POLITICAL OBJECTIVES AND EDUCATIONAL CONSEQUENCES

by Frank Bowles (Los Angeles, California)

I must begin this paper by stating specifically that it was not prepared as part of this excellently co-ordinated program to which you have been privileged to listen for these several days. In fact it was not prepared at all except in the sense that certain studies in American education which I have been making for the past year have yielded materials illustrating the effects of political decisions upon the social product of education systems. I had mentioned this point to Brian Holmes several months ago, and it was his knowledge that I had in hand the stuff of a paper which was at least indirectly related to the program of this conference that led him to ask if I would care to use the spot in the program unexpectedly left open by Dr. Halls.

The material of which I speak relates to two parallel systems within American education — one white, one Negro. The two systems have had for a hundred years — that is to say since the close of the American Civil War — similar institutions, similar programs of study, similar regulations, similar diplomas and degrees, and have prepared for similar careers. They have had similar organizations and similar forms of control in that both were strongly influenced by protestant churches, and both, in recent years have received most of their support from tax funds.

Yet these two systems, in their social products have been separated by infinite distances. And in that separation there lie many clues to the unrest that pervades American education today, in the sense that part of that unrest is rooted in the struggle to liquidate the effects of this long separation.

BACKGROUND

At the time of the outbreak of the Civil War the American educational system in the North was composed of the three sectors. Common schools were supported by local communities. They were an early form of an elementary system, not compulsory but in many states under some form of state control. Secondary schools were nearly all private, though some states had the beginnings of a public secondary system. Colleges were all on the colonial, which is to say the English, model and existed mainly to train lawyers and clergymen. Most colleges had preparatory systems.

There were 100,000 free Negroes in the northern states and these Negroes were in all sectors of the northern schools, but not many. There were three Negro Institutes of essentially secondary grade supported by white philanthropy.

It was a rudimentary and unorganized system. It is probable that 95 per cent of school children did not go beyond the 4th grade and that their level of education by today’s standards, would be that of educable mentally retarded children. The purposes of the system were to achieve general literacy —
which it did not do — and to support the protestant religion, foster patriotism and national self sufficiency which it did do.

In the southern states there were no state systems of common schools. There were academies and colleges, small and struggling, and strongly Protestant in tone. There was no provision for the education of 3½ million Negro slaves, and in fact it was against the law in every southern state to offer schooling to a slave.

The objectives of the southern white schools, such as they were, were to establish general literacy for the middle and upper class, to maintain white supremacy, southern autonomy, and the Protestant religion. The political objectives with respect to the slaves were to maintain obedience and dependency, with illiteracy as a tool, and to encourage propagation.

STAGE 1: POST CIVIL WAR

By the close of the Civil War the South was in complete chaos. Ex-slaves had become camp followers of the Union armies, and rough schools had been set up by the Union army and by missionary groups to help control and rehabilitate them. In the last two years of the war, black troops were recruited, finally to the number of 170,000. (It is of interest to note that the South also recruited and used black troops towards the war’s end). Union troops occupied the entire south and began setting up governments which were based upon full franchise including the former slaves, and which elected many black office holders. These governments were usually called “carpet-bagger”, because of the strangers carrying carpet-bags (a form of valise) who quickly appeared to advise the new office holders. In education these new governments took the important steps of creating public school systems in all the southern states and these were opened to Negroes in instant integration. However, there were no teachers and few buildings so thousands of female teachers, young and old, came from the north as teaching missionaries to the south to open church supported schools and these schools in turn commenced to train Negroes as teachers to take over their schools. Thus, in five years the status of the southern Negro changed from slave to freedman with a voice and sometimes an office in government. Objectives of Negro education changed from illiteracy to literacy, from repression to self sufficiency and a new goal was given to Negro youth in the form of opportunity to teach.

At the same time that this change was taking place for the Negroes, the white system was also beginning to change its goals to accommodate the new industrialism which had been so well started by the war. The public schools expanded rapidly, a new group of agricultural and mechanical colleges was formed — most of them in reality, secondary schools — and higher schools of engineering and teacher education began to develop. So, here, too, there was a change in educational objectives to emphasize universal common schooling, technical skill, and a trained body of teachers. There was no great popular surge to education. If anything, higher education tended to fall into disrepute,
perhaps because prosperity and material success were in the air and education beyond minimum needs was considered a waste of time.

STAGE II

A rapid change in educational objectives took place about ten years after the civil war with the close of military occupation in the South. A political deal was made under which the Federal government withdrew its support from reconstruction southern state governments, in return for political support. As a result all of these governments were replaced within a decade by white supremacist governments, representing, essentially, the white peasantry, or what in American slang is the Southern cracker, or red-neck, or wool-hat.

