

THE MISSISSIPPI IDEA

[This article by Howard Zinn on last summer's Freedom Schools in Mississippi is reprinted, slightly condensed, from the *Nation* for Nov. 23, 1964. Mr. Zinn taught at one of the Schools. He teaches Government at Boston University and is the author of *The Southern Mystique* (Knopf) and *SNCC: The New Abolitionist* (Beacon).—Editors.]

FOR eight weeks, more than 2,000 Negro youngsters, averaging 15 years of age but ranging from 6 to 26 and older, went to schools which violated all the rules and regulations of educational orthodoxy. They were taught by teachers who met no official qualifications; they assembled in church basements or on the streets or in the fields; they came and went without attendance records, grades or examinations.

The idea, and the term "freedom school," were first brought before the civil rights movement by a slender Howard University student named Charles Cobb, who several years ago interrupted his studies to plunge into the Mississippi Delta as a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Cobb pursued his scheme with quiet, slow persistence, and when plans were laid last fall for a big "Mississippi Summer," with 1,000 or more volunteers to arrive in the state, Freedom Schools were on the agenda. Bob Moses, director of the Mississippi project, has a Master's degree from Harvard. He gave the idea close attention, and when Northern students were recruited during the spring many of them were told to be ready to teach.

The man who took charge of the summer Freedom School project for COFO (the Council of Federated Organizations: a union of SNCC, CORE and other civil rights groups in Mississippi) was Staughton Lynd, a young historian whose field, some might have noted warningly, is the American Revolution. He had spent three years in

north Georgia in a rural cooperative community, and then three more years at Spelman College, a Negro women's college in Atlanta. He had just resigned from Spelman in protest against restrictions on the academic freedom of both students and faculty, and was then immediately hired by Yale University. From the orientation session at Oxford, Ohio, in early June to the end of August, Lynd was a dynamo of an administrator, driving into the remotest rural regions of Mississippi to keep the schools going.

At Oxford, the Freedom School teachers were warned about difficulties: "You'll arrive in Ruleville, in the Delta. It will be 100°, and you'll be sweaty and dirty. You won't be able to bathe often or sleep well or eat good food. The first day of school, there may be four teachers and three students. And the local Negro minister will phone to say you can't use his church basement after all, because his life has been threatened. And the curriculum we've drawn up—Negro history and American government—may be something you know only a little about yourself. Well, you'll knock on doors all day in the hot sun to find students. You'll meet on someone's lawn under a tree. You'll tear up the curriculum and teach what you know."

They were also told to be prepared for violence, injury, even death. But they hardly expected it so soon. The first batch of teachers had just left the orientation session for Mississippi when word came that one of the summer volunteers (Andrew Goodman), a white community center director (Mickey Schwerner) and a local Meridian Negro youth (James Chaney) were missing. A publicity stunt, said Mississippi officials. But the SNCC veterans of Mississippi disagreed. "Man, those guys are dead," Jim Forman said.

The summer volunteers got into cars and into buses, and moved into Mississippi. Two hundred Freedom School teachers spread out over the state, from Biloxi in the Gulf Coast up into Ruleville in the Delta, and farther north to Holly Springs, covering twenty-five communities. Day by day, more and more Negro kids came around to the schools, and the expected enrollment of 1,000 rose to 1,500, then to 2,000.

One of the Jackson Freedom Schools opened in early August in a church basement just a short walk from the state COFO office on Lynch Street. Its combination of disorder and inspiration was very much like that of the other schools in the state. The "faculty" was more experienced than most: a young high school teacher of English from Vermont acted as "coordinator"—a combination of principal, janitor, recreation supervisor, and father confessor. Another youthful junior high school teacher of mathematics was from Brooklyn; there was one college professor of history who had taught for a number of years in a Southern Negro college; also, an enthusiastic young woman named Jimmy Miller, whose husband, Warren Miller, had written in *The Cool World* about young Harlem kids. The teachers lived in spare rooms, or spare corners of rooms, in Negro houses of the neighborhood.

Two days before the school was set to open, in close to 100° heat, the teachers canvassed the neighborhood for students. Each asked one of the Negro youngsters hanging around the COFO office to go along with him, so as to establish from the start that these were friendly visitors walking up on the porches, knocking on the doors, asking: "Do y'all know about the Freedom School starting Wednesday over at Pratt Memorial Church?" No, they mostly didn't, and so the information passed across the threshold: "It's for teen-age boys and girls, to learn about Negro history, and the Constitution, and the civil rights movement, and mathematics, and maybe French and Spanish, the way they don't get learning in the regular school." Kids on bicycles stopped, and

one friend told another, and the word was passed on.

