic groups whose culture placed an extraordinary emphasis on school achievement, this was not the case. Large numbers of barely literate white working class kids passed through the

schools in the early 20th century; but this was not seen as the massive problem it is seen to be for blacks today, because the jobs immigrants sought (crafts and factory work) did not set high educational qualifications and use school success as the condition of employment. Of all kids born as late as 1915-1919, only about 45% finished high school.¹⁹ The figure was probably lower for immigrant kids - certainly lower than the 48% of black kids who in 1960 graduated from high school.²⁰ So despite the fact that the cultural alienation from middle class teachers and texts of immigrant kids was not as great as that of black kids today, immigrant kids still did not do better in school than black kids do today. The apparent economic mobility of working class immigrants was due to other than educational causes.

The second fault with the immigrant analogy is that immigrants left school to join an industrializing economy with new jobs being created at the middle of the economy and at the top. As immigrants moved from menial work to skilled labor and then on to middle class bureaucratic and professional jobs, blacks were imported from the South to take their places digging ditches and sweeping floors. Today, the distribution of available jobs is not shifting from menial jobs to better ones. As we have seen, there is widespread unemployment of professionals, and blue collar jobs are being eliminated in favor of service, sales, clerical and technical jobs which are no better paid. Today, there is no new wave of immigrants to take over the bottom of the heap and push blacks upward. In the context of today's economy, it will take a massive confrontation with American racism to equalize the economic position of black Americans. Educational motivation is no substitute for that confrontation; in the absence of that confrontation, many blacks correctly perceive that an emphasis on education is a hoax. When they pass this attitude, usually implicitly, on to their children, the kids might not fight as hard against all the other forces consigning them to the lowest school tracks.

The Job of School Counselors is to Get Kids to Adjust to the "Realism" of a Rigid Social Structure.

Despite the liberal rhetoric about education as a stepladder up, teachers and counselors often acknowledge the economic realities, and keep black and working class kids in the low tracks intended for them. In his *Autobiography*, Malcolm X remembers telling his 7th Grade English teacher that he wanted to be a lawyer:

Mr. Ostrowski looked surprised, I remember, and leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. He

kind of half-smiled and said, "Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer -- that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you *can* be. You're good with your hands -- making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person -- you'd get all kinds of work."

Malcolm reflected that "if Mr. Ostrowski had encouraged me to become a lawyer, I would today be among some city's professional black bourgeoisie."²¹ But here, Malcolm could well have been wrong and Ostrowski right. If blacks like Malcolm had been encouraged to become lawyers, most of them would not have been admitted to law school; if admitted, they would probably have had to quit before graduating to work; and if graduated, they would most likely have wound up with a post office or civil service job that they could have had without law school in the first place. Ostrowski could have encouraged Malcolm to be a lawyer, but he couldn't create employment opportunities for black lawyers if the opportunities didn't exist.

While most counselors today would sanitize Ostrowski's language, their function is the same -- to get kids to be "realistic". Today, that means discouraging black and working class kids from entering tracks which lead to four year colleges and professional jobs and directing those kids to junior colleges with narrow technical programs instead. But even these opportunities are restricted, and for many kids, "realism"

will mean not trying to do more than keeping a head above water in high school, and hoping that *any* job will be around afterwards.

One authority described this counseling function as "cooling out". And he warned junior college counselors, in a passage equally applicable to teachers and the Army pamphlet mythologizers:

...one dilemma of a cooling-out role is that it must be kept reasonably away from public scrutiny and not clearly perceived or understood by prospective clientele.

...If high school seniors and their families were to define the junior college as a place which diverts college-bound students, a probable consequence would be a turning-away from the junior college and increased pressure for admission to the four-year colleges and universities that are otherwise protected to some degree. This would, of course, render superfluous the part now played by the junior college in the division of labor among colleges.²²

Thus, while a meritocratic tracking system might be a rational channeler in this economy, school tracks are far from meritocratic. There are tracks for girls and tracks for boys. Entire schools are virtually assigned specified channeling roles in proportion to the economic privilege of the area they serve. I.Q. and reading tests are in fact tests of race, class and sex, disguised as tests of ability. The role of teacher judgements in the assignment of students to tracks is infected with racism and class prejudice. And, if all else fails, the "realism" of counselors and teachers insures that, in a job market with limited opportunities, those already at the bottom are not encouraged to increase competition at the top.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY REFORMS

Could the tracking system be reformed to be truly meritocratic? Could tests and programs be devised which insured that students were placed in tracks solely on the basis of ability and not of race, class and sex?

Educational Planners are Divided about whether to Attempt to Remove Race and Class Bias from Tracking. Some Liberals Have Proposed Desegregation or Decentralization.

This question is really the subject of a fierce debate between two very powerful factions of educational planners. Answering "yes" are the liberals, led by the Kerner Commission, the Coleman Report, the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Commission, frequently followed by the Department of Health Education and Welfare and the War on Poverty (OEO) -- but with unenthusiastic (or non-

existent) support from the Nixon Administration. Answering "no" are the conservatives, dominating local school boards and state legislatures where these decisions must ultimately be implemented. Both factions recognize that tracking is essential to prepare some students for good jobs and others for jobs not as good. Their difference is whether competition should be increased so that black kids could get a better crack at the higher tracks.

The Kerner Commission saw three alternatives, and chose:

The alternative is not blind repression or capitulation to lawlessness. It is the realization of common opportunities for all within a single society.²³

Meritocracy is the only good riot insurance. Or, in the words of the Ford Foundation Program Officer arguing for increased black participation in local schools:

participation has a positive effect on

the participants as well as the system. For example, as parents in East Harlem become more engaged in the education process, "quality education" replaced "black power" as the slogan. ...In the train of responsibility, judgement, stability and dedication to constructive purpose are likely to follow.²⁴

The first meritocratic educational reform was school desegregation, and there is still an occasional flurry of activity from HEW and the courts. The theory of integration was that if you put black and white kids in the same schools with the same teachers, all kids would have an equal education and thus an equal crack at the privileges which educational certificates bring. Integration has not generally served this function though, because integration usually means simply a shift from an inter-school tracking system to an intra-school tracking system. James Herndon, in *The Way It Spozed To Be*, described how as the high school he was teaching in integrated, "grouping by ability, formerly anathema in the district, has caught on."²⁵ In Chicago, the few integrated high schools have the most tracks; the all white schools have no Basic (lowest) track and the all black schools can't find kids to qualify for Advanced Placement classes.²⁶

Integration today is used more often to frustrate black militancy and control than to achieve equality of education. In Chicago there have been two attempts at school integration in recent years: in one, black kids were bussed out of a rare integrated high school in a changing neighborhood, to attempt to prevent the formerly white majority school from becoming black majority. In the second, the Federal Government sued to achieve a teacher placement policy which leaves student populations segregated but requires assignment of beginning black teachers to white schools and of beginning white teachers to black schools.