Within a decade of this action, Negro students had been forced out of the Southern schools and into segregated schools conducted under poor conditions. As a result of this set-back, the burden of Negro education fell upon the missionary schools supported by northern philanthropy. These schools, which had been founded as colleges, were in fact elementary schools. They trained teachers with perhaps a 6th grade education, and taught a few vocational subjects. The training proved useful when, in the 1880's and 1890's, the state provision for elementary education for Negroes expanded, out of this expansion there developed a curious educational pattern in which private so-called colleges for Negroes prepared teachers for the public schools which in turn provided a stable income to support families of Negro teachers in sending their children to colleges to become teachers. Thus, as the schools expanded, the colleges expanded and the Negro system, completely self-contained, and closed to outsiders, began to evolve, subsidized by public funds.

Out of this development there came, eventually, a public compromise in which Negro leaders began to emphasize vocational education as the proper Negro aspiration. What this meant of course was permanent acceptance of inferior status; though, at the time, it must have seemed to many Negroes to represent a change to self sufficiency and personal freedom. At any rate, vocationalism became the order of the day for Negro schooling. And, as a consequence, Negro schools developed at the secondary level and some began to offer college work. These college courses were taught by graduates of the three Northern Negro colleges, or of some of the white colleges, particularly Oberlin which had a number of Negro students.

Yet, despite these strictures upon the Negro, his lot did improve in a limited manner. By 1900 it could be said that in return for accommodation to non-citizenship the Negro had achieved the right to schooling so long as it did not interfere with white supremacy. This non-interference extended to the formation of a few Negro professional schools, most importantly, two medical schools and one law school. The political objectives were however, still segregation and dependancy, by force if necessary, and for the mass of Negroes the education was limited to that which we could today consider only for
mentally retarded children. This was to continue until the agricultural south was forced to yield its labour force to the industrial north.

The white system, during this same period — roughly from 1875 to the opening of World War I — was beginning to develop professional schools, and to emphasize cultural growth. Secondary education, at least in the cities, was generally accessible, and growing demand for higher education saw the beginnings of university growth from 1880 on. The parallelism is clear — the mass of Negro education had as its ceiling the possibility of secondary education with vocational emphasis, while the white system reached towards universities and an ultimate professional emphasis.

STAGE III

Beginning with World War I there are signs of a new concern in the country as to the status of the Negro. The labour shortage brought many Negroes out of the South to work in the factories and as common labour. Their lot was hard, but it was better than it had been in the South, and the schools were open to them. Some of the children went to college, but those who did usually went back to the South to one of the Negro colleges. The United States Office of Education began the study of Negro education and published three reports between 1916 and 1942. These reports, taken with the annual reports of the Commissioner of Education, after that office was established in 1871, make fascinating reading for anyone who seeks to learn the historical basis of present problems.

At this time, also, tax supported Negro colleges began to develop in the South for teacher training and the Negro colleges began to seek recognition from the white colleges and universities. Negro rights began to be heard as a phrase and offers were made to reduce the more brutal forms of repression. Negroes served as soldiers in the war. These were all straws — they did not establish dramatic change, but they were perhaps the beginning of change.

And, as the Negro school system developed, it acquired a pattern which characterized it until recently. In this pattern, poorly taught children come from elementary schools to poorly taught high schools. Most of them drop out of high school, but those few who graduate go to Negro colleges to be taught an imitation of the white curriculum, to prepare them to return as poorly trained and half educated teachers to the local schools, where they will have no further personal contact with learning. Once in the local schools the teachers conduct them in an authoritarian manner which they believe to be the manner in which the white schools are conducted. Occasionally a bright student escapes the system — which is schooling for inferiority to go to a white university in the north and prepare for medicine, or law, or scholarship. Sometimes, though rarely in the past, some of these escapees have managed to enter the boundaries of white society, but historically most of them have returned to the Negro community, to live out a career in the Negro upper class, or as Franklin Frazier has termed it, the Black
Bourgeoisie. The description is written in the present tense for in the deep south it is still valid today, but in fact, it is no longer universally valid in other parts of the country.

It is evident that no better formula for permanent separation of the races could have been devised, and yet the tragedy is that the system was built in good faith to be an improvement on the situation that it replaced. It was a system which postulated that the Negro had become in a sense an asset as, potentially, the cheap labour required by industry. Actually, what we were seeing, without recognizing it, was the relocation of the Negro from the rural south to the urban and industrial north, and his institutionalization as a permanent lower class. But, and at the same time, this institutionalization had in it the seeds of its own ultimate failure, for by these actions the Negro came into direct, daily, intimate contact with white society, white culture, and white values — a contact that he had never really enjoyed in the South. His aspirations found these white values as a goal, and model, and there began the formation of a growing Negro middle class based upon government employees, school teachers, and a few doctors, lawyers and undertakers (the latter historically important in all Negro communities), all, except for the undertakers, products of the Negro colleges.

