Black Teachers cannot Ignore White Suburbs

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PRINCETON, N.J. — In "Dear Dr. Butts," one of the stories in Langston Hughes' collection of stories about Jesse B. Semple, Jesse tells Dr. Butts that the only way he knew that Butts was his leader was that he saw his picture in a paper.

This same lament may be that of black youngsters in rural and suburban areas as they notice the absence of young black leadership in their schools and listen on the other hand, to the constant statements of solidarity and brotherhood by the same leader.

Like Semple, they may finally exclaim, "If you're my leader, let me know." Their complaint, viewed in the light of the desertion of these schools by prospective teachers, is well justified.

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How can we say that we seriously desire to change the climate of this nation when we avoid one important source of that moral and racial climate?

Are we so unsure of ourselves, our qualifications, or dedication that we refuse to admit the possibility that there is a job to do in suburban and rural communities?

Do we have so inaccurate an understanding of the mission that we think there is only one battlefield worthy of our concern?

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Like it or no, we are engaged in a struggle for the minds of American youth, and to absent ourselves from the field is to surrender that field to the enemy.

In interviewing prospective black teachers, I have been struck by an attitude that to me reflects an incomplete grasp of the duty and responsibility of the black man in education.

One of the most frequently expressed attitudes is a conviction that the only challenge for the black teacher lies in the large urban districts with a sizeable majority of black students.

Is this point of view a valid one?

Can the black teacher make his contribution only in these districts?

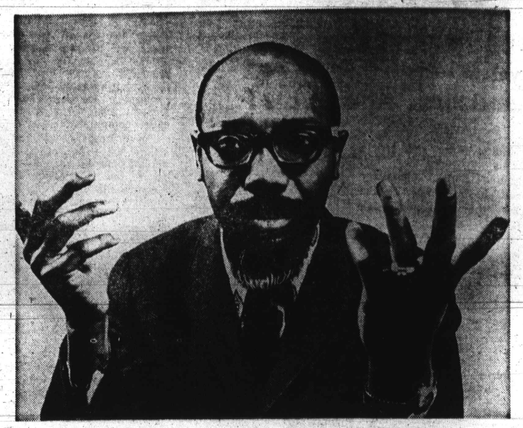
Are these the only districts where the challenge can be met?

My own experience in Trenton elementary, junior high and high schools and in Princeton High School leads me to answer the above questions with a strong "no."

We cannot delude ourselves with the nation that the inadequate knowledge, contact, and experience of the predominantly white suburban districts can be ignored.

We cannot deceive ourselves by thinking that if we work with the urban black, our job is done. It is not that simple.

Decision makers, policy makers, friends and enemies are as often, if not more often the product of suburban districts.



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Education should start at age three, says UFT

NEW YORK, N. Y. — Universal education starting at age three was one of the key proposals advanced by United Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker when he appeared before a House committee recently to urge enactment of a national program of state aid that would establish "equalized excellence" in schools throughout the nation.

"Our nation's schools are being faced with the most serious crisis in our history," President Shanker told the Subcommittee on Education and Labor at its hearing on HR 11546, "Nationwide Educational Excellence Act."

The crisis, he said, stems from a serious lack of funds, a critical lack of trained teachers and "a lack of commitment on the part of our society that education must be the number one priority if we are to provide equal opportunity for all the youth of America."

With new and expanded federal funding, according to President Shanker, American schools could be revolutionized along the following lines:

Early Childhood Education: Much recent research indicates that the most significant years of a child's life in educational terms occur before the age of six. It is vital, therefore, that a nationwide early childhood program be instituted with education on a full-time basis beginning at age three. Such a program would give a headstart in education to all children.

Help for Children with Emotional Problems: In most school systems throughout the country there are virtually no funds available to help those children with special emotional, mental or physical problems. Provision must be made for facilities for children with these special problems.

Teacher-Internship Program: A teacher-internship program must be created in which new teachers are trained under the complete supervision of a fully qualified teacher. Proper training for new teachers must be provided so that they will not be placed in charge of a class until they are judged competent.

More Effective Schools Program: The More Effective Schools Program is an elementary school program which provides small classes, psychological and guidance assistance and heavy remedial support for children. But this program is still in only a handful of schools around the country. Financial considerations prevent school boards from expanding this program despite the fact that it has proved that children of poverty can learn to read and can succeed.

Spelling out the nature of the education crisis in New York City, the UFT head noted that the Board of Education is asking for more than a $ half billion in school construction in 1970 to relieve the tremendous overcrowding.

Most observers, however, recognize that the city will not be able to budget for that amount, he added. Moreover, over the next five years, 375 school plants need to be constructed according to the Board of Education's own statistics.

"The New York school system will have a quarter of a million more pupils in 10 years than it has today and, if current projections hold true, the percentage of disadvantaged youth requiring special attention at greater public expense will be significantly greater than it is today," Shanker said.

More than one out of every three pupils attending New York City schools lives in poverty, he told the hearing.

More than 36 per cent qualify under the free lunch program and correspondingly the same percentage of children are two or more years behind in reading skills.

"The best overall predictor of school performance today seems to be the income of parents," Mr. Shanker noted. "The problem of successfully teaching the child of poverty has not yet been solved on a mass basis because thus far society refuses to supply the necessary funding," he maintained.

"These are educational problems common to urban America, and I come here today to plead with you to recognize this problem by supporting HR 11546, which will raise the level of expenditures for education to $1,600 per pupil within the next 10 years."

With the Nationwide Educational Excellence Act, meaningful early childhood education, more effective schools and other improvements can become a "national reality," he said.

"In this way, children attending a school in Harlem, a school in Atlanta, or a school in Scarsdale will all have the same opportunity to succeed — an opportunity to which all American children are entitled," the UFT president told the hearing.

HR 11546 is an AFT's bill which was introduced last May by Rep. Carl D. Perkins, chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee.

On Sept. 23, Sen. Ralph Yarborough, chairman of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, introduced an identical companion bill in the Senate: S 2950.

The AFT bill is based upon the findings of an extensive study made last year by economist Leon Keyserling at the request of the union.

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