School decentralization is the second meritocratic strategy, advocated largely by the Ford Foundation. Decentralization is different from community control; the former consists essentially of allowing local managers to operate schools within the limits of city-wide policy (finance, certification requirements, standardized testing, etc.); the latter would include setting those policies in the community itself. Decentralization is getting its first major tests now in New York City; other cities are making tentative steps toward some administrative decentralization and community advisory councils. It is not yet possible to say whether decentralization will do the job really intended for it: cool the anger of black parents about the failure of schools to educate their children. It is also unclear whether decentralization can succeed in eliminating

some of the cultural alienation and racism which black children experience in schools and which contributes to their consignment to the failure tracks.

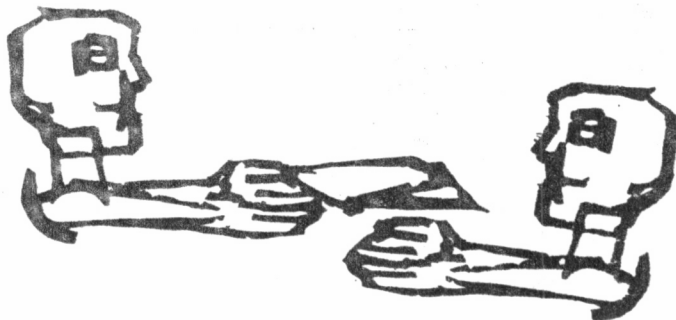
Performance Contracting is Another Liberal Strategy Attempting to Offset Tracking Bias Against the Poor.

A third strategy is "performance contracting" -- by which the teaching of sections of a school curriculum (or, as in Gary, an entire school) is subcontracted to a profit making corporation. The corporation's fee is contingent on student success in learning reading, arithmetic, etc. It is argued that corporations whose profit depends on black kids learning to read will make sure that the kids do learn. Racism can be fought if there is money to be made in the fight. For contracts let in 1970, contractors must improve students' performance in reading and mathematics by 1.6 grades per year in order to break even financially. And a corporation which increases student performance by 2.3 grades in a year can collect a bonus of \$110 per student.²⁷

Performance contracting began as do many educational innovations - with "pilot project" grants from the Federal Government (in this case, from the U.S. Office of Education and the Office of Economic Opportunity). Though the first experiment in 1969-70 was somewhat embarrassing for USOE -- Dorsett Educational Systems earned its profit simply by teaching schoolchildren in Texarkana the answers to tests they would be given -- the system was applied in at least 20 school districts across the country in 1970-71.

The corporations are free to use virtually any methods to improve reading scores. Students in Texarkana were given free transistor radios when they completed a grade level and lesser prizes for other achievements. Some corporations are retaining the regular teacher and paying her a bonus if she can improve the kids' performance. But by far the most popular approach will be the use of teaching machines and programmed learning.

Programmed learning is the system orig-



inally derived from the "positive reinforcement" theories of B.F. Skinner (author of *Walden Two*). It involves continual testing of educational progress by letting the student know immediately whether a "right" or "wrong" answer has been given at every stage of the learning process. Using a programmed booklet or machine, if a student does a problem and gets the correct answer, the program directs the student to the next most difficult problem. If the student gets a wrong answer, the program gives the student a different page to turn to (or a different image on the machine) which breaks down the skill on which the student failed into its teachable parts. The goal is to allow each student to proceed at her or his own best pace; in a class of thirty students each student might be at a different point in the learning program at any given time -- in effect, they try to create 30 tracks in the classroom rather than 3 or 4.

The hope is that programmed instruction will allow each student to proceed at her or his scientifically best pace -- all subjective teaching factors would be removed and there would be no impediment to the achievement of black kids (performance contracting is only being tried, at the elementary level, in racial minority schools) equal to that of whites. Putting each student on a tailor-made scientific track is the fulfillment of meritocratic tracking.

It is possible that the attractiveness of monetary prizes to kids for reading achievement may wear off after a while -- although upwardly mobile white kids have always had material incentives as a chief stimulus to school success. But the chief problem with this reform is that programmed instruction is appropriate only for the teaching of testable skills where the right answer is all that matters. Kids taught almost exclusively through learning programs can learn only basic skills -- they cannot learn judgement, creativity, moral insight, etc. Thus, learning programs are now in vogue at two stages of the educational process: one in the early elementary schools for black kids; the other in the highly specialized and uncreative vocational and technical programs in junior colleges. There too, teachers are being replaced by "learning managers" and courses are divided into skill blocks with "behavioral objectives" for maximum "accountability". Programmed instruction is not taking hold as a panacea in elite colleges or in white middle class schools -- here it is used on a very limited basis, for the teaching of those non-judgemental skills to which teaching machines are ideally suited.

This makes it likely that the performance contracting fad, rather than being a weapon against race and class tracking, will simply adapt such tracking to the needs of the modern economy. Black kids will be programmed from the first grade to take up jobs

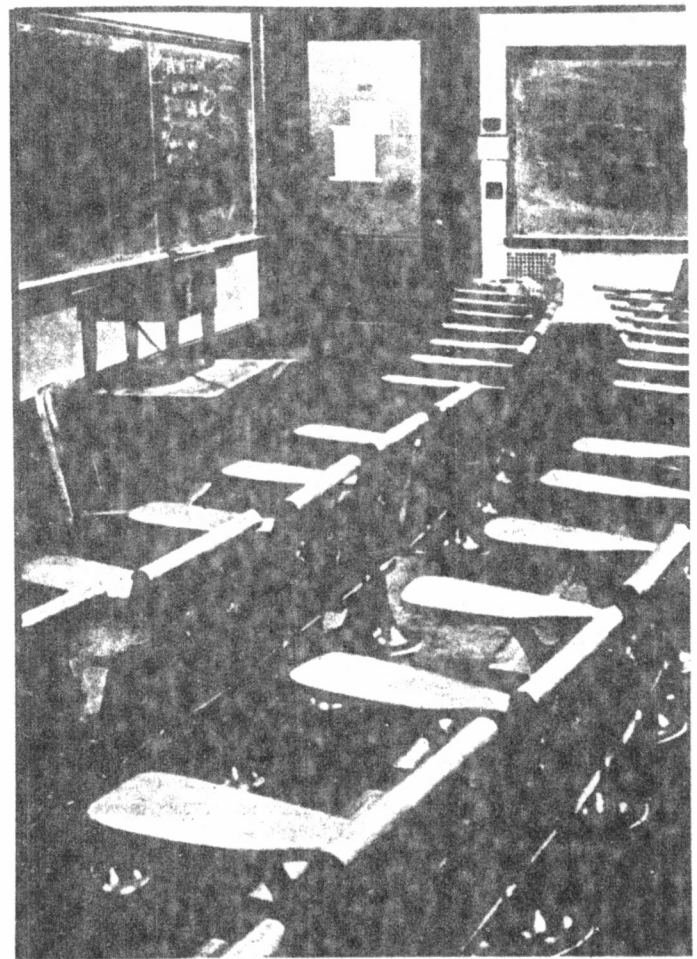
in the new technical proletariat, while white kids continue to learn the leadership and evaluative skills necessary to manage the economy.²⁸

Compensatory Education, Experimental Schools and Open Admissions have also been Tried as Meritocratic Reforms.