But here again comes the parallelism, for in this same time the values of white society had also changed. Universal secondary education came in the 1930's and the rise of the universities in the 1950's. Living patterns changed from savings and economy to consumption and expansion and the gulf between the values of the two races remained as wide as ever.

**STAGE IV**

The final stage in the development of these two systems came with the Supreme Court decision of 1954 which declared school segregation to be unconstitutional and called for its end with "all deliberate speed". This decision was not a surprise. Court decisions for some years had pushed the obligations for Negro education all the way to the concept of guaranteed legal equality, and it was reasonable to expect that the colour line would itself be legally erased some day. I cannot honestly say how white Americans viewed this eventuality. Probably the majority of whites, North and South, believed that Negroes wanted control of their own education. How many of this majority were engaged in rationalizations, no man today can tell. Probably the majority of Negroes saw access to the white schools as their only way out of poverty. Beyond these viewpoints there were various groupings of belief including a substantial number with faith in integration.

But this is digression. The point to be made here is that the 1954 decision ended the discussion as to the law of the land. Segregation was legally outlawed. Futile rear guard actions continued for 10 years, but they have largely ceased. Integration, inch by inch, is in progress and is no longer a debatable issue, although it is still a matter of cocktail party rhetoric.
But while ending the discussion of segregation as acceptable law, it also
stripped away the protective curtains which had hidden the realities of the
Negro and the White systems from each other and from the land.

The White system is a system oriented to the middle class. It is organized
to assure college entrance to anyone who seeks it and to assure admission to
graduate or professional school, with financial assistance if needed, to anyone
who has performed satisfactorily in college. It is a system that has been
radically expanded by government support. It is, in its upper reaches which
comprise the great public and private universities and the fine private colleges
which send them their graduates, an elite system in the classic sense of the
word. It is, in its lower reaches made up of junior colleges, and small colleges,
and some large, loosely organized urban colleges, essentially an opportunity
system, allowing any student who wishes to invest his time, and a little money,
the chance to earn a degree, and possibly to go on to graduate study or a
professional school in the elite sector. But this movement between sectors is
becoming difficult, as one system, once completely open, becomes increasingly
stratified as increasingly conservative governments put financial limits on
its expansion.

The Negro system has been oriented to the lower class although some of
its graduates enter this white middle class. Its students at all levels come
from the lower class, its teachers are students from the lower class who were
educated in Negro colleges to prepare them to return to the lower class as
teachers. Generally speaking and with perhaps the exception of six colleges,
the Negro colleges are unable to prepare effectively for the elite sector of
American education. As a result of this, the number of Negro lawyers, doctors,
scientists, and scholars, is small. Most Negro college graduates become school
teachers in elementary and secondary schools. If a Negro teacher chooses to
enter graduate school to advance his education, he must often wait until
middle age before he can save enough money to achieve it. There is no full
fledged Negro university. Virtually no Negro college has received research
support from the government for the evident reason that none is in a position
to offer the guarantees as to effective use that the government requires.
Negro college alumni, mostly school teachers, have little money to support
their colleges.

The Negro school system, from elementary school through its 123 colleges,
is, like its students, a product of poverty. As was said at the outset of this
paper, it is, in almost every particular a mirror image of the White system.
It has copied its institutions, its formalities, its customs, and its style. Yet
there has been no communication between the systems. Negro colleges have
developed for fifty years with standards and programs that have served the
Negro schools, but have no relationship, except in nomenclature, to white
standards and schools.

It is this complete separateness which is producing one of our most difficult
problems today, which is the problem of mass insistence by Negroes in
making demands for entry to the elite sector of American education. It is important to note that thus far there have been no demands for entry to the open opportunity sector such as the junior colleges, although these are in fact open. The problem is that the Negro has learned from experience that it is only through the elite sector that he can enter professional life and the white middle class — that the open sector, or for that matter the Negro system, will get him nowhere. Hence his demands, which include the conviction that only violence will achieve the goals which have been denied to him.

We come, at the end, to the clear finding that Negro education has been segregated and separated for a hundred years by political decision until separation has become a way of life so powerful that not even the close structural parallels between the two systems can suffice to close the gap. Now that the political decision has finally been reversed, the way of life remains, and, paradoxically, erupts into violence and bitterness at the very time when efforts are finally being made to close the gap.

In closing, there are, I think several generalizations that we as educators, may ponder.

Any educational system exists for the implementation of political decisions. It follows that any national system is a grouping of institutions for solving the problems as they are defined by the nation’s ruling group whoever, and whatever they may be.

The system may — or may not — solve the problems it was intended to solve. We have instances of both results. But in solving these problems it may create others. It may become so firmly fixed that it cannot change a situation we have all seen in some part of our own system. It may, solving immediate problems, create others for the future. And it may, in appearing to solve problems, actually fail to do so and open a vast gulf between problem and solution, inviting and indeed demanding new political decision to begin a new cycle of educational development. When such demands do come, their scope, and indeed, violence, constitute an excellent measure of the political failure that underlies the educational failure.