No one paid attention to details like age requirements, so that at the opening of school, sixty kids showed up, from 6 to 19; Jimmy Miller marched the 6-to-10 children off to a corner, to read with them, and teach them freedom songs, and sound out French words whose English equivalents they had not yet discovered, and painstakingly correct their spelling.

With the older ones—14 to 19—any idea of going in an organized way through an outline of Negro history or American government was soon dropped. Beyond a core of seven or eight who came faithfully every morning at 9 and stayed until mid-afternoon, there were a dozen others who came and went as they liked. So the history professor started each day from where the mood struck him, from some point on which he thought the students' recognition might be fastened just long enough to pull them onward.

One day, it was an editorial in that morning's *Clarion-Ledger*, charging that civil rights workers were teaching people to break the law. "What do you think about that editorial? Is it true? If you could write a letter to the editor about it, what would you say? . . . Here's paper and pencil, go ahead. We'll pick out one or two and *really* send them to the editor." This was not education for grades, not writing for teacher's approval, but for an immediate use; it was a learning surrounded with urgency. And the students responded with seriousness, picking apart the issues: Are we for the law? Is there a higher law? When is civil disobedience justified? Then the teacher explored with them the differences between statutory law, constitutional law, "natural" law.

On another day the teacher told his students about the annual fair he had visited the previous afternoon. It was held in Neshoba County where the bodies of the three murdered civil rights workers had just been discovered. A strain of tension and fear had pervaded the fair grounds. The teacher reported what speakers had told the

crowd that day at the fair. Gov. Paul Johnson had said "It is not Mississippi's obligation to enforce federal statutes." A representative of the John Birch Society had said: "I am for the Constitution, for freedom, for the open Bible." The students were asked: Do you disagree? Aren't you for the Constitution? For freedom? The discussion became heated. Distinctions were drawn, and became more and more refined, all by the students themselves, the teacher just listening: "Which Constitution does he mean, U.S. or Mississippi? . . . Maybe we're for different *parts* of the U.S. Constitution . . . Well, maybe we're for the same part, but we *interpret* it differently."

The Jackson Freedom Schools faced only harassment. Early in the session, while canvassing for more students, two teachers—one a slim, blonde Skidmore undergraduate—were picked up by the police, held for several hours, then discharged. Violence spluttered around the COFO office in Jackson one ugly Saturday night: a young man building book shelves for a Freedom School bookmobile on the street across from the office was clubbed to the ground by a white man who fled in a car; a dance hall where teachers and students were spending the evening was sprayed with bullets by a passing car, and a Negro boy was wounded, crosses were burned. But by Mississippi standards, Jackson was peaceful.

In the rural areas of the state, the danger was greater. A church used as a Freedom School in the little town of Gluckstadt was burned to the ground (when the teachers arrived on the scene, fifteen youngsters were waiting under a tree for class to begin). A Northern doctor who spent the summer in Mississippi with the movement told of the two white girls who lived alone in a hilltop house out in the country, 30 miles from Canton, and held a Freedom School there. In McComb, so dangerous that the Justice Department pleaded with the Mississippi project not to send anyone in there, a Freedom School was started by a Washington, D.C., speech teacher, a young Negro named Ralph Featherstone. Two days after the

first contingent arrived, a bomb exploded in the midst of sleeping SNCC workers. But 100 children came regularly to attend the McComb Freedom School.

Violence took the headlines, but behind it a phenomenal thing was happening to Mississippi: 2,000 young people were having experiences that would—for some in a small way, for some drastically—change their lives.

The kind of teaching that was done in the Freedom Schools was, despite its departure from orthodoxy—or, more likely, because of it—just about the best kind there is. For the teachers were selected not by any mechanical set of requirements but on the basis of general intelligence, enthusiasm and the kind of social conscience that would drive them to spend a hot summer in Mississippi without pay. They taught, not out of textbooks, but out of life, trying to link the daily headlines with the best and deepest of man's intellectual tradition.

Their object was not to cram a prescribed amount of factual material into young minds, but to give them that first look into new worlds which would, some day if not immediately, lead them to books and people and ideas not found in the everyday lives of Mississippi Negroes. They didn't always succeed, but even their failures were warmed by the affection that sprang up everywhere between teachers and students—both aware that they talked with one another inside a common cradle of concern.

One afternoon in Jackson, a visiting folk singer brought the students of a Freedom School out into the sun-baked street back of the church, formed them into a huge circle, and taught them an Israeli dance chant imploring the heavens for rain to help the harvest. Older Negroes passed by, sat on porches, listened to their children utter strange words and dance this strange dance. The young ones seemed to understand; they were beginning, for the first time in their lives, to reach beyond their street, beyond their state, to join in some universal plea.