The liberals' fourth strategy, compensatory education, received extensive tests in the 1960s. Dependent on the theory of cultural deprivation, the most well known of the compensatory programs was Project Headstart, which assumed that kids had to be given a middle-class orientation before entering kindergarten in order to succeed in school. Those kids whose families couldn't be trusted to provide this orientation (mainly blacks) would be taken into a pre-school program where they would have the opportunity to hear fairy tales and go to museums.

Compensatory education is on its way out as a panacea, although some programs continue and are still judged to be successful (e.g., *Sesame Street*). But in the words of the Ford Foundation,

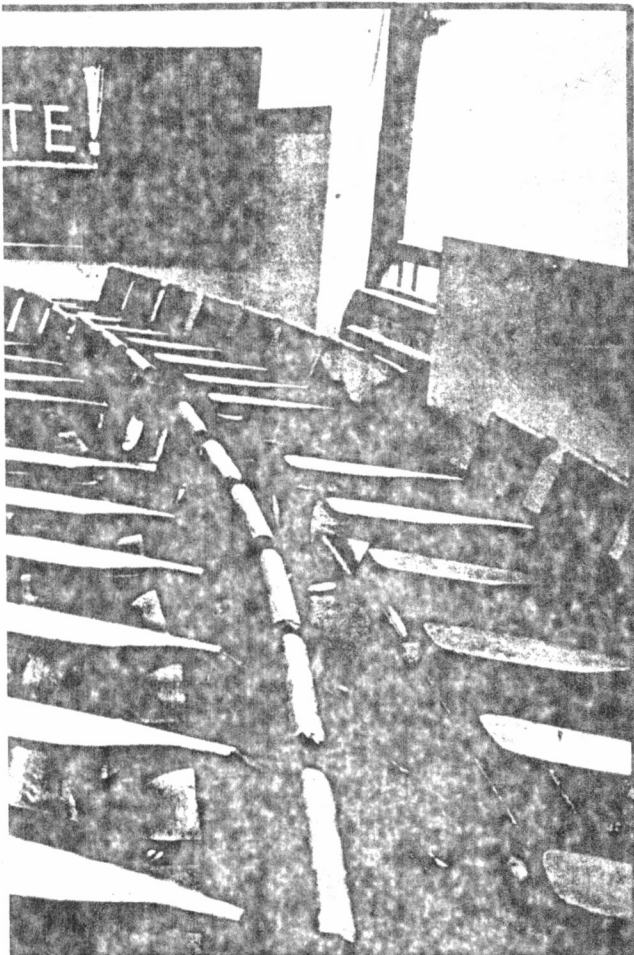
Compensatory education -- attempts to overcome shortcomings in the learner -- is the most prevalent form of intervention designed to raise [urban] pupils' academic achievement. It characterizes



such efforts as the Ford Foundation-supported Great Cities School Improvement Programs, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and New York City's early Higher Horizons Program and recent More Effective Schools Program. Compensatory education seeks to attack a spectrum of defects in the learner --verbal retardation, lack of motivation, and experiential and sensory deprivation -- that presumably prevent his participation in the learning process. In addition to grafting extra education onto the regular school experience, proponents of compensation have attempted to nip deficiencies in the bud through preschool programs like Project Headstart...

Enormous effort, ingenuity, and funds have been invested in compensatory education, but the evidence gathered from even the best efforts indicates that they are having little significant impact on the problem of low achievement among disadvantaged children...²⁹

A fifth strategy to combat the race and class bias of tracking is the attempt to bring elite educational innovations to selected groups of "disadvantaged youngsters". Most notable are the experimental high schools like Parkway in Philadelphia, Adams in Portland (Ore.) and Metro in Chicago.



These are attempts to apply the libertarian prescriptions of the free school movement to an urban high school setting.

The experimental high schools are, in effect, a new special track within the city school system. Presumably black kids graduating from relatively non-structured schools without walls will be prize candidates for similar experimental college programs, or will at least be looked on favorably by admissions officers and employers.

But these experiments are not without their problems. The principal of John Adams High School has noted that "our loosely structured curriculum is not yet reaching some students, especially the blacks." He has found that black and working class parents feel that most employers will show no interest in working class students trained to be creative, self-directing and independent. Black students at John Adams seem to want a traditionally disciplined high school curriculum which, if survived, at least gives them a chance in the working world.³⁰

Experimental schools are even more vulnerable than standard high schools to the vocational imperialism of corporate employers anxious to train students to a narrow non-transferable vocation. Curricular freedom comes to mean the freedom of corporate employers to teach high school courses to potential employees. "General Electric has provided two high schools in Cincinnati with modern washing machines and other equipment, enabling the school for the first time in years to fashion a realistic 'appliance technology' course." But there are setbacks: "the Insurance Company of North America... found itself with no takers when it offered a course on insurance to students in [the experimental Philadelphia Parkway School]."³¹

Even in their own terms, the experimental high schools are unlikely to have a significant impact on the racial tracking system, since the schools are experimental. Urban school boards are unlikely to underwrite an experiment which encourages freedom and autonomy in all the black students' high schools which train the service, sales and clerical force to follow orders and do as they are told. Should such experiments in fact spread, we can expect much more experimentation in the mode of General Electric and the Insurance Company of North America than in the mode of the open classroom and independent study.

Finally, at a college level, "Open Admissions" is an reform to combat racial tracking. New York City last year adopted an open admissions plan which guaranteed every high school graduate a place in one of the colleges of the City University. But this was a barely disguised attempt to divert criticism of the tracking system in the black and Puerto Rican communities. Special tracks for the "underprepared" were established within the colleges: the expectation is that open

admissions in New York will become a "revolving door", where previously inadmissible blacks and Puerto Ricans are admitted to the City University in order to be flunked out after a year or so. In any event, given the glut of teachers and other professionals with which the prior expansion of higher education has flooded the market, open admissions to four year colleges is most unlikely to be a popular reform in the next few years. More probable is an increased emphasis on directing white working class as well as black high school graduates into narrow "voc-tech" junior college programs and away from four year institutions.

