WHY WHY WHY

"what students perceive"

A Report of the U.S.
Commission on Civil Rights
Clearing House Publication No. 24

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is a temporary, independent, bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957 and directed to:

Investigate complaints alleging that citizens are being deprived of their right to vote by reason of their race, color, religion, or national origin, or by reason of fraudulent practices;

Study and collect information concerning legal developments constituting a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution;

Appraisal Federal laws and policies with respect to equal protection of the laws;

Serve as a national clearinghouse for information in respect to denials of equal protection of the laws; and

Submit reports, findings, and recommendations to the President and the Congress.

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preface

In November 1967, the United States Commission on Civil Rights sponsored a national conference on *Equal Educational Opportunity in America's Cities*. This conference, which was attended by education administrators, teachers, students, and social scientists from across the Nation, explored a variety of issues bearing on the problem of equal education opportunity.

One of the most productive panel discussions of the conference was unique in that high school students of varying racial, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds were its participants. Adults listened while the students talked. They expressed their own views concerning the problems facing the institution of public education. The sensitivity, perceptiveness, and constructive thought displayed by these students made a deep impression on those who heard. Perhaps the most vivid of these impressions was the bitterness and frustration expressed by the students. Many clearly felt that the schools were not responsive to their needs or to the needs of society and were not keeping pace with the rapid political and social changes of the times.

Shortly after the conference was concluded, the Commission determined to examine on a much broader scale, by means of extensive interviews, the attitudes and perceptions of students concerning the education they were receiving. These interviews were conducted by Commission staff from mid-1968 through early 1969.

In all, 277 students from 17 cities and towns throughout the country were interviewed at length. Efforts were made in each of the communities to interview substantial numbers of both minority and majority group students. Of the total number of students interviewed, 44 are represented in this report. The selection process was based on criteria that would assure adequate racial and ethnic representation, geographical distribution, and full representation of various views and attitudes. Clarity of expression necessarily was an additional criterion.

The students who were interviewed not only represented different racial and ethnic groups, but different socioeconomic groups as well. Although the academic levels of the students covered a broad spectrum, from those in remedial and vocational courses to those in honors courses or advanced placement, the majority represented the average. Most of the students interviewed were high school juniors and seniors—those most settled in the school environment. The grade levels identified in the student profiles represent the students' grade levels at the time of the interview. In most cases, the interviews were arranged through local school officials and knowledgeable civic and religious leaders, and the Commission wishes to express its appreciation for their cooperation.

Questions asked, for the most part, dealt with the educational environment of the student: the courses he was taking; the teachers he liked and didn't like; the attitude of the principal and teachers toward the students, and his relationship with his fellow students. The interviews were conducted individually and in most cases the race of the student and interviewer was matched. Taped recordings were made of each interview, which usually lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. Questioning was directed toward bringing out the student's views on specific topics. These topics appear as chapter headings in the report that follows: Education Overview; Administration; Teachers; Curriculum; and Perceptions of Others.

Students talked about the administration and about school organization, describing the way in which school officials handled racial incidents or discipline grievances. They talked about teacher attitudes and teaching methods and gave their opinions about testing practices, grades, and ability groupings. Interviewers especially encouraged students to talk about their social science classes and the major contemporary issues of race and poverty. Since interviews began the week after Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, urban unrest and racial tension within the schools frequently were principal topics of discussion.

While great care has been taken to retain the spirit of the original interviews, some editing has been necessary to make

the material concise, unified, and readable. In order to present the material in logical sequences, thoughts have occasionally been transposed since certain topics have sometimes been discussed in several different parts of the interview. In addition, some liberty has been taken in deleting and inserting words in the interest of clarity and readability. For example, repetitive remarks such as "you know" have been omitted and grammar has been corrected where errors tend to detract from the substance of the material. In most cases, however, the students' words are transcribed verbatim.

It is important to stress that, although this report is based upon a sizable number of student interviews, no effort was made to assure a scientific sample, and the Commission does not present the report as a precise reflection or statistical cross-section of student attitudes. Rather, the interviews that follow are representative of the views and perceptions expressed to Commission interviewers by a large number of students of various racial and ethnic origins in different kinds of school settings.

Further, the Commission does not offer recommendations based on this study nor does it make judgments concerning the factual accuracy of the views expressed. Instead, the Commission has undertaken to act as a forum for the expression of student viewpoints in an effort to gain a better understanding of the concerns of our youth and the ways in which schools are shaping their attitudes and perceptions about education and society.

The Commission was fortunate in being able to engage the services of Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., a distinguished psychiatrist, educator, and student of American society, who agreed to prepare an introduction to the report analyzing the views expressed and discussing their implications for the future of education and our society. Dr. Poussaint's discussion provides basic insights into the issues and concerns discussed by the students, and the Commission wishes to express its deep appreciation.

One final word. Our system of public education is being tested more critically than ever before. Crucial questions are being raised to which satisfactory answers have not yet entirely been found:

How can the schools respond constructively to the needs and aspirations of today's youth in these turbulent times?
How can students participate constructively in the decisions that affect their education?
What innovations in educational technique or curriculum are necessary to improve the quality of education?
What must be done to meet the educational needs of minority group children?
What steps must schools take to promote successful adjustment to desegregation by students and teachers alike?
How can schools continue to play their historical role as "the great equalizer of the conditions of men—the balance wheel of the social machinery?"

These are some of the questions to which educators are struggling to find answers. They also are among the questions with which students are vitally concerned and in the pages that follow, they address themselves forcefully and often passionately to them. To some readers, the comments of the students concerning their educational environment—and particularly their critical comments—will carry a "shock of recognition" and remind them vividly of their own attitudes and perceptions when they were students. To others, the students' views will seem alien, and their demands and protests unreasonable. In short, each reader undoubtedly will determine for himself the validity of the students' perceptions, on the basis of his own views of the proper role of education and of the proper relationship between schools and students, shaped by the totality of his own educational and other life experience.

Whether we agree or disagree with what the students are saying, it behooves all who are concerned with the kind of education our schools are providing at least to listen. Just as educational policy cannot be determined solely on the basis of what students think is wrong with their schools, so it would be unwise to totally ignore the views of those who are, in the last analysis, what the educational process is all about. In short, the Commission believes that students may well have something instructive to say to those in positions to make educational policy and that before their arguments are rejected, they should be heard and evaluated carefully.

introduction

By Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D.

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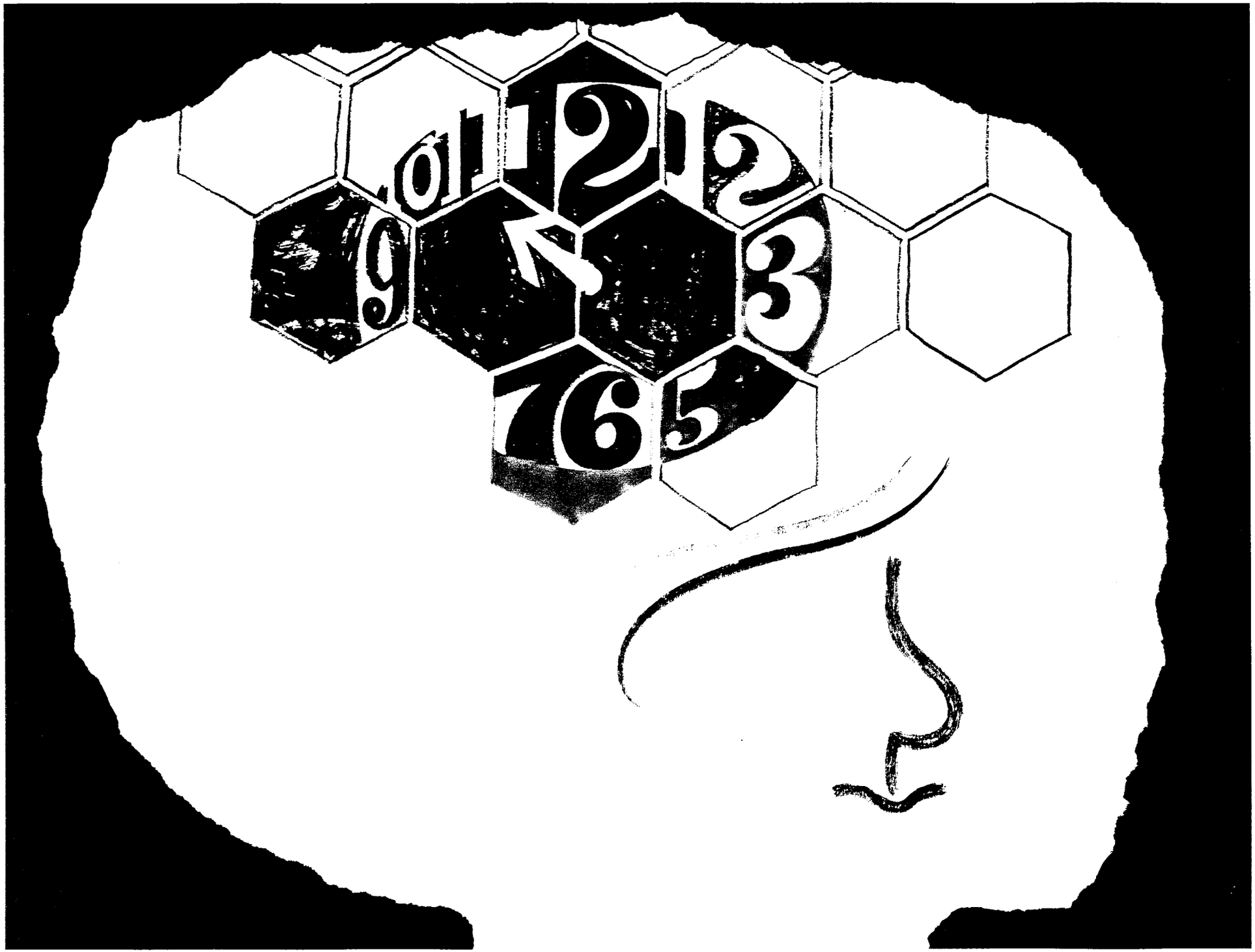
Prepared for the United States Commission on Civil Rights, February 4, 1970.