The situation I have just recounted was, seen in hindsight, doomed from the outset, for it undertook to use the same system and the same institutions, to produce two totally different sets of products. It succeeded in the attempt but the success has been tragic in the quite unexpected by-products of alienation and separation. These stand as a warning to those in any country who would subvert the honesty of the educational system.
OBJECTIFS POLITIQUES ET CONSEQUENCES EN MATIERE D'EDUCATION

par FRANK BOWLES, (Los Angeles, Californie)

Une des causes du malaise actuel de l'éducation américaine se trouve, dans une certaine mesure, dans les efforts tendant à faire disparaître les effets de la séparation qui existe entre les systèmes d'éducation des Blancs et ceux des Noirs. Bien que ces systèmes aient des institutions, réglements et administrations financières similaires, ils ont été en fait complètement séparés.

Au moment de la Guerre Civile, quelques-uns des 100,000 Noirs libres dans les États du Nord avaient accès aux différents niveaux des écoles. Cependant l'éducation donnée était limitée, visant à un enseignement de base : lire et écrire et à inculquer un sentiment patriotique. Dans les États du Sud il était contesté d'instruire les trois millions et demi d'esclaves nègres dans la lutte de maintenir la suprématie blanche et la dépendance nègre.

A la fin de la Guerre Civile, des écoles furent organisées avec des moyens de fortune par l'armée et des missionnaires dans le Sud et, à mesure que de nouveaux gouvernements étaient établis, des systèmes d'écoles publiques ouvertes aux Noirs furent mises en place dans tous les États du Sud. Ces développements ouvrirent à la jeunesse noire un but nouveau : la possibilité d'enseigner. Simultanément, cependant, le système Blanc commença à changer ses buts pour répondre à un nouvel industrialisme. Les écoles publiques s'agrandirent, de nouveaux collèges d'agriculture et de mécanique furent mis en place et les écoles normales furent développées.

Avec la fin de l'occupation militaire dans le Sud, un nouveau changement a eu lieu. Des gouvernements suprématistes blancs arrivèrent au pouvoir et obligèrent les Noirs à aller dans des écoles de bas niveaux qui leur étaient réservées et qui étaient dirigées en grande partie par des missionnaires. Ces écoles formaient des enseignants noirs et offraient une vague éducation professionnelle, créant ainsi un système noir entièrement autonome.

En 1900, les Noirs avaient conquis le droit de recevoir une éducation à condition que cela ne mette pas en danger la suprématie des Blancs. Quelques écoles professionnelles noires comprenaient deux écoles de médecine et une de droit avaient été établies. En même temps les Blancs commençaient à souhaiter le développement de l'enseignement supérieur et une connaissance culturelle plus approfondie.


Ce système existe toujours dans les parties les plus reculées du Sud mais n'est plus en vigueur dans les autres parties du pays. L'institutionnalisation des Noirs comme classe à jamais inférieure les a amenés en contact direct avec la société blanche et ses valeurs, et a ainsi causé son propre échec. Dans l'intervalle, les valeurs de la société blanche ont changé également visant vers les années 1930 à un enseignement secondaire pour tous et à une expansion de l'université dans les années 1950.

Le stade final du développement des deux systèmes vint avec la décision de la Cour Suprême en 1954, déclarant inconstitutionnelle la ségrégation en matière d'éducation. En conséquence l'intégration est maintenant en cours, mettant plus clairement en valeur les deux systèmes: le système blanc pour la classe moyenne et assurant l'admission de tous les étudiants qui en sont capables dans des écoles supérieures préparant à des professions libérales; le système noir, orienté vers la classe inférieure et, à quelques exceptions prises, incapable de préparer convenablement ses étudiants à faire partie de l'élite de l'enseignement américain. Le nombre d'avocats, de scientifiques, et de savants noirs est limité, la plupart des licenciés noirs devenant enseignants.
Il n'y a pas d'université noire reconnue et le système scolaire noir est un produit de pauvreté, copiant le système blanc mais complètement séparé de ce dernier et sans commune mesure avec lui. Ainsi un des problèmes actuels les plus difficiles de l'éducation américaine est le désir des Noirs d'entrer dans les meilleures institutions américaines, la seule solution qui donne accès à une profession libérale et à une vie bourgeoise.

Les conclusions qui peuvent être tirées de cette situation concernent l'importance de la définition des problèmes adoptée par les groupes dirigeants, le danger de créer des problèmes indirects, quelquefois plus grands en appliquant certaines pratiques spécifiques en matière d'éducation et les dangers que l'on en court en utilisant des institutions similaires avec des objectifs différents.