"Meritocratic" Tracking Reforms are Usually Elitist -- the Rich will Keep the Top Privileges While White and Black Workers Fight It Out for Middle Positions.

The meritocratic coalition, with its programs of desegregation, decentralization, performance contracting, compensatory education, model high schools and open admissions is unlikely to succeed. It will be defeated by powerful middle class conservatives entrenched in local school boards and state legislatures, with white working class support.

As we can see from Tables 4 and 6 above, educational tracking discriminates against white workers (and against women) as well as against racial minorities. The liberal reforms, however, propose to deal only with racial discrimination; thus, these reforms divide white and black workers who ultimately have a common interest in the transformation of tracking.

The white working class, the "hardhats", the "backlash Americans" are determined opponents of liberal reforms to counter the racial bias of tracking. The Kerner Commission lent authority to the charge that this working class opposition stems from racism--the prejudice of white workers against blacks. Much of the liberal establishment, from the mass media to federal government spokesmen, publicly bemoans the white racism of workers who oppose opportunity for black kids.

But this handwringing is disingenuous. For the educational planners have structured the alternatives so that backlash is the most rational short run response of white workers.

What we see in the educational backlash is a white working class realization that in this play, 'the liberals want us out!' In the context of extremely scarce opportunity for upward mobility in the economy as now structured, meritocratic reforms must produce a white working class (backlash) reaction. If the ability to compete for the limited professional and managerial openings is increased for the black population, it must be decreased for the white working

class. If, as jobs for teachers decline, increased numbers of black students are admitted to state colleges, it is a logical certainty that significant numbers of white working class kids will be denied the most traditional entry to the professional middle class.

This is the sentiment that George Wallace and Spiro Agnew are attuned to; and in the context of a stagnant economy and limited opportunities, the sentiment is correct. When Agnew attacks the Eastern intellectual elite, or Wallace scorns HEW bureaucrats, it is because the reforms those elites propose will not threaten the admission of elite sons to Harvard or Yale. Liberalism like Headstart and Upward Bound is designed to increase competition in the middle levels of American society. The sons and daughters of the working class aspire to be teachers or social workers or engineers. The chief threat to that aspiration comes from the black kids who want to avoid being stockboys and housemaids.

The intellectual-industrial complex (from Ford Foundation to HEW) takes a risk in its attempts to reform the educational tracking system. It has judged that black urban riots are a greater danger to social stability than is the backlash of the white working class. Secure in their own privilege, the liberal spokesmen insist that the backlash is a racist phenomenon inspired by the prejudice of blue collar workers. But those workers, like the black parents on the other side of the fence, understand the true nature of the squeeze play in which they have been caught. There's got to be both a winner and a loser, and while black and white working class communities fight it out among themselves, the educational planning elites look on from above. In education, racism protects the most elite privileges by dividing black and white workers who ultimately share an interest in the transformation of tracking.

The tracking system is today a response to the problem of scarce opportunity for economic security in this country; and in the context of scarce opportunity, everyone wants to corner the market on limited privilege. Black parents want discipline and rigid tracks in their schools so that ghetto kids will at least be qualified for middle level jobs they'll have a hard time getting anyhow. White working class parents are enraged at compensatory education for blacks, for they understand too well that it is their own children who will pay for it. White middle class parents want to make sure that their children don't get caught in the scramble for the lower-middle tracks, and move to "good" neighborhoods in the suburbs with "better" schools which can guarantee admission to an elite college.

FALLACIES OF TRACKING

If meritocratic reforms were politically possible, their chief effect would be to increase access of black students to the privileges of an obsolete system. Since we are likely to be stuck with this system for some time, this increased access is an essential element of justice for which all should fight. But, for the purposes of building a long range movement, teachers should also be aware of how faulty even a "fair" tracking system would be.

Even a "Fair" Tracking System Would Rest On Dubious Assumptions; e.g., that "Objective" Ability Testing is Possible in this Society.

For the three assumptions on which even a "fair" tracking system would rest are highly dubious. These three assumptions, we will recall from p.5, were:

- ¶ - that the ability or motivation required to attain high levels of educational achievement differs from one individual to the next in measurable ways.
- ¶ - that different occupational categories require different levels of educational attainment.
- ¶ - that an occupational structure like that projected for the American economy in Table 1 (p. 3) is necessary and inevitable.

We are not prepared to say that the first assumption is false, but only that it is impossible to justify its truth. Objectivity in ability testing has never been achieved -- all our supposed tests of "ability" are in fact tests of differential socialization, class, race and sex.

Even if we developed a relatively objective ability test for a meritocratic tracking system, at what age are children to be put in tracks? Since there is no way of measuring ability except by measuring achievement under some attempt at standard conditions, the liberals hope to create as uniform as possible an environment for all children so that competition for the top tracks will be based on genuinely "equal" opportunity. But unless this track placement is done at a very late age in a child's life, many kids will be cut off from opportunities because of their own rate of development. Even among children of relatively equal background and environment, teachers often spot "late bloomers" -- kids who, for one non-standardizable reason or another, become highly motivated relatively late in their school careers. Even if race and class could be eliminated as the determining factors in track placement, this problem alone would prevent any truly objective system of early



childhood ability testing. Even for a single individual with a relatively constant environment, I.Q. scores can vary throughout life.

Even more important is the fact that we have no way of defining ability for American children. Every test we have -- I.Q. scores, reading tests, etc. -- are in fact so infected with cultural assumptions that we are not testing ability but race, class and sex. Liberals assume that this problem will be eliminated if early childhood socialization can be standardized. But how much standardization of socialization (and by whom?) is required to justify the tracking system?

This question may seem panicky. But there is in fact talk among the nation's educational planners of attempting to fully standardize child rearing practices for the entire population.

This form of totalitarianism is closely related to the "cultural deprivation" theories we described earlier. If one believes (as does the Coleman Report, the Moynihan Report and the Ford Foundation) that poor urban education stems primarily from "defects in the learner", there is no limit to how early the meritocratic state should intervene in the homes of racial minorities.