The eloquent, young voices in "What Students Perceive" carry both a message and a challenge to our society and educational system. The keen and sometimes stinging comments in this study are representative of high school youth from a broad spectrum of ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic groupings in the United States. Their candid and often colloquial communications contain a certain beauty of expression that is refreshing and perhaps distinctive of American culture. Yet, their words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do not offer us the comfort of a uniform or lucid point of view but reflect the diversity of feelings, opinions, attitudes, and experiences of students from a wide variety of social and life circumstances.

Not all of the voices here are those of discontent and despair. Nevertheless, the reports that express dissatisfaction often provide the critical insight that is a key to our understanding of the problems confronting our educational institutions. Apparently, many students are not perceiving school as we would wish or hope them to perceive it. The clash between our schools' stated mission to educate and the students' perception of that mission is both startling and ominous. We must listen carefully then to the words of these young people. We should borrow heavily from their wisdom if we are to restructure our schools to meet the many challenges of tomorrow.

In the first chapter, "Overview," a young student, Kris, opens her interview with a singeing condemnation:

School is a separate little world in itself, set up with its own conditions and its own rules for living and learning together, and it is really, really difficult to relate education to the way life is outside.

This statement of almost complete alienation contrasts dramatically with Johnny's which begins:

Conditions at my school are pretty good, but I know people that gripe about them. It doesn't make any difference what you do for them, they'll still gripe about it.

The comments of most of the students fall somewhere between these two extremes and provide us with critical assessments and, upon reflection, valuable insights. Why do so many of our young people feel estranged and alienated from our educational system to the point of becoming both school and societal dropouts? Why do our schools fail so often to serve the needs of minority group youngsters in our society?

These questions are complex and cannot be answered precisely, but if there is one important lesson to learn from reading this material, it is that students should not be viewed as some homogeneous, monolithic group that can be fitted into a rigid educational machine designed to service an old-fashioned model of a white middle class American child.

The fact is that a school program that is suitable to the disposition of Johnny may not be suitable for Kris, and vice versa. Similarly, a curriculum designed to meet the needs of a child in white suburbia may fail miserably if foisted unmodified on black or Mexican American youth in the ghettos or barrios. Likewise, programs in secondary education for rural poor would differ markedly from programs designed "to reach" youth in city slums. There are enormous differences among youth today even within a given social class. Upper class students can be hippies or West Pointers. Some school dropouts in the lower socioeconomic groups have decent jobs while others land in jail. Variations in experiences and life-styles mean that different people need different things at any given time. No single approach or method works effectively with everybody. Ideally, schools should have the flexibility of styles and approaches to work with a variety of classes of youth—hopefully, to the benefit of all.

Few people want to completely destroy our present school system but many do want to significantly modify it. As Pablo soberly expresses in the opening chapter:

School is pretty good in some cases and pretty bad in some others. Times are changing, everybody knows the times are changing and education should keep up with the times.

Thus if we are to bring about the needed modifications in programs, it is important for us to focus carefully on the inadequacies of our educational system and the changing needs and relationships in our society.

"The only way you can make it in this raggedy society is to educate yourself." This student's remark with a twist of irony expresses well the credo of all those citizens who have found in America a land of opportunity and hope. Generation after generation of immigrants have fought their way into the socioeconomic mainstream via our public school system. Today, education remains the foremost hope and promise of minority groups who continue to be rejected and oppressed. Through overt and subtle racial and socioeconomic discrimination, "a good education" is becoming an increasingly unobtainable com-

modity for too many offspring of oppressed people. Minority group students in this volume reflect some of this hopelessness and despair. At the same time, many white students of all classes are expressing similar frustration and disenchantment with the school system.

In general, the students direct their comments to subjects that can be divided into several categories—school administration, teachers and curriculum, and perceptions of others. It would be valuable for the reader to carefully savor each interview. We will only examine the important highlights of the student perceptions in this discussion.

Most of the student complaints about the administration of their high schools focus on the inflexible rules and regulations which are made without student consultation or participation. Many regulations appear to them to be unnecessarily rigid, authoritarian, old-fashioned, or otherwise unreasonable. Students complain about a lack of flexibility in rules governing styles of dress, hair style, and social behavior. Why do some principals adhere to rules governing dress and behavior that were established decades ago and do not reflect the current styles in the community? Many students express the feeling that school administrators treat them like children who are incapable of participating in decisionmaking. This contrasts sharply with the fact that at 17 boys can join the Army and at 18 die in Vietnam for the country, but at the same age, are not allowed to participate in minor decisions relating to student activities and policies in high school.

Students attending high school are usually in late or early adolescence, a time of great intellectual and psychological change. Adolescents are seeking access into the adult world and also searching for a personal identity. During this stage of life, the student is much more capable of independent thought and logical reasoning. The adolescent is capable of more self-direction and begins to reevaluate himself in relation to his family, peers, and social world. It should be expected that in the process of his growth, the teenager questions and sometimes rebels against arbitrary authority. Since school is a large segment of the adolescent's life, it exercises a great influence on his growth to adulthood. This is true for youth whether they are white, black, or brown. Therefore, from the psychological standpoint the students' cry not to be treated "like children" and their demand for greater student participation in administrative decisions affecting their lives is understandable and reasonable.

Recently, at our colleges, we have seen some of the tragic results, through riots and general student unrest, of excluding students from the policy making boards of our colleges and universities. Most institutions of higher learning in the past several years have moved rapidly to correct some of these deficiencies. For the first time in our history, students now sit on colleges' boards of trustees and other decisionmaking bodies.

Student participation helps to curtail many potential problems in programming and communication which are part of the generation gap—the difference in values and styles that separate the older and younger generations. Pupil participation becomes even more important in our schools when working with minority group students who are from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds than school administrators. Too often, middle class white administrators make unnecessary mistakes in judgment when prescribing programs for minority groups without their involvement and consultation.

Students in this volume indicate a respect for those school officials who are interested in their feelings and opinions, and allow them to participate in school governance and problem solving. Teenagers also seem to respond well to adults who are friendly, flexible, and display a minimum of the adult, "We know better than you" attitude.

Student unrest is beginning to spread from the colleges to the high schools as the demands for reform continue to escalate. Particularly in regard to racial unrest, it is urgent that administrators begin to institute policies that will contribute to eliminating the sense of powerlessness and second-class status that schools so often have fostered among minority group children. One such step should be to incorporate more minority persons in administrative and leadership positions within the educational system. This would include some degree of community participation and/or control particularly in minority group communities. Dr. James Conant, in his classic report on education, stated,

"There are three requisites for the successful operation of a high school: first, a school board composed of intelligent, honest, devoted citizens . . . second, a first-rate superintendent; third, a good principal." Whether this contention is valid or not, it clearly is important to obtain minority group representation at all levels of school administration, if minority group children are to be properly educated.

Some of the same complaints that the students have about administrators they also level at teachers. Teachers who are inflexible, impersonal, and arbitrary seem to be the least effective with high school teenagers. Instructors who manifest negative racial or class attitudes have, as you would expect, particular difficulty working with minority group students. Many cultural barriers exist between middle class teachers and lower socioeconomic students, especially if there are also ethnic differences. Most white teachers have received very little in their own education that would help equip them to work effectively with minority group youngsters. In fact, their training, if typical of American schools, was probably racist in much of its content. Their academic courses most likely extolled the values and virtues of Northern European civilization to the exclusion of other cultures, and their training courses undoubtedly were geared almost entirely to the educational needs of white middle class children. Training programs for educators have been modeled too closely to white upper strata values and practices.

One black student aptly expresses the insensitivity they frequently show:

When you get a white teacher in the class, he's brought up the same way as most of the white students are—relative to the times. And the black student just cannot identify with the teacher who comes back after a weekend and says, 'Well, how many of you went skiing?' Most of them spent their time in a pool hall or something.

Black and Mexican American students also frequently perceive that white middle class teachers are more comfortable with and favor the white middle class student (although one student reports that a white teacher favored the black students when allotting grades). The important process of student identification with his teacher and vice versa is obstructed because of racial-cultural differences. In the end, it is the minority group student or poor white who loses out on an equal chance for a quality education. It is also worth noting that white students also feel rejected and hurt by anti-white prejudice encountered in Negro teachers. As school staffs continue to integrate, this may become a more significant problem than it is presently.

The most important factor, however, in the students' rating of teachers is not whether they are white, black, or brown. The students, despite their differences, all seem to value and respect a teacher who appears truly interested in teaching and has enough empathy to understand some of the problems of students that stem from their social environment. This comment by one American pupil is representative:

I had an American history teacher who was a real nice man and seemed to be interested in the students and the community. He is an Anglo, but spends most of his life with Mexican Americans.

In other words, students respond well when they [students] are liked and *respected* by the teachers. Racist views or middle class contempt for lower socioeconomic groups almost absolutely obstruct communication and destroy the chances for effective teaching. Most young people have a need to be understood in a noncondescending manner.

Often the demand by students for more "black" or "chicano" teachers is made because they feel mistreated and not understood by the typical middle class white teacher. Thus, a young Mexican American comes to this conclusion:

The best teachers are the ones that come from a similar background and know the kids' problems and how they feel about certain things. I feel that the person that is going to teach at a school that is composed of minority groups should be somebody that at least knows or has studied the problem, and not one that goes in there thinking he is going to tear all those little ignorant people up.

Minority group students are particularly conscious of negative attitudes of school personnel that may become manifest in

structured school programs. Guidance counselors may tend to discourage Negro and Mexican American youth from taking college prep courses either because of direct racist feelings or a misdirected liberal desire "to protect" them. Majority group students, on the other hand, frequently are channeled—almost automatically—into these courses. Some of these students are beginning to recognize the arbitrary nature of their favored position. As one white student observes:

I have gotten A's and B's all the way through, and it's really frightening for me to see my grades coming out like that and get commended for it. As a result I am funneled into college prep courses, the honor roll, and other kinds of things.

Minority group students, however, often find themselves excluded from the "honor tracks" or shunted to "trade" and vocational courses. The noted psychologist, Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, has reported that children who are treated as though they are stupid and uneducable almost invariably become uneducable.