A Stanford University professor of English told how hard he had to work to make contact with these young boys and girls, so different from his regular students. But it came. He walked into class, put them at ease with some foolery, got them to talk about the events in the morning newspaper. Then: "Who would like to read a story?" One girl stubbornly had her back to the class. He asked her to read and she turned around. "She then read this story by Eudora Welty, 'The Worn Path,' and read it beautifully; it could have been a staged performance. And this was back of the church, the only place we had for my class, with the noise of traffic all around."

When the girl finished reading, the teacher asked the class: "Did you like the story?" There was a chorus: "Yes!" "Why?" They responded. He told them about subject and plot, about description and dialogue, how in general one analyzes a story. He asked how the story made them *feel*, and one said sad, and another said it made her laugh, and he asked how could a story do both at the same time, and spoke to them of *irony*. "God, how they understood!"

He bridged what they read and how they lived. He read to them from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. This was written, he said out of a Negro boy's personal experience. "Now I'll tell you a story of my personal experience." And he told of a wartime incident involving himself and Negro soldiers in Charleston, S.C. And then, to the class: "Who else wants to tell a personal story?" The next day, one girl brought in a story which, he realized, was prose as good as that written by any Stanford freshman he had encountered. And, so, literature was read and created at the same time.

In these classes, discussions of democracy, of the philosophy of nonviolence, were hardly academic. In one Jackson school the class met to elect delegates to a convention of all the Jackson Freedom Schools. An older fellow named Jimmy, age 24, had been hanging around the class for the past few days. He spoke breezily of having

recently spent three years in jail for a knifing. The teacher suggested that Jimmy sit up at the desk and chair the meeting. He laughed and complied. "O.K., now, I'll choose the delegates," he announced. There were objections from all over the room: "We've got to *elect* them!"

"What kind of resolutions are we going to propose to the convention?" a girl asked. One suggested: "If any kid is treated brutally in school in Jackson, all the kids in the Jackson schools walk out; we'll have a chairman in each school; we won't act just on say-so; we'll get written affidavits and witnesses before we take action. It's something like a student union."

The teacher was curious: "Do students get beaten up in your schools?" A girl answered: her principal had beaten a boy until he bled.

Jimmy then told how he'd been beaten by a teacher when he was younger. And how he and some friends had then found the teacher alone and taken revenge. "We had a nice understanding after that." He hesitated. "But I don't know what I'd do now. You know this nonviolence we're talking about. If it happened now I might beat him. Or I might just laugh and go away. I was young then and full of hate. At that time, I see something I want, I take it. Now, I *ask*. It's the movement I guess . . . I want my son to come up different."

Role-playing was used very often in Freedom Schools. "Kids that age are natural actors," a teacher explained. "And it puts them in other people's shoes. We don't want to win easy arguments over straw foes. They have got to be tough thinkers, tough arguers." The teacher listed on the blackboard Barry Goldwater's reasons for voting against the civil rights bill: (1) It is unconstitutional. (2) No law will end prejudice ("We cannot pass a law that will make you like me or me like you"). (3) It can't be enforced. (4) It violates the idea of States' rights. The class went over the arguments, with one boy portraying Goldwater, and defending his points powerfully, another trying to break them down.

Outside on the street, in front of the building, an energetic, red-headed teacher was pointing to a blackboard propped up in the sun, the kids sitting in rows in the shade of the building. "O.K., we can build any kind of community we want now. What will the rules be?" This was a hortatory kind of teaching, but a kind the schools fostered: constantly talking with students not just about what *is*, but about what *should be*.

A Harvard graduate in literature who had taught in Israel worked in a Vicksburg Freedom School:

It was hard. Youngsters hung around the school, slept there. Every morning, they were like corpses on the floor. To start class, you had to clean them out. The school was cramped, noisy. We used role playing a lot. Kids would portray three generations of Negro families, and we learned history that way. We sat in a circle rather than the usual classroom format, to stress the equality of teacher and student. I read to them from Thomas Wolf's *You Can't Go Home Again* and from Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream*, then had them write speeches as if they were Senators urging passage of the civil rights bill. I tried to extend the idea of oppression beyond race. If you pick on a small kid with glasses and beat him up, aren't you acting the same as these white segregationists? I asked them.

One teacher spent a whole hour with his students discussing the word "skeptical." He told them: "This is a Freedom School and we should mean what we say. We should feel free to think as we want, question whomever we like, whether it's our parents, our ministers, our teachers—yes, me, right here. Don't take my word for things. Check up on them. Be *skeptical*." For these youngsters it was a new way of looking at the classroom. They told how in their high school in Jackson the rooms were wired so that at the flick of a switch the principal could listen in on any class in the school. Teachers were afraid to discuss controversial subjects.