Thus, in April 1970, President Nixon sent to the Dept. of H.E.W. a recommendation of his personal physician that all children be tested at age 6 to identify criminal potential; and that the potential criminals be "treated" by being placed in state run camps. And in the same month, the Commissioner of Education, Dr. James Allen, proposed that all American children should be "diag-

nosed" at age 2½ for "home and family background, cultural and language deficiencies, health and nutrition needs, and general potential as an individual." This information would then be computerized and sent to a "team of trained professionals whose job it would be to write a detailed prescription for the child and, if necessary, for his home and family as well."³²

Within our current political structure, this kind of emphasis on improving "ability" testing is more likely to lead to cultural annihilation than to equal opportunity.

The Assumption that School Success is a Rational Job Certifier is also False.

The second assumption of meritocratic tracking -- that different occupational categories require different levels of educational attainment -- is so deeply rooted in modern American ideology that many will find it strange even to question. But the assumption is false.

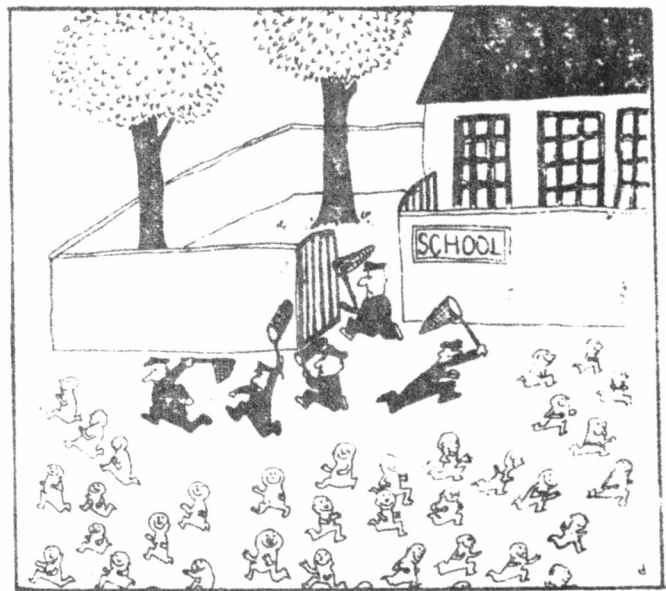
At a common sense level, many of us teachers realize that little in our formal school training was relevant to our teaching roles. Life experience - in the world of work - rather than college or ed. school would have been better preparation for teaching. We know that many competent teachers with real skills to teach are kept out of the schools because they don't have the formal educational credentials; while many incompetent teachers fill the schools simply because they have persevered to get a B.A. and a dozen ed. credits.

Sixteen years of formal education is not the best qualification for a good teacher. It should not be surprising, therefore, that in other occupations as well, formal schooling has little relevance to the real requirements of the job. A recent statistical study has shown that workers with more schooling do not do better jobs than workers with less. For textile workers, utility installers, auto workers, paper technicians, secretaries, insurance agents, bank tellers, electrical engineers and scientists, higher educational levels did not improve job performance.

Air traffic personnel working for the Federal Aviation Agency [need] the characteristics that technical college training might be expected to develop... Yet half of the 507 air controllers who had attained government rating 14 or above had no formal schooling beyond high school.

Further, there was no pattern of differences in job grades among men with different school records... Non-college graduates *without* managerial training earned the most awards. Nevertheless, FAA officials expect to raise the schooling requirements for new employees in the future...³³

That formal schooling has little relationship to job performance does not mean



that a high degree of skill is not required for many jobs. Teaching requires skill, but most of us feel that we gained our most important teaching skills on the job -- not in ed. classes. Apprenticeship under the careful eye of a respected master is a much more effective way of gaining skills -- be they teaching or air traffic skills, surgery or auto mechanics.

If formal schooling does not qualify occupational skill, why is school tracking used to select out different categories of workers, and why are educational requirements for most jobs increasing? Simply because school attendance is more a means of restricting access to good jobs than a means of qualifying people to do jobs well. The nation's first high schools, established in Massachusetts in the 1840s, were set up in order to keep Irish immigrants out of competition for expanding managerial opportunities in the industrial revolution -- not because a high school education was necessary for job success.³⁴ In 1910, "only a little better than an eighth of all adults had 12 or more years of schooling, yet a third of the labor force was employed in white collar occupations [which now require at least a high school diploma], while many others were employed in demanding, skilled, technical jobs."³⁵ As competition for good jobs increased, so did educational requirements.

Compulsory education laws were passed and increased over the last 150 years, not primarily because school was good, but because child labor was bad. Compulsory school laws were the reverse side of the coin of child labor prohibitions -- with work forbidden, school was needed to keep kids out of trouble. Today, there is talk of raising

the compulsory attendance age to 18 -- not because of increased educational levels required in the economy, but because youths who can be kept in school cannot swell the unemployment or delinquency lists.

Again, we can use our own experience to guide us. School teaching is not becoming more complicated, not requiring increased education. But master's degrees are more and more helpful in getting teaching jobs because there is a surplus labor pool in the teaching field.

So the assumption that better jobs require more (or "better") school education is false. Even a tracking system which created "fair" competition for school honors would be irrational in its own terms -- it would have little to do with qualifying graduates for job performance.

The Occupational Structure on Which School Tracking Rests is Irrational in this Era.

Finally, the third assumption underlying tracking -- that the projected occupational structure is given and rational -- is also false. In the American economy of the late 20th century, it is neither necessary nor desirable to hoard educational opportunities like scarce resources, allocating them in fine proportion to the status of occupational categories.

Most of the production and most of the work done in American society today is waste production. Missiles, striped toothpaste, planned obsolete cars, -- most production exists either to destroy other people or to get Americans to consume junk they don't need and have to be convinced to want. If we imagined American society without this useless production, we could then imagine an occupational structure and concomitant school system based on equality rather than hierarchy.

The elimination of 3/4 of the nation's Gross National Product³⁶ would enable us to eliminate the narrow standard of productive efficiency which lies behind much occupational differentiation. Instead an efficiency of human development could be substituted. For example, in a society with productive capacity to burn, how easy it would be to give everyone who worked in a hospital-- from dishwasher to doctor -- medical training, make the delivery of medical care a cooperative endeavor of the entire hospital staff and begin to break down the distinctions between doctor and dishwasher altogether.³⁷ There are certainly enough educational resources in America to invest in that kind of training; and with the elimination of useless work, labor power would not be too scarce to "waste" on "unnecessary" (in strictly economic terms) education.

The same reasoning could be applied to any occupational hierarchy in this country. The narrow considerations of efficiency which are used in a production plant to justify keeping some workers in monotonous jobs while others do "important" work, having the society as a whole invest more in the education and training of management than of labor -- all of these social arrangements have

no rationale if narrow economic efficiency is unnecessary. And efficiency is certainly obsolete in an economy which produces too much rather than too little.