Minority group students even report accounts of teachers making direct comments in class about the inferiority of certain ethnic groups. For instance, this story is related by a Mexican American girl:

I went into this class and the teacher started talking about Mexicans being blanket-wrappers and chili beans, and things like that. He was saying Mexicans didn't apply themselves and wouldn't be good students and that colored kids were worse.

That teachers who are entrusted with educating our young and teaching "democracy" should make such comments in class to children is shocking. Its effect on young minds, particularly minorities, is obviously cruel and damaging.

Such openly racist attitudes also encourage white youths to develop unhealthy psychological defenses. White students may learn to deal with personal insecurities and inadequacies by false feelings of superiority. Thus instead of handling personal difficulties constructively, they make scapegoats of those who look different and project their problems onto minority group students. The use of such mechanisms not only causes hardship to black and brown youngsters; it also interferes with their own growth to emotional maturity. Thus the bigoted person remains a deficient individual.

Many Caucasian youth who are grappling with their prejudices are angry with the society that has conditioned them in this way. White students, as they grow more concerned about social issues and seek ways to help resolve the towering problems of race and poverty, are increasingly aware of how much they are handicapped and rendered ineffective because of supremacist attitudes perpetuated in the schools. Often, despite the best in themselves, many cannot help being paternalistic and condescending around "colored" people. Some, who do not yet recognize the conditioning to which they have been subjected, will later enter a world where they must work closely with minority groups and then will realize that the educational system ill-prepared them. Therefore, school administrators should not hesitate to quickly rid the system of personnel who openly espouse bigotry.

Throughout this volume, it is clear that students have quite high expectations of school officials. Outside their family associations, they are the adults to whom they look for learning, identification, and wisdom. Some may sit passively and others offer direct obstacles but most still expect the teacher to somehow stimulate their interest and "teach" them. One student's observation about teaching—"It is hard. It's one of the most difficult jobs in the world"—is not an overstatement.

Teachers have been more greatly challenged today because of the sweeping changes in values and social perspectives in our Nation, especially among the youth. The new consciousness among minorities and the poor have made new demands on teachers and schools for "relevance". Racist attitudes have come under renewed and greater attack. Increased integration particularly in the South has brought transitional social and psychological stress to both the black and white child. In the past few years, the black consciousness movement and a growing militancy among Mexican Americans have added further dimensions to the difficulties in communication and understanding between minorities and the white Anglo majority. The comments from the students in this volume reflect the intensity of concern about these relations.

Many of the white students who are struggling with different levels of their own feelings about racial differences often express hurt and bewilderment. A white student reports:

One problem I am having is that I had always spoken of them as 'Negroes' because it seemed to me that 'colored' was offensive and 'black' was offensive. . . . I'm having trouble saying 'black'.

The word "black" in our culture has garnered so many negative connotations in our racial psychology that many whites as well as many blacks find it very difficult to feel that "black is beautiful". In fact, many people, especially whites, seem to become more frightened the more the word "black" is used descriptively. One white student explains:

It is kind of scary to have all this black power around and have no idea exactly what they are advocating. Black power is getting to mean that Negroes want a separate society and they don't want to take white standards.

Since the "black power" slogan became popular during a time when there were a great many riots in our urban ghettos, whites immediately associated the new black unity with violence. Foremost in many white minds was the fear that blacks would retaliate for past and present wrongs of the ruling group. As one white student puts it:

Power is a very strong word and if you said, 'black power' right away, if you don't know what it means, you think that it's a force that is going to overpower you.

This student expresses keenly the unconscious reactions that psychiatrists find whites have to potential black aggression. This fear leads to a withdrawal on the part of many white students and a decrease in social communication between groups to dangerous proportions.

One white pupil reports: "There's a definite gap now between the coloreds and the whites in this school." It is fair to say that this feeling has been characteristic of the atmosphere in high schools and colleges throughout the country. Whites blame the blacks for this increased tension:

Whites feel they are being left out and a lot of blacks are saying, 'You ought to be left out. We were left out for so long, now it's our chance to get ahead.' It's kind of carried away. In my eyes, they are all equal but I think black power is crazy. Ever since then, there has been nothing but hate for both sides.

The white students seem particularly fearful and upset if they are enrolled in a high school that has a majority or large proportion of minority group students, especially blacks. Often, their reactions seem part of the backlash effect which normally indicates that many have a great deal of latent racism that becomes manifest when blacks are aggressively "black and proud". One young girl angrily remarks: "I think they want superior rights, not equal rights." The students undoubtedly reflect the attitudes of their family and community.

On the other side, blacks and Mexican Americans are undergoing a revolution of self-awareness and discovery of their identity which is permeating the halls of our educational institutions. The pattern of teaching white supremacy has been part of the educational process in both integrated and segregated schools throughout the United States for a long time. The curricula of most American schools knowingly or unknowingly have taught white racism. History is presented almost entirely according to the white man's mythology and the history of other races and ethnic groups is either disparaged or ignored. For example, white and black revolutionary figures are portrayed quite differently. White revolutionary leaders such as Patrick Henry and Paul Revere are portrayed as grand and glorious heroes. On the other hand, black slave revolutionaries such as Nat Turner have been depicted as ignorant, misguided, and perhaps deranged ingrates. By the same token, even though the red man was murdered and his land stolen by white settlers, he is still pictured as "the bad guy" who savagely abused the good intentioned, white Christian. Mexicans, also, are continually ridiculed and made to appear inferior and "uncivilized". An account by one of the Mexican American students is enlightening:

I remember phrases from my history book like, 'Santa Anna knew that he was dealing with a superior class of men.' It is

phrases like that, that stay in my mind, they stay on the surface, but they keep drilling this junk in your heads until it gets to your subconscious . . . what am I—inferior or something?

In effect, white history has often encouraged the minority student to contentedly accept his status of subordination in America, and the majority student to accept the patterns of racial and cultural superiority. One black student in this volume describes one session in which a white teacher in complete earnest discusses "The Advantages of Slavery". Another remarks: "The only time it seems anything was ever achieved is when the white man did it—this is what they teach us in school and that's racist!"

Textbooks and other teaching materials have usually presented the model of the white middle class to be emulated and aspired to by minority groups. The styles of life and language in books meant to teach spelling, reading, and history are white models that are often divorced from the realities of life of the black or Mexican American child. The chicano youngsters in this volume mention the rejection they feel from teachers who object to their use of the Spanish language and cultural styles. How can he feel that he is a worthwhile human being if he is not Anglo, and living in a clean suburban house like Dick and Jane? Minority group models and heroes are seldom presented for children to emulate.

Many school activities that center around religious worship espouse a white God, a white Virgin Mary, and a white Santa Claus. Goodness and purity are said to be "white" and badness and sin are said to be "black". Cultural material that is taught normally focuses on European-Christian traditions and little is presented about Asian, Mexican, or African life, history or culture. How is a minority student to feel a positive sense of self when "colored" people are constantly negated and only whiteness legitimized?

This negation of minority groups that pervades our culture and is reinforced by our schools has a powerful impact on a child's self-concept. A Mexican American student gives this poignant description:

I am as brave as a lion as long as I am not near Anglos. If I hadn't seen any Anglos for a long time and if right away I get thrown in with a bunch of them, you know, I feel kind of funny. I feel alone—all by myself. I feel inferior.

This self-hatred that develops early in the life of the minority child has devastating psychological effects on his development. Sometimes self-hatred can take on very subtle manifestations. For instance, competition, which may bring success, may also bring failure. Thus the efforts which may bring success to oppressed students are often not made even when the opportunity exists. This occurs for two reasons: First, the anxiety that accompanies growth and change is avoided if a new failure is not risked; therefore, a try is not made. Second, the steady state of failure represented by nonachievement is what many minority group persons have come to know and expect. Nonachievement is familiar, and safer. Furthermore, for minorities, especially black people, it has often meant survival to deny the possession of intelligence, thoughts, and feelings. This makes it difficult to move from a position of passivity to one of activity, and to acknowledge heretofore forbidden feelings and behavior as now safe, legitimate, and acceptable. Frequently, such internal feelings may lead to an overwhelming discomfort which then results in a student's withdrawal and truancy. Other youngsters may develop an attitude of "what's the use" or feel that they don't have a "right" to success. Still others adopt an attitude of hostility and defiance against a system that appears to despise them.

It is pleasing to note in these pages the students' very positive response to the teaching of "Negro History" and courses such as "The Minorities". As changes in the curriculum continue to take place, we will actually be able to observe some of the positive effects of these changes. This black student's comment probably expresses the sentiments of many concerned educators:

When I was a freshman and a sophomore, my history courses didn't have too much about the Negro, about his accomplishments, and all the things that he had done in the past. He just seemed to fly over us, you know, and I didn't pay much attention. But now that I have had Negro history, things have begun to come to life and I can look back and see how we were kept down. I would say every school, not only in the city—but in

the state and country—should have a class on Negro history. It is very interesting not only to the colored people but it would give white people a chance to actually see the beginning of the trouble, the causes of the problem, and by knowing the causes, people would take a different view of the situation.

For the minority group student the development of a new sense of racial and ethnic pride has had many important consequences. Negroes, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican Americans have become less acquiescent and tolerant to racist practices and attitudes as they gain a greater sense of identity. The new racial and cultural consciousness has led to group organization among minorities that has many positive impacts in the struggle for human rights. As indicated earlier, many whites have responded with fear to this new unity. Cries of "separatism" and "reverse racism" have been echoed by both liberal and conservative whites.

To many black and brown people, the new group cohesiveness is at least in part a protection both socially and psychologically against their bombardment with racist attitudes. Large and small slights from white Anglos have become more and more psychologically intolerable. Since the degree of racial and ethnic self-hatred has diminished, minority groups are no longer ashamed or repulsed by being a part of their own people and community. They respect the cultural differences of their groups from the mainstream of white America. Many back and Mexican American students are in a state of transition and are rebelling against some of the implications of complete assimilation with white Anglos. Many are tired of "begging for acceptance" from white people. They resent being made "tokens" and "exceptions" who must acquiesce or participate in racist practices, or become an object of a "broadening experience" for whites.