The blonde girl from Skidmore College taught French to teen-agers in her Freedom School. "I try to do the whole class in French, use pantomime a lot . . . I soon realized these kids had

never had contact with a white person before; maybe that's the greatest thing about this whole experience. If nothing else is accomplished, it's been a *meeting*, for both student and teacher. . . . We have a Freedom Hour at 11 every morning. They run it themselves, make their own rules." She was asked if the Freedom Schools were not, in fact, *indoctrinating* the children. She paused. "Yes, I suppose so. But I can't think of anything better to indoctrinate them with. Freedom. Justice. The Golden Rule. Isn't there *some* core of belief a school should stand by?"

A green-eyed, attractive Radcliffe graduate, interpreter now for an international agency, whose field was Latin American history but who had not a day of teaching experience or education courses to her credit, went to work in a Freedom School:

My kids were 9 to 13. I told them about the Spanish background of Negro slaves in the United States, about the Caribbean islands and the slave plantation system as it developed there and compared that system with the one in the English colonies. I spoke to them about life in Brazil, about the multi-racial societies in Latin America where people get along fine. I told them about the problems of kids their age in Venezuela, in Puerto Rico (where I've spent some time). Yes, it did something for them psychologically to know that there are people in the world worse off than they are!

Without a strict curriculum to follow, the schools capitalized on the unexpected. A class held out in the sun would take advantage of passers-by, draw them into discussion. One day three Negro women came by who'd been trying to register to vote and had been rebuffed. The teacher beckoned: "Come over here and tell my students what happened." And so the children learned about the registration procedure, about voting, about what to tell their parents about going down to register. One of the middle-aged women, her anger still fresh, told them they must become educated if they wanted to change things.

It was risky, teaching without an ordered curriculum.

And because it was risky, the Radcliffe girl said, it led to treasures.

I could experiment, do what I wanted, try things completely new, because I had no one to answer to, no reports to make. Nothing could happen to me or to these young people that would leave us worse off than before. And I could go off on tangents whenever I wanted, something I'd be afraid to do in a regular school setup. Wherever thoughts and discussion led, we followed. There was nothing we didn't dare turn to.

The road from study to action was short. Those who attended the schools began to come to mass rallies, to canvass for registration of voters, to question things around them for the first time. In Shaw County, "out in the rural," when the regular school began its session in August (Negro schools in the Delta open in August so that the children will be available for cotton picking in the fall), white Freedom School teachers were turned away from the regular school cafeteria, where some students had invited them to lunch. The students then boycotted the school and flocked in large numbers to the local Freedom School.

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REVIEW

LAO TZU AND THE TAO

ALL the inspired "teachings" of the past, so far as we can see, share a common affirmation—that man, as an individual, can achieve full stature only when he recognizes that doctrines and beliefs are not "the truth," but stepping stones to self-knowledge. This idea is conveyed more clearly, perhaps, than in many other classics of transcendental thought, by Lao Tzu's *Tao Te King*. A new edition of this work by D. C. Lau (Penguin, 1963) is continuing evidence of the interest in expressions of "transcendental" thought which resist theological or doctrinal interpretations. Each rendition of or commentary on the *Tao Te King* is more apt to be characterized by the enthusiasm of the man than by the technical learning of the scholar. (We suggest a reading of Dr. Lau's work as an illuminant of the aspects of existentialist thought lately stressed in a MANAS article by Dr. Frederick Mayer, Dec. 2, 1964.)

Readers who wish to compare the Lau translation with others will find a passage on "Virtue" a good test. Whatever the reading made, it is clear that Lao tzu wished to show that beyond the external marks of what men commonly call "virtue" is an attitude which is totally indifferent to claims of moral superiority:

A man of the highest virtue does not keep to virtue and that is why he has virtue. A man of the lowest virtue never strays from virtue and that is why he is without virtue. The former never acts yet leaves nothing undone. The latter acts but there are things left undone. A man of the highest benevolence acts, but from no ulterior motive. A man most conversant in the rites acts, but when no one responds rolls up his sleeves and resorts to persuasion by force.

Hence when the way was lost there was virtue, when virtue was lost there was benevolence; when benevolence was lost there was rectitude; when rectitude was lost there were the rites.

The rites are the wearing thin of loyalty and good faith and the beginning of disorder;

foreknowledge is the flowery embellishment of the way and the beginning of folly.

Hence the man of large mind abides in the thick not in the thin, in the fruit not in the flower.

Therefore he discards the one and takes the other.