Ultimately, the rationale of efficiency which justifies hierarchical educational privileges for a hierarchical occupational structure boils down to the maximization of profit. Money cannot be "wasted" on "unnecessary" equality, because these would cut into corporate profits (in a private enterprise) or waste tax money (in a public institution). But profits themselves are irrational in the modern American economy. Historically, profits were justified because they stimulated economic growth -- it is the reinvestment of profit which builds new factories and creates additional employment. But today, growth is the last thing America needs. Growth is not needed to feed, clothe, house and even educate the entire population -- growth exists for the sake of profit (and more growth) alone, and that means war, pollution and the increasing manipulation of our consumer-psyches.

This is why America needs an anti-profit -- a socialist³⁸ -- system in order to rationalize the economy; and why we believe that the true liberation of our educational system will be possible only when the profit efficiency mania which has created a hierarchical occupational structure is eliminated. Tracking and capitalism are inseparable.

Think for a minute about the growth categories of the labor force for the next ten years (Table 1). Sales workers are needed not to help us get products we want, but to get us to want products we don't need. Clerical workers are needed primarily to staff the increasingly complex bureaucracies whose chief function is to guard corporate profits and keep track of increasingly complex investment (growth) patterns. Service workers are needed to wait hand and foot on the growing middle class which defines life's meaning as more and more "conspicuous consumption." Technical workers are trained for new proletarian jobs and denied an understanding of why they do what they do -- because it is more "efficient" to hire three half-educated X-ray technicians than one radiologist who understands what is happening.

With the elimination of profit-oriented military and waste production, the work day could be shortened and distasteful work shared. Alienating labor would become a much less important part of each American's life. All work would be recognized as socially useful, and there would be no connection between the type of job you do and how well you live. Schools would have to transform their functions. No longer could schools be custodial institutions which regulate the size and composition of the labor force by separating students from other workers and from each other, keeping them in a non-competitive position until age 16.

Schools could meet their social responsibilities by helping to train students of all ages to do work which served the needs

of all the people. If all workers were entitled to an adequate and decent standard of living the rational channeling tasks which would still be performed would have none of the competitive or punitive characteristics of tracks today.

Schools could help people find purpose in life which was not defined by the need to earn a living. Not only is this task of equal relevance to all students, regardless of race, class and sex, but it is hardly separable from the living of life itself. The present tracking system could disappear and schools cease to be isolated institutions whose inmates were defined as children not yet prepared to live. At what age(s), if any, citizens should get formal, school-like training would be an open question. Society would be "de-schooled."³⁹

There is no short run reform program which can eliminate the tracking system with its breeding of competitiveness, false hopes for upward mobility, anti-social feelings of superiority and inferiority. So long as schooling is a scarce material reward which

serves as a ticket to other, more important scarce material rewards, the tracking system in some form or other will separate those rewarded in school from those not. The frustrations of tracked schools are a reflection of the class structure of a capitalist society. So long as we have doctors earning \$30,000 a year alongside dishwashers earning \$3,000, we will have a school system which separates the dishwasher from the doctor at an early age. And so long as we have a political system which is dominated by corporate interests, the schools will also serve to insure that the sons of doctors have a better crack at privileges than the sons of dishwashers.

Teachers upset about the tracking system and their role in it ultimately must look to the broader structure of society for the cause of their frustrations. A school reform movement which does not also become an economic structure reform movement is bound for defeat, caught up in its own contradictions.

TACTICS FOR CHANGE

Our challenge to the economic and philosophic assumptions behind even a "fair" tracking system are very long range. But teachers with a commitment to liberation and social equality must still respond to the tracking system as it exists today. And the first step in this response must be to look at ourselves -- for tracking brings out the worst in teachers, too.

Track Hierarchies Warp Teachers, Too.

Most schools have internal status systems in which teachers themselves achieve stature by teaching the "better" classes. Frequently, principals use this status system to reward subservient teachers, assigning them the higher tracked classes. This status system is most noticeable in inter-school teacher transfers. In most large urban areas with central teacher placement policies, teachers seek to transfer from "bad" (usually black) schools to "good" ones. Some teacher union contracts have made the right to transfer a prerequisite of seniority: a self-fulfilling system is established where the more experienced teachers are constantly transferred to the more upper middle class schools. This teacher attitude is not new; it was expressed in the 1954 classic, *Blackboard Jungle*, where teacher Solly Klein explains that "North Manual Trades High School" is the "garbage can of the educational system":

Our job is to sit on the lid of the garbage can and see that none of the filth

overflows into the streets... All the waste product, all the crap they can't fit into a general high school, all that stink goes into the garbage can that's the vocational high school system... Sure, the books will tell you the vocational high school affords manual training for students who want to work with their hands. That's all so much horse manure... The point is, you got to keep them off the streets. And this is as good a place as any. We're just combinations of garbage men and cops.⁴⁰

This attitude is not totally based on irrational status considerations. Most teachers consider it more challenging and fulfilling to teach the "bright" children. They are the children who most resemble the teacher her(him)self and with whose aspirations the teacher can most easily identify. Teachers who have accepted the system's definition of school success (and that includes most of us) as being the memorization and repetition of standard material, largely irrelevant to students' own lives or possibilities, will find it easier and more rewarding to teach students who have also been programmed to perform in this way. To have a successful and fulfilling teaching experience with kids tracked towards non-academic professions requires a much deeper understanding and commitment to working class kids and their problems than most of us are likely to acquire.

only taught together kids of many ethnic groups and "ability" levels but eight grade levels as well!

Heterogeneous teaching in one room schools was made possible in part by a heavy authoritarian discipline with physical punishment for kids who stepped out of line. But it also required the development of self reliance in students which allowed the teacher to remove herself from the center of a child's attention for much of the school day. In many cases, older children taught the younger.

Student self reliance need not be synonymous with individual isolation. Self reliance can also mean an ability to interdependent rather than solely reliant on the teacher. But students today have been socialized to be incapable of meaningful individual and group work on their own. One teacher in a heterogeneous classroom will have little success in reversing habits instilled in students before (and to be instilled again later). But heterogeneous teaching must experiment in this direction -- in the direction of increased student interaction (with more noisy classrooms), and in the direction of the motto for each student in the class: 'what you don't know, learn; what you do know, teach.' But for that to work, curriculum genuinely relevant to the lives of all the students in the class must be developed.

It is also true that there are fewer "discipline" problems in higher tracked classes, since rebellious kids are usually eliminated from high tracks as their school careers progress. Since school behavior deviance is usually the result of an implicitly (if not consciously) decision to rebel against a system which is not serving student interests, behavior problems are more likely to develop in low tracks. This is especially the case in later school years, where the low tracks have no longer even the most remote educational function; kids are bound for jobs which require no school-taught skills (except obedience), but are kept in school by compulsory attendance laws designed largely to reduce unemployment and job competition.