Vernon, a black student, typifies the old demeaning accommodating attitudes:

There's a lot of guys on the football team now that call me 'nigger', but I don't get mad at them . . . I think it's wrong for you to have a friend who would be afraid to use a bad word such as 'nigger' around you. A lot of my friends who never say it, sometimes it will slip out and they'll say, 'Excuse me; I'm sorry; don't pay any attention' and I say, 'It's all right; it doesn't bother.'

This student is in all likelihood repressing his anger and rage—a psychological defense frequently used by minority races.

Minority group people pay a high psychological price in order to maintain adequate controls against a just anger. The simplest method of dealing with rage is to suppress it and substitute an opposing emotional attitude—compliance, docility, or a "loving attitude". Sometimes anger can be denied completely and replaced by a compensatory happy-go-lucky disposition, flippancy or—an attitude extremely popular among Negroes—"being cool". Another way for aggression to be channeled is through competitive sports, music, or dancing. These are the few activities which white Anglo society has traditionally opened to minorities. Another acceptable means of channeling rage is to identify with the oppressor and put all of one's energy into striving to be like him. An additional way for the oppressed to give expression to their feelings is to empathize or identify with someone objectively like themselves, who for one reason or another is free to express appropriate rage directly at the oppressor. Malcolm X and H. Rap Brown served this function for many black people. Still another technique for dealing with anger is to replace it with a type of chronic resentment and stubbornness toward white people—interpreted as a "chip on the shoulder". Trying to control anger in this way frequently shows itself in a general irritability and always has the potential of becoming explosive. Thus, the spreading wave of minority unrest may be seen as outbursts of suppressed and often legitimate wrath.

In psychiatric practice it is a generally accepted principle that a chronic repressed rage will eventually lead to a low self-esteem, depression, emotional dullness, and apathy. It appears now as if more and more blacks and Mexican Americans are freeing themselves of suppressed rage through greater outspoken release of pent-up emotions. The new generation of minority youth is unwilling (no matter how impractical it sometimes may seem) to sacrifice its psychological integrity in order to move more easily in a white middle class world.

Racial integration in America has usually taken place on terms dictated by whites. Thus, since integration is nearly always a one-way street that blacks travel to a white institution, then an implied inferiority of the black man is inherent in the situation, because it is *he who must* seek out whites to better his position. This implies that only he can benefit and learn; that he has nothing to offer whites; that whites have nothing to learn from him or from his presence. For instance, students note in this volume that many of the white students resent taking "Negro History". As one white student bluntly puts it:

If you bring too much colored—Negro—history into the school, white kids will stop listening and say, "Who wants to hear about some nigger?"

In addition, when the number of Negroes or Mexican Americans at any white school is token, it creates particular hardships for these individuals. They immediately find themselves surrounded by students, many of whom already have been taught at home that minority group children are their intellectual and social inferiors. In this setting, since all people want to belong, many black and brown children must become experts at "being liked and accepted". Sometimes they have to "prove" that they are "just like all other human beings" and "worthy" of being assimilated.

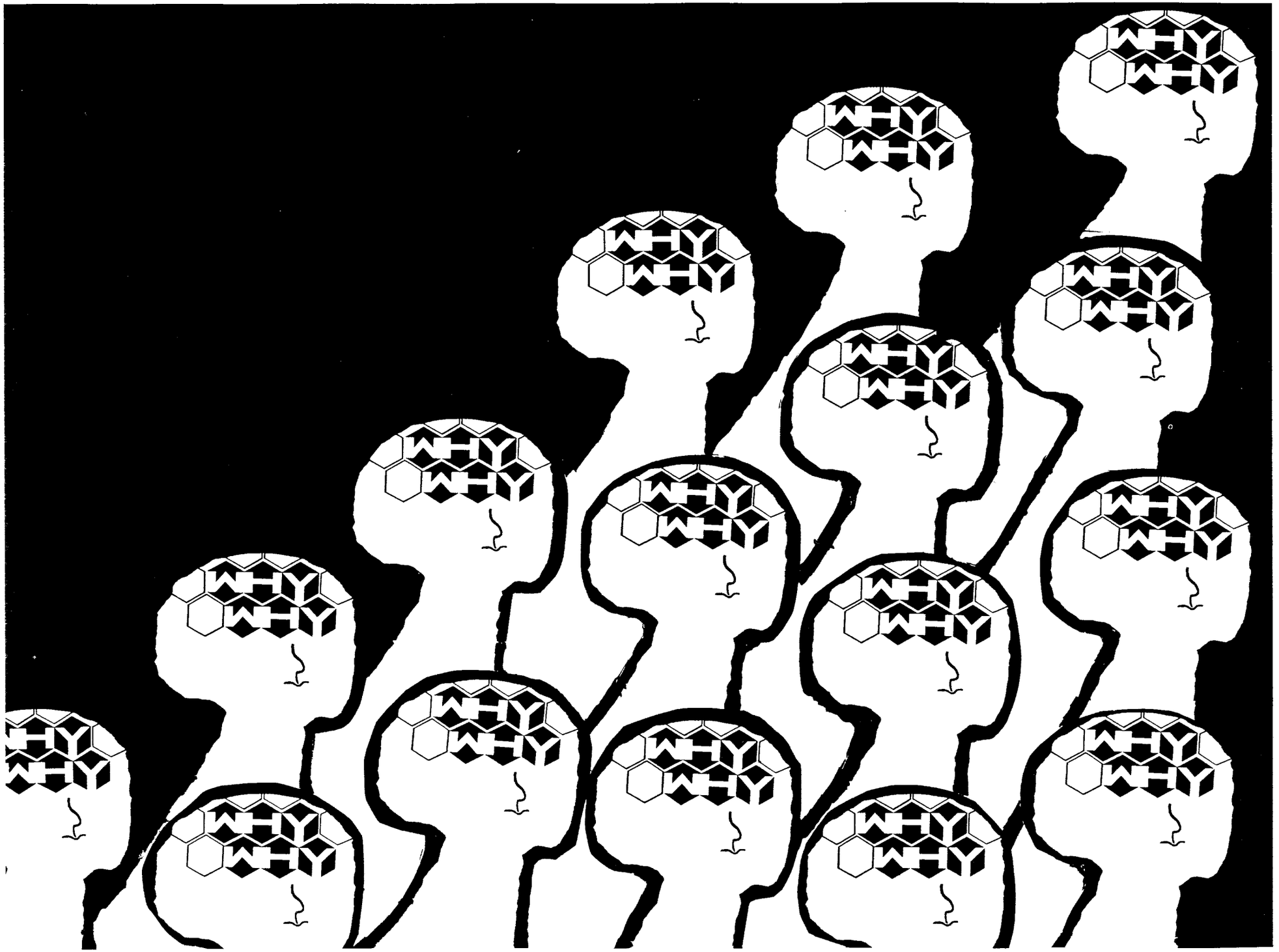
This severe pressure on minority students in such schools is greatly eased if they represent a good percentage of the student body. In this way they can gain much psychological support through their own organizations and social clubs. Many black and brown students in this volume have shown that they can organize effectively to bring about change in "integrated" schools that address themselves more to their needs and experience. This new sense of non-accommodating dignity is aptly put by this black young lady:

In our lunch room we have this table, and I call it Harlem, because this is where all the soul people sit. When I first went there I would say, 'Ah, this is ridiculous, we cannot all sit together.' But now I feel, 'Well, why not?' because if whites are really genuinely together, and they want to be your friend, they don't mind coming over and sitting with you. Many of the black students are not willing to say, 'You come over here.' I am sick of the white students saying, 'All right, you can sit with me.' I feel, 'Well, why don't you come sit with me instead?' It is not that the black students try to be white, it is just that they aren't ready to say, 'Look, people, you have got to look at me and try to see things my way for a change.'

It is not only the minority group high school student who wants the opportunity to participate more fully in the management of his life; this is important to the growth and maturation of all adolescents. Too often school officials (and other adults) treat teen-age students as an oppressed group without rights. The similarities of the two positions is apparent in the title of a paper that a young man wrote on behalf of student rights—he entitled the paper, "The Student as Nigger". No one has suggested that high school students should "run" the school but the voices in this volume cry out for more adequate participation and representation. There is no reason, for example, why dress codes must be imposed arbitrarily on students without consulting them, or why student councils—for many youngsters their first experience with democracy in action—should be rendered powerless and impotent. Yet few school administrators have given students a voice in the decisionmaking process that so directly affects them. Educational programs that stress achievement, participation, and power-sharing in the schools are crucially important to all students, but doubly important to minority students in their search for a positive sense of identity.

With the rapid technological and value changes in our society it is even more crucial that the older generation lend an attentive ear to the keen perceptions of our rather sophisticated younger generation. Nothing is more dangerous to constructive change than the obstruction of effective communication characterized by a mutual respect between groups—white or black, young or old. For those who want to learn what is in the hearts of our high schoolers trying desperately to cope with staggering, chaotic times, *What Students Perceive* provides a thoughtful and poignant look into their critical reflections on our educational system. These pages should be read with care!

Overview


WHY
WHY

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a white student who attends a nearly all-white suburban school outside a medium-sized mideastern city. Elizabeth is a senior who plans a career in psychology or sociology.

I think of education as learning things and developing attitudes and making the most of your personal talents and abilities so that you can succeed or do your very best in life. Education ought to be a step-by-step process and everything ought to be pulled together so that when you get finished, you can look back and have the whole thing. Just like building a brick wall, you've got to start with the bottom layer. I feel like—looking back—that there are a whole bunch of holes in the wall, and the wall is going to fall down because things didn't go along evenly. I feel dissatisfied, but I can't really put my finger on it completely, and I can't give very good suggestions what to do about it because I'm not sure.

Kris

Kris is a white student in her senior year in a small city school on the west coast. The school is predominantly white with a minority enrollment of approximately 15 percent. Kris is taking academic courses and plans to go to college.

School is a separate little world in itself, set up with its own conditions and its own rules for living and learning together, and it is really, really difficult to relate education to the way life is outside.