This is also a central emphasis of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Krishna informs his disciple, Arjuna, that there is a higher knowledge beyond doctrine—and that when this knowledge is obtained one practices "action" while not *acting* in the usual sense, so that he is not emotionally ensnared in patterns of human interaction which he cannot and should not control.

In his introduction, Dr. Lau gives appropriate attention to Lao Tzu's commentary on the aggression and acquisitiveness which result in war. "There are," he writes, "a number of pacifist passages in the *Lao tzu* where one can detect a passionate concern for the lot of the common man in times of war." For instance:

Where troops have encamped
There will brambles grow;
In the wake of a mighty army
Bad harvests follow without fail.

"The explanation of such passages," Dr. Lau says, "lies in the fact that, in achieving victory over the hard and the strong, the submissive and the weak do not become their opposites." He continues:

In order to understand this, we must bear in mind the fact that in the *Lao tzu* a term is often used in two senses, the ordinary and the Taoist. "Victory is such a term. In the ordinary sense of the word, it is the strong that gains "victory" over the weak. In this sense, victory cannot be guaranteed indefinitely, as however strong a thing is, it is inevitable that one day it will meet with more than its match.

It is not remarkable that these considerations come naturally to mind in an era threatened by nuclear destruction. Moreover, Lao tzu does not conceive of the ideal life as insulated from political affairs, and in the psychological sense this may be said to be even more true of Lao tzu than of Confucius. While it may seem to stretch the point

to say that the former envisioned each man becoming a "statesman," this is none the less true from the standpoint of attitude. Dr. Lau writes:

Almost all ancient Chinese thinkers were concerned with the way one should lead one's life, and this was never confined to conduct in the personal sense, but covered the art of government as well. Politics and ethics, for the Chinese as for the ancient Greeks, were two aspects of the same thing, and this the Chinese thinkers called the *tao*. One who has the *tao* will in the words of the *T'ien hsia* chapter of the *Channg tzu*, be "inwardly a sage and outwardly a true king." This was the general outlook of the period, and the *Lao tzu* was no exception. This can be seen even from one simple fact. The term "sage (*sheng jen*)" occurs more than twenty times in the *Lao tzu* and, with only a few exceptions, refers always to a ruler who understands the *tao*. Besides "the sage," there are other terms as well that refer to rulers, like "the lord of men" and "lords and princes." This shows that the *Lao tzu* is, through and through, a work on the art of government.

The *Tao Te King*, insofar as its passages intimate an Ultimate Reality beyond the range of the highest metaphysical speculation, can be said to have a "mystical" tone. But the *Tao Te King* is also concerned with the implications of Tao for ethics and human conduct. The true mystic, in other words, strives to become impartial through communion with that which is One in both nature and man. This is "conformity with Nature," for Nature neither praises nor blames; her essential rhythms are unaffected by specific happenings; she does not cling, in any final sense, to any particular mode or manifestation.

This brings us to another theme in Lao tzu, certainly applicable to various stages of global political contentions:

The sage is first and foremost a man who understands the *tao*, and if he happens also to be a ruler he can apply his understanding of the *tao* to government.

When there is not enough faith, there is lack of good faith.

Those who are of good faith I have faith in. Those who are in. Those who are lacking in good

faith I also have faith in. In so doing I gain in good faith.

Dr. Lau comments:

We can see here that what is advocated is that we should extend our faith to even those who lack good faith. This is because by so doing we have some hopes of transforming them into men of good faith, whereas placing no faith in them will serve only to confirm them in their bad ways. Hence in a way the lack of good faith is the result of the lack of faith.

Lao tzu suggests that the attainment of impersonality and impartiality of mind may be reached by dwelling on sublime abstractions, and psychotherapists point to the disastrous results of intense preoccupation with egocentric desires. Typical "neuroses," as we know, are connected with fear and hostility. The hostile man is never content to let nature take its course. He feels he must have what he wants in precisely the way he wants it, and at the immediate moment. The welfare of others, rather than being taken into account and given sympathetic consideration, becomes simply a chain of obstacles. And the neurotic, whether or not he has the power to make his intrusions effective, is an inveterate meddler in the lives and affairs of other people. They are no more than the environment in which he must fulfill his own desires. He is an "arranger," then, at best; and at worst he feels entirely justified in upbraiding or punishing. He does this because he cannot stand the apparent interference with his own life of the differing opinions and reactions of his fellows. He is, in other words, the antithesis of the philosophical anarchist or pacifist. He knows not the Tao, and therefore can find no "repose."

It seems no exaggeration to suggest that in the many centuries since the time of Lao tzu, innumerable men, by pondering his teachings, learned how to overcome a characteristic "neurosis," long before this term came into currency.

COMMENTARY

WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE . . . ?