Not only are there fewer discipline problems for teachers as one moves up the tracks of a school; it is also easier for most teachers to teach a homogeneous class at any level than a heterogeneous class. Homogeneous classes where all students have had similar school experiences and are judged to be at the same ability and achievement level can be taught by an authoritarian approach. A teacher talks at any kid in the class and expects the rest to listen. If the teacher is so bold as to attempt a discussion, what one kid says can be taken as if any kid said it. Teachers have been so thoroughly socialized to this type of method, that if given a heterogeneous class, their most frequent response is to attempt the same method, teaching "right down the middle".

This is not largely a fault of teacher attitude; the entire school system conspires to reinforce this situation. To understand how far we have come in this direction, a teacher should try to compare her (or his) fear of teaching a heterogeneous class with the scene known to all of us from 75 years ago -- when teachers in one room schools not



Despite these difficulties, we feel that some radical teachers should seek to teach non-tracked heterogeneous classes, should advocate the establishment of such classes and should resist participation in the teacher track status system. Groups of radical teachers must investigate and learn the details of their black and white working class students' lives: where are they going, what will they do, what kinds of lives will they lead, what kind of information will they need (information ordinarily denied in schools) in order to overcome obstacles in

their destined communities and employments? The tracking system itself must be a prime subject for teaching (see Appendix III, below) --- not only do students have an absolute right to understand how their opportunities were delimited and what their life chances are, but the knowledge of tracking will be essential if students (particularly low-tracked students) are to overcome their convictions of inferiority which will continue to impede their ability to participate in struggles to better their own lives.

Though Victory is a Long Way Off, Radical Teachers Should Expose and Challenge Tracking Wherever Possible.

It is not enough for teachers only to attack tracking in their own class assignments and with their own students. A new untracked society will have to be struggled for in every institution in the land, and the schools will be an important locus of that fight.

Teachers can begin to understand that the tracking system in schools is so integral to the broad economic structure of this society that the rulers of American society will fight desperately to prevent any meaningful victories against tracking. Victories against tracking, in the short run, will most likely be perverted by those who run and plan the schools, for their reach is much greater than ours. Open admissions fights will be perverted by college flunk out policies. Integration will be perverted by ability grouping. Heterogeneous classes will be perverted by teaching machines. And so on.

But short-run fights against tracking are essential for a number of reasons. In the first place, by raising the consciousness of students, other teachers and communities about the true nature of the school system, the development of longer range struggles for social change is made more likely. In the second place, temporary victories can be won, which can make the lives of students and teachers less immediately oppressive and thus more difficult to manipulate. In the third place, struggles against as crucial an institution as tracking makes the schools more difficult to administer for repressive purposes and shifts the balance of power just a little bit away from the rulers and towards the people.

We suggest a number of struggles that teachers should start to build:

1. In high schools, student organizations should be developed which can fight for rights against the tracking system. In elementary schools, teachers should be working closely with parent and community groups, feeding those groups information about the schools which expose the tracking of their children. Teachers, student groups and community groups could build a fight around any one of a number of demands: elimination of

- grading, abolition of standardized (I.Q.) tests, abolition of homogeneous classes, public access to all school records, student access to all student records, elimination of class, race and sex bias from all texts, appointment of community representatives to assist teachers in all classrooms (with equal pay), public (community) scrutiny of all school counselors and counseling offices, abolition of all grade point requirements for student leadership positions (student government, newspaper), etc.

2. The first place to start might be to learn things you don't know; for example, what kinds of tests are used in your school to place students into ability groups? what are the euphemisms for tracks in your school (are classes numbered 3-1, 3-2, 3-10)? what does the basic or general program really include? are parents told about student testing and placement? are all students' records available and open for parents and high school students to see? what are the types of different courses and curriculum offered for each high school track? where do students go after high school? what kinds of jobs? to college? where? does the counseling department provide students with a broad range of alternate choices? how is the budget determined for your school? how does it compare to that of other schools?

This information is often readily available at Boards of Education research bureaus, but it means a lot of digging and putting all of these facts and figures into a new framework. In case this information isn't available to you or to parents and the public, an important fight should be public access to all information about the schools. By piecing together this research from your school with that of teachers, parents and students from other schools in your city, you can develop a picture of how tracking works in your city.

3. School decentralization movements should be developed into genuine community control movements, bearing in mind that for community control to be real, each community must control institutions of equal value. Parents councils in low-tracked high schools should begin to demand from local colleges that each high school be given a college admission quota proportional to the high school's enrollment; and that this quota be filled by students from a full range of economic backgrounds.

4. Teachers must attempt to get teaching assignments in white working class schools, attempting there to develop support for egalitarian reforms of the tracking system. This is a difficult thing to do, since most of us teachers have been so infected with the establishment notion that the opposition of these communities to reform is based on racism, that we find it hard to relate to white working class students and

communities except in the most condescending ways. But white working class school movements must be built on the recognition that the tracking system is detrimental to them as well, and that no movement for liberation can be built which does not recognize the priority rights of black and Spanish people for equality.

5. Teacher movements should begin to reflect this understanding of schools as an institution. Radical teachers should join teacher unions, and fight for union policies which ally the union with community groups, which bargain for equal education and an end to tracking, etc. In the next few years, un-

but do not have the kind of information that "insiders" have to concretize their concerns. Teachers should feed parents this. Because of the very real danger of retaliation toward teachers on the part of the administration, it's often good to have parents and the community confront principals and Boards of Education with evidence-- demanding answers to the questions about discriminatory mechanisms used on their children. In some cities, teachers have worked with parents to develop parent legal rights guides. Teachers and high school students can participate together in learning school law and becoming



employed teachers will be a potentially powerful force -- every city should have an unemployed teachers' council which uses its knowledge of what tracking did to its own membership to raise demands which abolish tracking for all.

Often we find ourselves isolated or in the minority in our schools, but it is important to begin even with a few other teachers to talk to. Some teachers have developed discussion groups (perhaps during lunch period, maybe after school) where questions about problems within the schools and frustrations that teachers feel can begin to be understood as problems of a broader system. These discussion groups can form into teacher groups that share teaching experiences and ideas for curriculum; groups in which we learn to criticize our work and that of others. These groups can then begin to develop strategies for challenges to the tracking system: strategies that involve other teachers, our students and their parents and communities.

Often there are parent and community groups who are angry about school conditions

lay advocates for other students. Parents can learn to do this in elementary schools as well.