When you come to school, you just sort of contract and prepare yourself to be talked at all day long. There is a bell that says you can eat and a bell that says you can stop eating; a bell to tell you to sit down—a routine all the time. It really is such an unrealistic sort of world. You either go insane or you laugh at it and alienate yourself.

I'm really so frustrated. It is so hard to force teachers to talk or let you talk about things that are important to you and to the world outside. You don't talk about change, that's what kids are so discouraged about. If you talk about those things, it is outside and it is on your own. Education means learning about those things—not just a kind of sterilized, homogenized math and English, and all out of a textbook kind of thing.

I don't think many kids are aware of what's happening to them because they have been through this since first grade. They are conditioned to answer the teacher and if he says, "Shut up, don't interrupt me," you don't. I have seen kids fed up and mouth off to a teacher. They are promptly sent to the dean. That is the answer—separate him from the others. Kids don't look upon this as education and therefore don't want any part of it. The kind of things I want to be taught they say nobody is interested in. I know that isn't true. I live with these kids and talk with them and know it's a universal interest to find out what's going to connect their lives—that's what they're worrying about.

It's really ridiculous to sit kids down in a place and say, "We known what is best for you. We know what you are going to learn, what you should learn, and what you are going to want to learn. Sit down, shut up, and we'll do it for you." Schools are here for the kids and if they're made by someone else or belong to some one else, then there's no point in having kids there at all. And besides, school is all so irrelevant to most of them. I really think I've gotten an education in spite of school—not because of it.

Johnny

Johnny is a senior in a suburban school outside a medium-sized southern city. He is white and is in an academic course. Some black students have been assigned to Johnny's school as part of the city's desegregation plan.

Conditions at my school are pretty good, but I know people that gripe about them. It doesn't make any difference what you do for them, they'll still gripe about it. And those are the people that keep it from being an ideal school. They'll go around and tell the teachers, "Why can't we have a lounge? Why can't we leave school during lunch periods and go home to eat, or things like that? Or if you've got a study hall sixth period, "Why can't you leave school instead?" I don't think you could have an ideal school if you allowed this because there's just going to be those few students that's gonna ruin it.

Larry

Larry, a white student, is a senior in a school in the southwestern part of the country. The school is located in a medium-sized city and has substantial numbers of blacks and Mexican Americans. He is taking an academic course and wants to become either a minister or a doctor.

Learning, unless you're doing what you want, is actually pretty boring. Some people just don't like to be bored that way you know. I like to learn things, even if it wasn't required, I'd learn things. But education is just a training ground to students. That's about all it is, training for future life, you know, when you get to be on your own, you've got to have some basis to live by. You've got to know a certain amount to be on your own. It just isn't like it used to be where you could skip out in the third grade and still live.

High school should be required; it should be the very minimum education a person should get. Actually, it isn't education that's needed; it's the diploma, anybody can get through high school today. You can be trained for a vocation; you can take all kinds of courses like radio, drafting, woodwork and metalwork, and still graduate. You don't have to take hard subjects. I mean, anybody can get through if they really try. People who don't get through high school are just either stupid or something. I don't think they're bored. They just don't like to put out the effort they need to get the grades to pass. I'm not really speaking too much of learning. I'm just speaking if you're going to get a job with any chance of advancement, you've got to have a high school diploma and that's all there is to it.

Jesse

Jesse is a Mexican American student in his sophomore year at a predominantly white school. The school is located in a small city on the west coast. Jesse looks forward to attending college to study law or sociology.

Education is there, but it is up to the kid. I can drop out if I want to because nowadays it is not a matter of education. They say you need your high school diploma and a college education to get this and that. My God, I have never seen a bigger lie in my whole life. Especially it is true of minority groups, that if you go out and try and get a job, I don't care how much college experience you have, the very fact that you are a Negro or Mexican is going to hurt your chances to getting certain jobs. Still, I am preparing myself; I am doing things for myself.

Education is not really making me. It is helping me, but I am doing the bigger part. I am the one who made up my mind to study college prep.

Alice

Alice is a Mexican American student. She attends a school in

a medium-sized southwestern city and is in her sophomore year. The school has a mixed enrollment of black, Anglo, and Mexican American students. Alice is studying cosmetology and does not want to go to college.

High school is pretty neat. I like it. It is the only school with vocational courses. They have electronics, radio-TV, cosmetology, and stuff like that. Most of the kids work hard at what they are going to be doing. The principal says they teach us enough down here that we shouldn't have to go to another school and pay $300 or $400 and get the same training that we have already had. And that is true.

I like school just as it is now because you know the different kinds of people, you know, being Negro and being Spanish. I don't think I would like to be with just rich people and all.

Pablo

Pablo is a Mexican American student in his junior year at an all-Mexican American school in a large city in the Southwest. He wants to become a teacher.

School is pretty good in some cases and pretty bad in some others. Times are changing, everybody knows the times are changing and education should keep up with the times. The education we're getting from our school right now is kind of getting behind and somebody has to do something to speed it up a little. If all of us Mexican Americans stay behind in our education, we're going to be behind period. If we have a chance to improve the education, we're going to have a chance to improve our race. We have a big dropout rate. They just kick them out; they don't try to improve them. Nobody has really gotten on the ball and tried to improve the conditions.

Now they are improving the educational system, but it is kind of slow. Nobody is prepared for trig because our elementary and junior high education was crummy; we couldn't take harder courses. They don't even give you a chance to try them. You go to some Northside school and wow!, you have two or three classes in trig because they are prepared. Over here, you are not prepared for anything. The education is way behind.

People who have a chance really work for it. You go outside and you see somebody digging a ditch; they are the poor Mexican American or Negro. It is a fact. You see the guy come around saying, 'No make it a little wider,' or 'No, straighten it up.' That's the Anglo. Anglos have all the power because of their education. We don't have the education because they control it. If we were better educated, we could have better jobs.

Vernon

Vernon, a sophomore, has been attending a nearly all-white school in a southern medium-sized city for 2 years. He takes academic courses and considers himself a fairly good student. Vernon is black.

I don't think I'd change my school that much. It suits me as it is except for a few minor things that wouldn't change the school very much. Probably if there were maybe 100—200 Negroes at the school, there would be several changes needed. Because it is in its first stages of integration, there's not that many needed. It could be plenty more Negroes there, but they just won't go. I don't know why.

Roger

Roger is a black student from a large city in the Eastern part of the country. He is a junior and attends an all-black school. He hopes to go to college.

School should be geared to providing students with a wide range of possible areas they could use to solve the problems in their communities. The educational system as it is now set up is geared to a society and a culture that doesn't have any problems. They don't teach you what to do about the rats in your home; they don't teach you how not to be exploited by credit companies or how to get together and maybe form a co-op or something. They don't teach anything that vaguely resembles practical education, and that's why things are really messing people up. They're learning about Alexander Hamilton and how he directed the Treasury Department and that's not helping you feed your children. This is what the school really needs.

Students also need courses where they can really understand themselves, you know, where they can see themselves as black individuals. If you just look around, you are going to see these problems, and that's why a lot of students see that school is not real.

Caroline

Caroline is a black student who attends a predominantly black school in a large eastern city. She is a sophomore taking business courses to prepare herself for a secretarial job, but also plans to attend a business college.

When I hit the ninth grade, I went in to high school. It was supposed to be nice and all that. I just turned out doin' wrong and ended up repeating the grade. I liked to have fun and the classes didn't interest me. I stayed out and all.

I take family living, arithmetic, English, and record-keeping. But I don't think I'm gettin' anything out of it. It's partly because of the teachers' attitude and the way they let the children do things. They're not really teaching them. It's more like they're babysitting instead of teaching them.

If I could change the things I have now, I would change the subjects. I'd take history, biology, and arithmetic and all of them because they are substantial classes. And I think I would get more that's going to help me instead of little classes you go in and sit and talk all day. Sometimes it's good to have classes that you can sit down and talk about different things freely and don't have to do much writing, but when you have more than one of them, you can sit home and talk to people. I mean, you want to learn something more.

Stewart

Stewart is a senior at a predominantly black school. Stewart is black and wants to become a chemist. His school is located in a medium-sized city in the Eastern part of the country.

The schools I've attended have been what I call 'ghetto schools'—the inner-city school—and if you compare them to the schools of the predominantly white neighborhood—the schools of suburbia—they are always on a low par. But public schools have a number of people from various areas and give you a keener and more clear insight into exactly what's going on in the world. No matter how much education you have as far as book [learning], you have to have a lot of common sense and understanding to really know what's going on in the streets. This is one thing you are constantly exposed to in the ghetto schools.

School is like a vicious circle. School is no good for the underprivileged kid and school should be his salvation. This should be the place where he can at least express himself and it should be like a second home, and yet school is more horrifying than home. School becomes like a jail; a place for correcting bad boys instead of a place for teaching the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The teacher does not even try to relate to the student. It's just, 'What's the matter with you, boy? Why don't you try to smile sometimes? You're going to high school now. You're acting like a little child. You have to grow up.'

People are telling you to grow up and you're saying to yourself, 'Well, man, grow up! I'm working and studying and getting good grades. I'm smart. I can function.' You become a hustler; you cheat the guys, and always this thing about, 'You're going to high school. They're not going to put up with that crap.' You're bitter, let's face it. All this could be eliminated if you have someone in the school who has come through the same channels. It doesn't take a full-scale program; it takes interested people. That's why my principal was a failure and why many principals all over the Nation are failures. They fail to relate. This is the whole basic problem: communication and respect.

The only way you can make it in this raggedy society is to educate yourself. Sometimes, you know, I say, 'Damn, what's the use?' You graduate number one in your class and you're still a second-rate job. You still get housing discrimination, you still go to work, and everybody looks at you stupid. You just can't be accepted as a man. This is why this country is so explosive today because young people aren't going for it no more. And much of this, if not all of it, can be solved through education.

Administration


APPLES
ORANGES

Rosa

Rosa is Mexican American. She is a senior in a suburban school near a medium-sized west coast city. About 50 percent of the students are Anglo. Mexican Americans and blacks comprise the remaining school population. Rosa has been taking business courses but wants to go to college next year to study elementary education.