[The concluding paragraphs of Howard Zinn's *Nation* article on the Freedom Schools were so searching and suggestive of reforms in education that we solved the problem of limited space by deciding to use this material as a guest editorial, which appears below.—Editors.]

THE Freedom School's challenge to the social structure of Mississippi was obvious from the start. Its challenge to American education as a whole is more subtle. There is, to begin with, the provocative suggestion that an entire school system can be created in any community outside the official order, and critical of its suppositions. But beyond that, other questions were posed by the Mississippi experiment of last summer.

Can we, somehow, bring teachers and students together, not through the artificial sieve of certification and examination but on the basis of their common attraction to an exciting social goal? Can we solve the old educational problem of teaching children crucial values, while avoiding a blanket imposition of the teacher's ideas? Can this be done by honestly accepting as an educational goal that we want better human beings in the rising generation than we had in the last, and that this requires a forthright declaration that the educational process cherishes equality, justice, compassion and world brotherhood? Is it not possible to create a hunger for those goals through the fiercest argument about whether or not they *are* worth while? And cannot the schools have a running, no-ideas-barred exchange of views about alternative ways to those goals?

Is there, in the floating, prosperous, nervous American social order of the sixties, a national equivalent to the excitement of the civil rights movement, one strong enough in its pull to create a motivation for learning that even the enticements of monetary success cannot match? Would it be possible to declare boldly that the aim of the schools is to find solutions for poverty, for injustice, for race and national hatred, and to turn

all educational efforts into a national striving for those solutions?

Perhaps people can begin, here and there (not waiting for the government, but leading it) to set up other pilot ventures, imperfect but suggestive, like the one last summer in Mississippi. Education can, and should, be dangerous.

SUGGESTED READING

The article, "Rebellion at Berkeley," by Lewis S. Feuer, in the *New Leader* for Dec. 21, deserves careful reading by all those who think it important to understand the drama recently played out on the Berkeley campus of the University of California (see *Frontiers*). Prof. Feuer, who teaches philosophy and social science at Berkeley, is presently working on a study of student uprisings. This article devotes considerable attention to the recent book by Clark Kerr (President of the University), *The Uses of the University*, showing the deep contradictions between the circumstantial realities of the large, modern university and the purposes of education.

CHILDREN

... and Ourselves

A NEW PSYCHOLOGY IN EDUCATION

IN discussing the idea of education as a life-long undertaking, we have endeavored to show the importance of the "self-actualizing" view of man which emerges in the writings of the "third force" psychologists. One cannot, as Warren Beatty has said, have a coherent philosophy of education without being convinced that each individual, whether young or old, is capable of a self-directed transformation of goals and purposes. We must either accept the old view that people are created by their culture and immediate environment, or assume that each one can understand and affect his particular "fate"—discover a destiny which reaches beyond the "personality patterns" produced by the conditioning process. The approach that seems broadly common to Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Clark Moustakas? Rollo May, and others, may be Platonic or Emersonian, but it is also becoming a beacon light to many educators. In evidence is a volume produced within the teaching profession by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a department of the National Education Association. This 250-page symposium, to which these four psychologists contribute, the 1962 Yearbook of the Association, edited by Arthur W. Combs, is titled *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming—A New Focus for Education*.

The following from the Preface shows the growing importance of the new psychology for education:

It may seem paradoxical to say that *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming: A New Focus for Education* is timely. How can it be timely in a period in which attention in education is riveted on the technological revolution, alternative proposals for organizational structures, and updating knowledge in government-favored academic areas? *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming* is timely precisely because continuous consideration of the basic foundations of the educational program is inescapable. Regardless of

what technological devices are adopted, what organizational patterns prevail, what curricular content emerges, the three basic foundations of education—social, psychological and philosophical—are central in the making of the educational program.

Essentially the 1962 Yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development provides bold new insights on one of the three foundations, the psychological, with related implications affecting social philosophical aspects. *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming* deals with the truly adequate person, adequate in the sense of Webster's synonym *sufficient* and in the sense of the authors' equivalent phrases, *fully functioning* and *self-actualizing*, rather than adequate in the corrupted usage, "good enough to get by." The yearbook describes how schools may help develop such persons.

Here is no trivial contribution by scholars avoiding reality; here the authors deal with the heart of the educational process as they propose a new focus for education. If they prove to be correct in their espousal of a "third force" in psychology neither behavioristic nor Freudian, a hopeful vista as to man's potentiality stretches ahead. The theories and applications of *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming* merit intent and open-minded study by the reader.