Remember, our often perceived "failure" to educate our students is not a result of our own personal inadequacies, of undisciplined or unmotivated students, of hostile communities or even of over-crowded or under-resourced classrooms. From 8 to 3 each day, facing individual kids, this is easy to forget. We make futile attempts at individual solutions in our classrooms, locking the hostile world outside our door. We may even retreat into hopelessness, seeing the only way out is to leave for a more non-alienating situation in a "free" school. Since our basic involvements lie within a classroom and a school, we tend to think of classroom and school problems as isolated. But we can't escape the social struggle, not us, not our students, not their communities. We must work together to create a society in which the schools will serve the people. We can create our weapons from our own situations in the schools of the United States.

TRACKS AND FREE SCHOOLS APPENDIX I

Many teachers are tempted to escape tracked urban school systems by working in non-public "free schools". But whatever other merit they may have, "free schools" are not an escape from tracking. They are really analogous to the private prep schools which the rich have always enjoyed, or to the liberal suburban schools which the upper middle class is now creating for its children.

Free schools usually have an almost entirely white middle class constituency. This is true because they are often expensive to run, but also because black and working class parents are justifiably suspicious of placing their children in a track which does not prepare them to compete. Thus, black students at the John Adams school in Portland want disciplined preparation from school to prepare them to compete with white working class kids for very limited opportunity. Free schools can easily be a luxury for privileged students who need not worry about employment prospects or college admissions. Some of these students can pass their entire lives on a privileged free school track, culminating in liberal non-authoritarian colleges like Antioch or Reed, going on to artistic or free professions. But most kids will still have to earn their living in this society by following meaningless orders --- a school which doesn't teach them how to do that is on a track for which they can't qualify.

Of course, if all schools in the country were "free schools", it would be a different

story. That would be "the revolution", because employers would have a labor force schooled to rebel at alienation and authoritarianism. But this is not accomplished by the voluntary creation of a few free schools by a few middle class teachers and parents. These voluntary free schools might spread, but not beyond their original social class definition --- they will remain an experiment internal to the privileged tracks.

"Free schools" would have to seize the resources of universal public education for them to have an effect beyond their own narrow class (track) base. And this would require many years of intense political struggle, not the volunteer pioneering of a few middle class teachers.

The conditions for the final elimination of tracking won't be approached until this country sees a revolutionary substitution of human need for corporate profit. Teachers must understand that their frustration about tracking will not be eased until this new system - a socialist system - is won; that since the school system is an integral cog in the country's economic machine, teachers cannot really separate their educational concerns from their social concerns. We believe that every teacher who is upset about the inequality, the authoritarianism, the sexism and the racism of schools is, almost by definition, a socialist.

IS THERE A NATIONAL TRACKING CONSPIRACY? APPENDIX II

In reading this pamphlet, some will question the implied notion of a tracking "conspiracy", led by foundations, corporations and government leaders. Most teachers, aware of the inequalities of schools, tend to think of these inequalities as "social problems", mistakes to be solved and corrected. This habit of mind is not restricted to teachers; it is widespread throughout the country and is constantly encouraged by government and corporate rhetoric. Steel corporations and gasoline companies, pour tons of waste into the air every day, and then take out television commercials to talk of how hard they are trying to "solve the problem" of pollution --- as though it were some act of nature over which the companies had no control. Government deliberately increases unemployment in order to win a more favorable balance of payments, and then announces it is studying the "unemployment problem" and searching for a solution.

We do not say that the tracking system is a conscious conspiracy, involving everyone from H.E.W. Secretary to teacher in a worked out plan to keep the downtrodden down. But neither is the tracking system a "mistake", an accidental by-product of otherwise good intentions. Between these poles of conscious conspiracy and mistake lie most social institutions in a complex society.

American capitalism is largely self-regulating. Institutions are established and survive if they serve a social function, useful to the system as a whole. If they do not, they are discarded, but not always with conscious intent. A recent example will illustrate this point. This pamphlet discussed the creation of the teacher glut and the present cut-back in teacher

training enrollment to prevent the glut of unemployed teachers from growing dangerously large. We said that most techniques for cutting back enrollment (like tuition increases) are in fact ways of excluding working class and black students from teaching opportunities.

In 1970, the Illinois State legislature passed a tuition increase bill. Legislators did not make speeches about keeping black and working class kids out of college in order to restrict the supply of teachers. Legislators did not justify the tuition increase as a means of making the tracking system more rigid. Instead, the governor spoke about how taxes were already too high and those who benefit from education should pay for it; some legislators argued that student demonstrators will appreciate their education if they have to pay higher tuition. Nonetheless, it is a fair guess that even with student demonstrations and high taxes, the tuition increase bill would not have passed if there had been a teacher shortage. Some legislators at a conscious level, others at an unconscious level, would have been less enthusiastic about tuition increases; federal programs would have been established to make grants to state college systems; and so on. Halfway between conscious intent and self-regulation, the tracking system was readjusted.

On the other hand, most teachers, because of our own indoctrination as American liberals, are too slow to believe there is conscious intent behind any oppressive policy. It took American liberals shamefully long to understand that the Vietnam war was not a "mistake" of well-intentioned Presidents and statesmen but a conscious policy of genocide, imperialism and profit. Even today, many anti-war liberals per-

sist in believing that the President doesn't have even the information which is printed in the newspapers. Similarly, we tend to believe that the country's leaders really need a study commission to find out that black kids fail in school or that, if they succeed, they can't get decent jobs anyway.

At the upper levels of any system in this society, leaders are, and must be, fully conscious of their purposes. They then structure institutions by creating incentives, special programs, training schemes, ideologies which make it less necessary for those at lower levels to be as conscious of the institution's true purposes. Teachers, counselors, even school principals play an unwitting role in the tracking system. For most of them, the damage done to women, to blacks, to white working class kids in schools is an accident and thus a "problem to be solved." But the higher in hierarchy one moves, the less self-regulating the system is, the more conscious is the intent. Most educa-

tional changes and structures begin first with a Ford Foundation pilot project; they are often picked up for an H.E.W. "demonstration project" and then adopted by either Congress or state legislatures or local school boards or even local principals --- often seemingly for purposes very different from the original purposes at the top. But the low level purposes don't matter; indeed, if they differ from the consciously manipulative purposes at the top, they help perpetuate the myth that this is an unplanned society, where winners win by luck and skill, and whose "social problems" we're doing the best we can with. Those who doubt the consciousness of purpose of the leaders who structure educational institutions should read the annual report of the Ford Foundation, or the journals of school administration, or the speeches to education administrators of high H.E.W. officials. They can't afford to fool themselves.