The administration is strict; not extremely strict but pretty strict. The principal—is very unfriendly; he never smiles. In the 4 years that I have gone there, I have never seen him smile. He'll just stare and is always carrying a big frown on his face. The kids all hate him. I haven't seen a one that has said something nice about him. Our principal in junior high was forever smiling and joking with the kids, like: 'Well, how are you doing, today?'—and things like that. That's nice, you know; it carries on a real friendly atmosphere, while over there in high school, you turn around and feel like somebody's going to shoot you.

Our principal is a little old man and very old-fashioned, therefore. I don't think he should make the dress code. He probably would have us wearing dresses way down to our ankles. It's now his decision, but I think students should really decide. They really should put it to a vote. For instance, they won't let you wear a pants dress like culottes, and during the summer they really are comfortable—you have to admit to that. What was getting the Mexican and colored girls was that a lot of the white girls were wearing culottes and they wouldn't get sent home, while the Mexican and colored girls would—and that got to them. That would have gotten to me! I wear culottes but I haven't gotten sent home because mine have a little flap on the front and it makes them look like a skirt. If they would have told me to go home because of the clothes, I would have told them, 'That's my dress. My mother bought it for me to wear to school and if you want to buy me another, you can!' If the dress looks neat and appropriate for school, I don't think they should have a rule that you can't wear this or you can't wear that, because, for some kids, culottes are cheaper than a dress. See, that's it—they treat us like we are still little babies who have to be taken care of. We should be able to face the respon-

sibility—some responsibilities.

We had a lot of racial disturbances lately, you know, all those sitdowns we've been having on the lawn? The colored girls complained that they couldn't try out for the "Letter Girls" because they would never make it. Every year they try out. The colored girls would get together and pick the best looking ones that had the best figures and were the lightest, and still they would never make it. They would go to the counselors and ask why they weren't chosen and different things like that, but they wouldn't get anywhere. I thought it was rather unfair; it's not their fault what color they are.

So the colored kids started protesting and putting down pressure. They would all get together and sit out in the middle of the grass and start making threats. They also called the newspapers. As soon as the newspapers came over to find out what was going on, the administration put the kids in the auditorium. That's when they started talking to them. When the kids were in the auditorium, they also requested history on Negroes and a Negro counselor that understands them. Two days after the coloreds sat down on the lawn and everything, all the Mexican boys got together at noon and were just talking and standing there. One boy said, ' Come on ', to try to make the administration think we were going to go on strike, too. A man came up and asked, ' What's going on? ' ' What's going on? ', but we weren't doing anything. ' We are standing here and being sociable, ' I said. "We want to talk to each other. This is the only time we have to talk to each other." And he thought it was kind of funny, you know. He thought we were going to plan a riot!

I tried out one year for the "Letter Girls" but I didn't make it because I was too short, so it didn't bother me. I asked the real cute girls why didn't they try out and they said, ' They'd never make it. ' That's mostly their attitude I—I kind of forced them to get into it a little and this year, instead of letting the band director pick the cheerleaders, the dean of girls and a counselor helped out.

Some of the Mexican Americans were finally chosen as alternate "Letter Girls"—but still, you know, they got to perform. Two colored girls made it this time and also three colored alternates. The administration is scared, otherwise I don't think none of the coloreds or the Mexicans would have made it. I didn't go out and sit with them in the middle of the grass that day, but I do think that that was a good way of getting something done.

Edgar

Edgar attends an all-Mexican American school in a large city in the Southwest. He is a senior. At the time of the interview, he was uncertain what he would do after graduation although he was considering applying to a local community college.

My school is predominantly Latin American. There is only about three Anglos and two Negroes, and half of the administration, at least, is Latin American.

The principal is an old man. He was the vice principal under the first guy who stayed there for about 30 years. The original principal was Anglo and that one that took over is a Mexican American, but he is so old that he doesn't know what is going on. He has four administrators under him that take care of the school. All he does is walk around, then go home.

That school has been run like the first principal had it in mind. He used to tell everybody that he wouldn't let us compete because we weren't able to compete, and that we would only humiliate ourselves. So, by hiding the students, he felt he was actually doing us a favor. It was sort of like a little prison he had there.

You had to be in the ROTC; you had to buy a school newspaper; you had to speak English or be sent home; you had to wear your shirttails in, and a lot of junk like that. There has been restrictions on restrictions on restrictions and people have been coming out of there not learning anything and just wasting their time.

They have an intercom system and they turn it on and listen to you playing in the classrooms. Then they pull you into the office and yell at you because you had some idea that was kind of different. You know, it really got kind of funny, like they were the enemy. They started getting real hung on that intercom thing after we started our movement.

The student council is run by one teacher and in 5 years she hasn't taught a class and doesn't have any other title except sister-in-law to the principal. They don't let us elect our own officers in the student council; they pick out the ones they want and then we vote on those two. This guy and a girl, both sort of expert on parliamentary procedure, had written up amendments to the student council constitution which said we wanted to elect our own officers. They had that guy in the principal's office for 8 hours and that girl was expelled. They didn't need any grounds. They were the administration; they know best and they kick out anybody they want to. This has been going on for years and years, but this time we were going to practice what they had been teaching us. We told them, ' Either straighten out or we walk out. '

We made a list of demands. We told them we wanted Mexican culture taught in the schools. We wanted to improve the curriculum to be able to compete with other students. We wanted algebra taught in the ninth grade and chemistry made available. We wanted a program for calculus and maybe computers. That's all we wanted—a fair shake. We wanted a constitution because nobody knew where the revised copy was. We wanted a voice in what they said was our student government; just the powers that they said we had, that's all. We were asking for so little.

We tried everything—we went by the channels. We weren't about to be told we were ignorant fools who didn't know how to handle themselves. We took our list of demands from the teachers to the administrator and he said, ' No, that's not the way it's going to be done. ' When this whole thing boiled up, the principal didn't know what the hell was going on. He is going to retire now and the whole thing is blowing over. What it amounts to is that we made a lot of noise and a lot of people aware that there was a problem, but the problem didn't actually get solved.

Roger

Roger is a black student from a large city in the eastern part of the country. He is a junior and attends an all-black school. He hopes to go to college.

We need to stop being treated like children. You have to realize that we are young men and women and some of our brothers are being drafted to go over there and fight. You are going to have to start relating to students and really giving them some meaningful position in the running of the school. The school is not there for the administrators and teachers; it is here for the students, so they should have some part in their education. The quality of that learning will be increased if students have an active, meaningful part in it—not just education as courses in the classrooms, but in outside activities, you know, and stop this fatherly bit by the administration—patting you on the shoulder and telling you whether you can do this or not.

You have just got to re-arrange the school so students really feel that it belongs to them; that it is their school. And doing this will help you with some of your so-called problems. You see, we find the administration is willing to let students run the social activities, but when students try to get involved in the education itself, they can't do that.

I found that our principal wasn't really concerned about the students—he just didn't want to rock the boat. The boat could sink, but just so it sank level, see—that's all he was concerned with. We have a new principal now, an acting principal. He is really concerned about the students. He is, you know, a man you can talk to and who will listen to you and, so far, he has gone along with what we say.

Right now a group of us are trying to work on a proposal for a meaningful, active student government to replace the current student council—that's supposed to be the thing that provides students with some school involvement. It really should be changed to the "social council" because that's all they do—they don't really do anything meaningful.

It's not a question of control, because there is nothing to control. The student council doesn't do anything, so it wouldn't matter if they were controlled or not. See, they don't function in areas that really would be reasonable to control. All they worry about is entertainment! The administration has come to the point where they will give us all the dances and parties we want, but you try and do anything that you feel is going to improve your education—they won't stand for that. That's not the job of the student council!

We also proposed a "Student Bill of Rights" which will tell those teachers who consider students subhuman that we have the same rights as they do and that "if they want me to respect them, they have to respect me, too." This is the third revision of it. We found that it doesn't violate any school board regulations, nor any teachers' union or administration contracts. We are also trying to take a student census and see what courses they want next year and what new courses they would like to be established. See, we found that if a group of 15 or more students got together and want a course, it's up to the administration to find a teacher and a classroom for that course. Students didn't know about this. That's how we got our two new courses.

Before that, we had a boycott that shook up the administration, and they got on this "giving us everything we wanted" policy. We talked with the principal in September and October and November. He said he had been working on Negro history for 3 years, and that it would take time. The day after the boycott we had a meeting with some of the administrative and faculty representatives, and the next day we had our two courses. They gave us social-psychology and Negro history, but they didn't let anybody sign up for them. At the beginning of the semester they told us about the new courses, and some seniors signed up. Sophomores and junior heard about them and said, "Well, you can't take it because you didn't sign up for it in September." 'But the course was only started in February.' 'Well, that doesn't matter.'

So a lot of people didn't get to take it, because at first they were only offering the courses to seniors. The administration does little things like that then quickly reverses itself and says, 'Oh, that was a mistake. We didn't mean to do that,' you know, when they are caught being sneaky.

Robert

Robert is a junior for the second time. He is black and used to go to a predominantly white school, but now attends an all-black one. He lives in a medium-sized southern city. Robert is in a commercial track and is very interested in athletics.

I got into a fight with a couple of other fellows and one of them got hurt pretty bad. The man tried to say that I was all to blame so I got expelled from all schools in the city for a year. Well, mainly one reason I got expelled was that I had a gun on me on school property. But, see, the day I had the gun, I was going to pawn it for a boy because he was too young to do it himself. The man would never have believed that I was going to pawn it. He probably figured that I had it all the time, you know, so I didn't even try to explain it to him. I didn't say anything either when the school board expelled me. I stayed out for a whole year. I would probably still be expelled if I had done tried to get back in the white high schools. If I was going back to there, I'd probably get the same thing again, you know, another fight with somebody else. So the boys talked me into going to a black school.

The coach over at the other school was a nice man. I mean, if you was colored and you could do the job, you were going to do the job. He didn't go whether you was colored or white. I was just a sophomore and I played basketball and football about as good as some of the seniors did, but some of them parents didn't like that and they said something to him about it. He didn't pay much attention to them but I could tell, you know, it was getting to him a little.