The concluding chapter, "The Process of Becoming," is concerned with the innate potentiality of the individual in relation to the "teaching-learning process." Prof. Combs writes:

The concept of the individual who is in the process of becoming underlines the importance of continuing education. . . Stereotyped "culmination activities" at the end of a "unit" often contribute to the feeling there is nothing more to learn about the subject. The image of a college degree which says one has "finished" learning inhibits the development of being in process. Supervisory practices which make it appear that it is a sign of weakness to ask for help actually hinder teachers in understanding the process of becoming. Maslow stresses the idea of need gratification as the person moves toward becoming. As one need is satisfied, the individual becomes open to other needs; the more he knows, the more he wants to know. Thus, schools which open doors, which keep curiosity alive, which make it possible for persons to satisfy their own needs are laying the foundation for continuous learning. Teachers must push out the walls of the classroom and extend the time of the school day and school year,

so that individuals do not feel that learning occurs only within the classroom at a certain time, under certain types of direction. When the school helps the individual continuously to experience satisfaction of needs through exploring, contemplating, manipulating and enjoying the world, it seems likely this process will continue throughout life.

This process of becoming is not easy, and the school should not try to create an atmosphere in which there is no struggle.

Although growth does bring struggle and pain, there are also moments of peak experiences which seem to bring unity within the person. In this moment he feels identity with others and with the world. He senses he is at his best, he feels free and natural. It is a moment of being, when the process of becoming has momentarily ceased. Maslow suggests that the adequate person experiences more of these peak experiences.

It would seem that the source of these peak experiences is within the individual. Exhilaration, feelings of freedom, a feeling of being free of the past and future are sometimes sought through narcotics or stimulants. The peak experience described by Maslow, however, does not separate the individual from the world. He is rather at one with the world and more responsible in it. This latter concept presents a significant challenge to education: to help persons have more peak experiences which are derived from the process of self-discovery so there is no need for seeking such synthetic experience through chemicals which leave a harmful residue.

An earlier chapter, titled "Motivation and the Growth of Self," considers the applicability of this psychology to education:

Much educational practice is now based almost exclusively upon the idea that man has to be prodded or moved into action by an external force or stimulus. This notion that man is at the mercy of the external forces exerted upon him has led to a system of education that seeks to provide the forces necessary to move students from inertia to prescribed activity. The organism has been seen as a sort of inert mass of protoplasm or object to be molded—made into something. In this view, teachers cannot afford to trust the organism. Indeed, they need to be constantly on guard against its reverting to some base animal character. Certainly students cannot be trusted to decide what is "good for them" and then some others (teachers and administrators) must decide what forces

should be exerted to keep children moving through this "good experience." Children are regarded as a kind of enemy of schools. They are certain to go wrong if we do not look sharp to our business and keep them straight.

This static view of human motivation has been with us a long time. It tends to see the human organism as basically untrustworthy and certain to move in the "wrong" direction unless carefully supervised and controlled. Motivation in this view is a matter of controlling the external events to assure that students will arrive at the prior and "proper" determined ends. It is basically a question of force, coercion, control, management, direction, aimed at molding the child in "the way he should go."

The view presented by our four authors suggests quite a different approach. They point out that all of us have a basic, internal, *given* need to grow that does not have to be imposed; it is there already. This view of man and of learning offers a new and challenging idea about children's motives. Each of the four authors predicated his view on the idea that man has a built-in thrust or will to health, a *need* to become fully functioning or adequate—a psychologically healthy person. This dynamic, Maslow says, is characteristic of the inner core or nature of man. It strains for expression, and through expression and need gratification the individual may ripen and mature to become the self-actualizing or fully functioning personality.

One direct quotation from Carl Rogers should not be omitted:

I have little sympathy with the rather prevalent concept that man is basically irrational, and that his impulses, if not controlled, would lead to destruction of others and self. Man's behavior is exquisitely rational, moving with subtle and ordered complexity toward the goals his organism is endeavoring to achieve.

A New Focus for Education should help to provide a sustaining background for the highest goals of the educator at any level.

FRONTIERS

What a University Is For

AN incurious attitude of disturbed complacency—a "this is *too much*" response of pained paternalism—pervades a large segment of the public reaction to the recent student demonstrations on the Berkeley campus of the University of California. There is a strong sense of: "Our tax money is being used to give these young people the best possible education; can't they at least *behave!*"

What are the issues in this impasse?

A brief fifteen or twenty years ago, students throughout the United States were called "the silent generation." It was said that, unlike previous generations of students, these young people were fearful of commitment, suspicious of militance, unwilling to accept the burdens of radical idealism which students the world over had embraced for centuries of Western history. Then, about five years ago, observers began to notice a change. From distrust of ready-made ideologies and passivity toward traditions of dissent, the students were turning with fervor to causes which seemed free of political equivocation and moral uncertainty—the simple, anti-human threat of nuclear war, and the clear denial of the constitutional rights of American Negroes.