And there was this girl. I don't know how it all happened but we started hanging around together and a whole lot of those old teachers, they didn't like that because she was a white girl. I mean, I couldn't help that, you know, and that is probably why I was having a whole lot of trouble in some of my classes. Like, I wear glasses and walk in my history class one morning, and I had my glasses hanging down over my nose looking over them. And she said, 'Take off those shades.' And I said, 'They're not shades; they're glasses.' She calls me a liar so I said, 'Well, look in them yourself!' She didn't want to look in them, so I kept my glasses on because that's what they're for. She sent me to the office for that. I went down there and told the assistant principal. So, I got 3 days for "being rude to the teacher." I didn't argue with them; I took the 3 days just like that. It wasn't because of my glasses or my eyes or nothing; it was because of that girl, I guess.

I don't think it's a good idea for students to be suspended

because when you stay out of school they get on you, you know, when you come back. Somebody who likes to get suspended is going to do the same thing again and again, you know. I know some fellows like that. They know they're going to get suspended, so they do it anyway. Over at the other school if you cut one class, you get 3 days, so the fellows cut two or three classes and they get 6 or 9 days. So I don't see what good suspensions do. If you're in your homeroom class and they mark you present and you don't go to all your classes that day, they see that you're on the present list then they're going to send you in for a cut. So if you don't go to your homeroom, they can't mark you present and then you can go to the classes you want and not go to the ones you don't want to without getting sent in for a cut. See, if you don't take a subject from your homeroom teacher, they don't know if you are there or not. So that's how I get to stay out without being sent up for a cut and getting those days.

If I could change some of the things about our school, it would be the part about being suspended for every little thing you do; it probably wouldn't be as strict as most high schools although it would have to have some rules and regulations. If you don't, who would be in the school? At the black high school boys can't wear blue jeans and girls can't wear culottes. When boys wear Afros, the administration tries to make you get your hair cut closer. Some of the boys' hair does look kind of bad, so that's probably why the principal was saying something about getting it cut, but most of the girls look nice.

Clarence

Clarence is a black student who attends a predominantly white school in a medium-size southern city. He is a senior and is enrolled in an academic course. He plans to attend college and major in science.

We have a good principal. He doesn't even act like a principal; he's friendly with every student—I mean, he's a real good guy. He doesn't just set stock rules that "you have to be this" or "you have to do that"; or that you can't suggest anything to the school unless the administration or the teacher recommends it. He does some of the things that the students suggest. I also don't think he's prejudiced because he doesn't look on you as a different individual; he realizes your problems and tries to help all he can to eliminate them. But he knows that there's so far that he can go. You know, if he goes too far, the parents of the white students would probably kick and have meetings and the teachers probably would gripe.

After Dr. King's assassination, the principal decided he needed some type of committee around the school which could bring students together more and increase the knowledge and social activities among the races. And so we developed this biracial committee and it's been there for almost 2 years; and at several other schools, they couldn't even have such a committee. They couldn't even have any group. We published the constitution and told students what the purpose of the biracial committee was. Now we're sponsoring a Christmas dance. We also had an Air Force band play something like a musical symphony, and had some lawyers speak on how to improve race relations. We talked about each other and discussed the races, and now that there's more relaxing from the tension, we're more concerned with activities and getting along together. We don't bring up race; I mean, not deeply question anyone's opinion on race. We get at the problem by trying to avoid it; it's more of an avoidance of the issue by trying to put it in the back of your mind and say it's not there. In time, it will work out.

Most of the black students aren't in school clubs because they're formed by white groups and they are for the whites, not for the blacks. They do more activities that the Negro has no concern for. There is still this internal barrier that needs to be overcome. I mean, there's really nothing hindering a Negro or a white student over there, but I do wish the students would really get along.

Student council mostly carries on projects and raises money for certain events such as putting up lights or signs around the school. We're paving a parking lot now by selling magazines for the student council. Only a few Negroes are on it. They should put on more Negroes to better represent the school. Student council passes out booklets to all the freshmen which says what students can't and can do. There are rules in there regarding

dress—you can't wear pants or beards. Most of the students can't wear them anyway because of their fathers or their family'll probably make them cut them off. Black students are allowed to wear Afros. I haven't heard of anyone actually being called down for wearing their hair too long, but the principal usually makes a remark, you know, he'll say, ' You better see a barber shop, ' or something like that. He'll make a comical statement and kind of hint at you to get a haircut.

We have certain privileges we get as students in 12th grade with a "C" average, like to go off campus during studies and lunch periods to eat. You can leave and walk around or do anything you want to. We have an area outside on the school grounds where we smoke; we don't smoke in the building and that's about the only place we can. Students smoke in the restrooms for convenience mostly. You know, to go all the way on the outside in the cold just to puff a cigarette, why you could probably get around a corner in the hallway and have a smoke. Last year we had two rooms on the top floor for smoking, but the fire department said it was a fire hazard to smoke inside, so now we're smoking on the outside.

Students get suspended for cutting classes, going off school grounds in a car, or acting unruly. Not too many get suspended though. Some students will cut classes on a day when there's a test and some won't go at all. Some students aren't, you know, —I guess if he doesn't have any set goal for himself, he's just in school because it's probably the only thing he has left to do. He'd probably go there and then leave the school grounds; if the courses are uninteresting to him, mostly then he won't even go.

Leasa

Leasa is a black student who attends a school where black students make up about one-half the student body. She is a senior. Her school is located in a large city in the Northwest, and, at the time of the interview, the school was experiencing much racial tension. Leasa plans to go to college next year and hopes to become an African history teacher.

Our former principal's a beautiful person. He was well aware of the problem in the central area and well aware of black students; he was just concerned; he was the kind of person, you could talk to frankly—you could tell him any gripes you had and he'd see what he could do about it. The thing that always makes me so mad is that last year, he aged like about 5 years and so he retired. He says it was for "health reasons," but these health reasons came about because of those middleclass Negroes who felt that he wasn't doing his job. They pressured him to the extent that he just had to retire or else he was going to have a heart attack. So we got another, the biggest racist. With the new one, you kind of have to play his game; you have to talk to him, but you have a B.S. line. I feel that he's only out for personal glory. He's the type of person for whom the school must look such and such a way to society and has to do such and such or the community won't like it.

He also always refers to us as children. ' Yes, the children seem to feel this way, the children are insecure, the children do this, the children do that. ' We are young men and women coming up in the world. We are *not* children and it just infuriates us to no end!

We also have this thing about being called "boys". We are young men at high school; do not call us "boys"! It just does not work. Like somebody would say, ' They're nice boys and girls '—"boys"? I am not a boy, I'm a young man or a gentleman, but I am not a boy! It's a serious matter, really, because for so long Southerners would say, ' Hey, boy, come do this, that, and the other. ' We just don't want anybody to call us "boys" anymore. The new principal has a lot to learn—he really does.

There was a big question, about having a Black Students Union. When the new principal first came to our school, he was all for the students. ' Students you can do anything you want, as long as you do it in an orderly and democratic manner. ' You know, he was that kind of principal, probably thinking ' I've got to win the students to my side seeing as how this great transition is taking place. ' And so, he said, "Yes, I'm all for the students." So they asked him, ' Well, can we have a Black Students Union? ' At first he was pessimistic about it, ' Well, I don't really think it's needed, no, I don't think so. It's a prejudice-type thing because you're restricting it to only black students—we can't

have this.' We said, "O.K., we'll open it to any students who are interested in the Black Students Union. They can become members. It's just that simple." He said, "Well, I don't know about that. I'll consider it." "O.K., Sir, you consider it. We'll talk to you tomorrow about the whole matter." So he was talked to. He said, "If the Executive Council passes it, you can have a Black Students Union." O.K. The Executive Council passed it. But then he said, "Well, I don't know, I really don't think so."

So the black students had a rally—everybody met in the front hall and were going into the principal's office to voice their opinions, but we never made it to the office. The people who were organizing it went to the office, talked to him, and he suddenly changed his tune. We have a Black Students Union now. Not that I am a member, but it was the principle of how he went about it that made me so mad.

Debby

Debby is a white student at a school with equal numbers of black and white students. The school is located in a large city in the Northwest. Debby is a senior and plans to go to college after graduation.

Our principal left at the half of this school year. We're not sure exactly, but he said for "health reasons" and I believe that could be because he looks so much better now. He's been worked very hard. He's been here for a long time and he's done quite a bit for it, and if there's been any problems, he's always been there trying to help solve them. He was very nice and understanding. If you met him in the hall, he either winked at you or he'd say, 'Hi,' or something. He was very nice and friendly. Our new principal is nice too; he's also white. He's pretty much the same as our other except that I think maybe he's a little bit more outgoing so as to be accepted by the kids.

I really haven't heard of too many rules that have been changed since he's come. I know he's letting more black student rallies be held for students of all races to come and participate in—not just for the black students. We have a Black Student Union here. They've asked for things like Negro history courses. I think it's going to become a necessary course next year—for everybody, all juniors. I'm not sure exactly how it all started but I think either the old or the new principal went to a board of trustees meeting or something and introduced the course proposal. They thought it was a good idea and they're trying it out for this year. It's taken pretty well and the kids are responding very well to it. I think it's going to be a steady thing, though there was no real pressure from the students to have it.

We have a very few, very ignorant students who are members of the Black Students Union. They wanted to have a meeting in the activities center and the new principal didn't want it because he thought it would be unfair to the other students since they wouldn't be able to participate. So the black students went and they sort of had a sit-in or a demonstration in the main office. It was ridiculous—they could have handled it in a much more grown-up way. I mean, at this school they hand you a lot of responsibility and you ought to be grown-up enough, at least when you're a senior, to take hold of the responsibility and to see that it's taken care of.

They went and they just sort of demonstrated. There was supposed to be an assembly, but there was just a big mass of people: a big blockage of bodies in the front hall and it was hard to get into the auditorium and stuff. They soon dispersed when they found out how useless it was. The Black Student Union is now an organization within the school and is open to all. Anyone can come in, listen, and partake. I think it gave the new principal a chance to meet what he's probably going to be meeting up with in the future, because everything is not going to go peaches and cream you know, nothing ever is. I think it's given him a challenge and he's sort of trying out new methods of how to solve these problems. I guess it's kind of like when you're babysitting and the child does something that you're a little leery of—how can you get the child to change his mind without making him cry or upsetting him, or without him carrying through on his original ideas. So you hunt around for a way to solve it and pretty soon you find one. I think this is the way our new principal is with us. I really do like the way the school is run.

Dahlia

Dahlia is a senior in a school where black and Mexican American

students make up one-half of the student enrollment. The school is located in a medium-sized city on the west coast. She is an Oriental American. Dahlia is an average student in the academic course and plans to go to college. She speaks of studying "a little of everything" and is uncertain as to what she will do.

I think racial tensions have lessened this year because of our principal. He gives us more of a chance to express ourselves, like, with this "open door policy". He leaves his door open to the hall, and anyone can walk in and say whatever is on their mind and they won't be disciplined for it. If they have a big gripe, they can just talk it all over. I've talked to the principal about racial gripes, and also, little things like about the water fountains and stuff. We have committees in student government, but sometimes they don't get to them as fast, so we can just go in and talk to him about it, and he usually, you know, inquires about it. Like our parking—that's always been a big problem because kids have their own cars and not everyone can park, so this year we found a new place to park just by going in and talking to him.

I remember the principal we had last year—we barely saw him. He was always in his office; he would be at games, but he didn't come out to the assemblies or say anything. Our new principal is really great! Everyone knows him; he talks to everyone and makes us feel that he is more a part of us than a part of the older generation.

The student council can make rules about student activities but the principal always has the control to say, 'Well, that's rash,' or whatever. On most issues, I think he should have the say about it because he has to present it in front of the faculty. But I think we have a pretty strong voice because as long as we put down the basic facts about what we want, then we can go on. Our power is pretty extensive now because we can more or less decide what is happening with students. We can pass on a lot of things among ourselves—like budgets and stuff. Our council passes most of those things, you know, and our principal usually signs his name and says, 'All right, we will do something about it.' He always looks into it, you know, and I think this year we have accomplished a lot. I think that if we had any more power, we would be running the school.

Running the school really depends on officers who have the ability to cope with the problems and everything. The administration should be there for discipline, but I do think our power is pretty extensive. The way we are now, we hear everything and have a suggestion box, and then those suggestions come into student government; we mull over those and then we just bring them to the principal and he sees what could logically be done about them. If it comes from student government, it has gone through committees and everything to make sure that everything is right, and then we present it.

I've enjoyed being in student government; I like to be a part of things. I feel that I want to do something at the school or I want to feel like I have gone to this school for, you know, other reasons than just for an education. Student government coordinates all the activities that go on campus; this year it has really been a good class. We have officers appointed by the director of student activities, the sponsor, and the elected officers themselves. This way, we get Negro students and the other minorities, too, and have representation from the different sides; whereas last year, only a certain little elite group held all the votes, ran for office, and got in.

We also have different kinds of committees. We have a "Boys' League" and a "Girls' League" that work on things like clothes —we had a big changeover in the boys' hairdos and stuff this year because there were protests. The guys wanted to wear long hair but the rule was your hair had to be above the collar. I don't like long hair on guys though they should have the right to wear it long if they want to. They should be able to as long as it is clean. You can tell by the way a person dressed how he is—that's how I personally feel. Now, see, they let it come to the bottom of their collars and their sideburns can also be longer. I think this year the system is a lot better. Control over such decisions depends upon the issue really. Everyone should be able to go by what is set down in the rules, and if a rule is broken, then disciplinary action should be taken. I guess a lot of students would be hard on each other if breaking the rules hurt everyone, you know. The only way you can get discipline or disciplinary action is if you go to an adult.

You can tell we aren't together at school. Kids don't support

our sports activities as much this year because of the riots and stuff. The Negro kids all feel, 'Why should we do anything for the school if the school doesn't do anything for us. They just want our ability so that they can get a better name.' Last year there was a fight between a Negro and a white guy on the track team. The Negro person refused to run because he felt he was disciplined differently from the white guy and he was kicked out of school. It wasn't true because I knew the guy he had the fight with and he was kicked out too! We also knew there was going to be a problem with the prom because there are kids who like the psychedelic music and kids who like the soul music. There was a big uproar and now we're having two rock 'n roll bands: one soul and one psychedelic. It was the only way to keep everyone quiet.

Communication between students could be a lot better as there's been a lot of unrest with the Negroes and whites. The administration has been trying to bring them together, but right now no one much cares. At the beginning of the year, everyone was all tensed wondering what was going to happen with the new principal. We could all talk about the racial tension quietly and everything but mostly the only times they talk is if something happens. I think we should have more talking done. Like, right now, when there is not so much trouble. The administration shouldn't wait for something to happen, but that's what they usually do.

Tanya

Tanya, a white student, is a junior at a nearly all-white school in a large city in the Southwest. The school was recently built and has the city's most modern educational facilities. Tanya, a top academic student, expects to go to college after graduation. She is thinking about becoming a teacher.

Last year we had the neatest principal, then he retired. This one that we got this year wants to run everything just like a dictator practically. Everybody hates him because he is sickening. You never see him around the halls or anything. It just seems like he sits up there like a little king and gives orders.

Like we were working on this civil rights thing and we wanted to have students come and, at least, explain to the classes what was going on, what we could do, and stuff like that. He wouldn't let us because it was too controversial to have in a high school. Every time you try and do something, I don't know—it's just that we've petitioned for a lot of things in that school and we never get anything. We petitioned for better dress codes once, and we petitioned once for a boy who got kicked out of sports for some stupid reason; we petitioned for integration—just to get some information. Our petitions are turned into the student council and nobody knows where they go after that. No changes have been made. None at all! We made up a declaration of rights about the right to wear what you wanted to we passed it around and got lots of signatures. The principal and everybody listened and that's as much as we heard. Nobody would do anything.

Somebody makes the rules, so somebody has got to be able to change them. If there were a student discipline committee I think we'd be harder on each other than the adults would, but at least it would be more fair than the faculty is, and nobody would get mad. We are all pretty sensible about things even though some of us might get carried away by an idea. I just think that nobody gives us credit for being responsible. They should at least give us a chance, but they always say, 'Well, if we let you do this, then within the week everything is going to be all messed up.' If we let you have sideburns, well next you are going to want beards and next you will want hair down to your ankles.' Nobody wants to be all that weird! They are only doing it, you know, just to fight the administration. If they were a lot more lenient on dress codes, everything would stay about the same, and I don't think we would want to try all those extreme things. Perhaps at the very beginning, but by the end of the year, everything would just blend back in because kids judge each other, you know.

This one boy I know had a picket sign saying, "Integrate Now." The principal didn't know what to do, so he went down to the boy's advisor, and sat down there for hours. Then when we had a student council election, the principal wouldn't let him run. He said that my friend was truant because he had brought that sign, and that he should have just gone to class. The kids from student council went to the principal and said

that they were going to change the election rules so that truancy wouldn't be counted. The principal threatened to veto anything the student council did. He has the power to do that. It's really discouraging because he even said that he is not going to let us do anything!

It seems like mostly what our student council does is have birthday cakes. This year, nobody has been very happy with it. Our "head girl" completely goes with the administration. She won't fight the administration on anything, or she hasn't this year. And the "head boy" just kind of left things up to her. Next year, it's not going to be the same because there was really a reaction and the two new officers are completely different.

Students have to be willing to risk a little pride and be humble enough to talk to the administration, I guess. That's the way the administrators want it, you know. But we've talked with them before, without being belligerent or anything; we tried, except that it seems like it's going to take a lot of trying before we'll convince them. Administrators are very uncourageous men. They're scared to change.

Rick

Rick is a white student who attends an all-white school in the suburbs of a medium-sized midwestern city. A senior, he is in an academic course and plans to major in sociology or psychology when he begins college next year.

I don't particularly get along with the principal and it seems to me he makes no effort to get along with anybody. I think that most people would agree with that. He runs his school with an iron hand—you almost go in and salute him and even the teachers in that school are intimidated. He has this very hard attitude and he isn't friendly. He makes no attempt at really getting through to the students; he just isn't concerned with that. I think that's really important, you know, just to get some human concern.

He just thinks of students keeping up the high scholastic average that his high school has always maintained. All he's concerned with is that we're neatly groomed, clean, and come from nice, respectable families—and that's it! He doesn't care what we think or how we feel or anything. He runs a tight ship and he does a good job. He's a good administrator as far as getting things done, but he doesn't let many people get to know him. He has his nose in everything; he's—he knows what's happening in class and out because he makes a point to talk to teachers. I guess it is a good thing.

I'm sure that he is a little bit scared of intellectual people who do something really creative and probably radical for the general attitude of the school is to stifle discussion and new things. He's fairly indicative of what the community wants. The principal is very quick and alert and sharp about coming back with legal answers about why and how to do things, but a few people in the student council were sort of wondering what this school is doing. They wanted to raise a few questions, but after they're answered by the man upstairs, then it's all right. The kids just don't care that much, so it doesn't bother them. See, most kids dress in university type clothing and keep their hair shortened down because mom and dad like it that way. Growing a beard isn't their idea of cool. I don't think the principal really has anything to be scared about. His main problem is just discipline—you know, being sent down to the principal's office for an hour. Big deal!

I'm not really concerned with the ultimate decision about being kicked out of school for growing my hair long, it's just the fact that it's so totalitarian and the principal has so much autonomy within the school. It would really be good if there was some sort of understanding between the teachers and students as to what is happening and why they are doing things. There is so much of this, 'Just do it because I said so,' stuff. Two times a teacher said to me, 'Do something,' and I said, 'Why?' and they said, 'Because I said so,' and I said, 'That's no reason to me.'

The principal was nice to me, relatively, about my suspension. I wouldn't get a haircut, so he made an appointment to see me and said, 'You can come back after you get a haircut.' Usually he paid for the first one. So I walked down to the barber shop. One time the principal said, "That's not short enough," so I went back, got another and came back with nice short hair. He looked at me and gave me the welcoming of the prodigal son and said, 'Now you look like a white boy.' Wow, I really gave him hell for that. I said, 'Don't you ever say that to me again.'

Jump to Part 2