Today, student support is a basic element in the strength of the civil rights movement. Funds are raised and workers are enlisted for this movement on many of the campuses of the country. This is the background of the struggle.

The crucial issue at Berkeley was created by a decision of the California Board of Regents, which on Nov. 20 ruled that "certain campus facilities carefully selected and properly regulated, may be used by students and staff for planning, implementing, raising funds or recruiting participants for lawful off-campus action, *not for unlawful off-campus action.*" (Italics added.) The students declare that this ruling is a practical

denial of their rights under the Constitution. They argue that there is not and cannot be in the authority of the administration of a state university any power to curtail or abridge the freedom of speech of students who are also citizens. A statement by the Berkeley Campus Free Speech Movement (FSM) says:

. . . the fact that the Administration is peculiarly vulnerable to pressures originating outside the University should remove it from consideration as the proper authority for determining guilt or innocence in the extremely sensitive area of speech, assembly and protest within the First Amendment. It must be emphasized that the current crisis has not developed in a vacuum. These rules work a grave hardship on the civil-rights movement in Northern California. Organizations in this movement rely heavily on negotiations, demonstrations, picketing and other such legal tactics. It is true however that in order to focus attention on a serious injustice and to bring pressure to bear for its correction, civil rights workers sometimes employ tactics which result in violation of the law. Without passing on the propriety of such acts, the Free Speech Movement insists that the question whether their *advocacy* is legal or illegal must be left to the courts, which are institutionally independent of the shifting pressure of the community. Moreover, the standard that the Chancellor is free to apply is only one of "responsibility" of the act of advocacy for the act advocated, which is far more inclusive and vague than the "clear and present danger" test. Hence guilt is likely to be found upon much less substantial and compelling grounds than would be necessary to obtain conviction for illegal advocacy in a court of law. Students are convinced that the regulations providing for such a hearing are the direct result of pressures generated by the civil-rights movement in the surrounding community, and enable the Administration to respond to such pressures by disciplining student civil-rights workers.

These general contentions are reinforced by the fact that no critic of the FSM has been able to claim that the campus activities which are now banned have in any way interfered with the normal course of education—except of course for the sit-in protest. Meanwhile, the Berkeley faculty, acting as the Academic Senate, on Dec. 8 voted (824 to 115) to endorse proposals which would provide that while "the time, place, and manner of

conducting political activity on the campus shall be subject to reasonable regulation to prevent interference with the normal functions of the University, . . . the content of speech or advocacy should not be restricted by the University." In short, the teachers back the students.

What seems lost sight of by those critical of the Berkeley students is the fact that the members of a self-conscious democratic society can never assume that their social order and body of restrictive and regulatory law have a final excellence. The only sure assumption is that the social contract can always be *improved*. Hence the true defenders of democracy will guard with their lives the right to question and even to challenge existing law and custom, on the ground that improvements can come in no other way. Now a university is a place set apart for the purposes of such questioning. It is one of the organs of self-regeneration for democratic institutions, and if the process of questioning can be stifled there, it can be stifled everywhere.

There is an illustrious tradition behind the practice of civil disobedience. It is not the business of the university to stultify that tradition, but rather to illuminate with understanding its moral necessities and ideal ends.

It may be the business of the state to define the penalties for civil disobedience, but the university has no need to do so. Further, if servants of the state find themselves compelled by oaths of office to prescribe those penalties, they can at least perform their duty with a certain shame. The state, in a democratic society, is held to be a servant of the people—which means *all* the people. When employees of the state find themselves in the position of punishing individuals for acts of principle, there is seldom righteousness in this administration of the law, but rather a regrettable social expediency. Every state finds it necessary to devise arbitrary solutions for the built-in failures of the social contract. To conclude that these solutions are right and good simply because the state applies them would be to

make the terrible mistake of thinking that the social compact *cannot be improved*—the greatest of heresies for a believer in democracy, since it strikes at the principle of self-regeneration.

The university is not an impressive baby-sitting institution where sagacious administrators protect the young against their own immaturities. The university is a place where the imperfections of man's condition—social, political, philosophical—are contemplated in the light of as yet unrealized ideals. The idea is to find ways of improving that condition. The university has no real answers, no final solutions, for these problems. Its administrators—the men who build the buildings, hire the teachers, pay the bills, and invite the students to come—are not wise because they happen to control the material facilities for education. They are humble contributors to a situation where, just possibly, innovation and discovery *may* occur and bring benefit to all. The university does not exist to honor the exceedingly dubious harmony of the *status quo*. The university is an investment of the present in the possibilities of the future. It must be kept free.