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ABSTRACT

Prejudicial attitudes are commonplace in our society, and they adversely affect all of our children. Children of a minority or poor group are directly affected because they are likely to suffer hunger, poor health and housing, and inadequate schools. White, middle class children are affected in ways which are less obvious, but just as damaging. In trying to resolve the conflict between what institutions preach about the brotherhood of man, and what these same institutions teach by example through violating concepts of love and justice, these children may develop unhealthy and undesirable attitudes and behavior patterns. Minority races and poor people are not the only targets of prejudice. The physically and mentally handicapped, members of minority religions, females, and the aged suffer as well. Forum 18 views these prejudicial attitudes as a serious threat to our society, whose strength depends upon full opportunity for all. The Forum makes several specific recommendations for governmental change, spearheaded by the President of the United States, in the areas of education, housing, health, and civil rights. (NH)

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CHILDREN WITHOUT PREJUDICE

Report of Forum 18

1970 White House Conference on Children

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Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,
And I so smiled, but he poked out
His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December;
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember.

Countee Cullen

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CURRENT STATUS

To rear a generation of children without prejudice, we must necessarily understand the meaning and origins of discriminatory attitudes. Many words have been written and spoken about prejudicial attitudes and their adverse effects upon children, particularly children of minority groups. Why, if we are really concerned about our children, haven't we taken steps to eradicate the disease of prejudice? We hear that steps have been and are being taken, that "it takes time," or that the problem is non-existent. Many Americans feel the problem is of no concern to their community or to themselves. Yet evidence is conclusive that prejudicial attitudes, which are, unfortunately, commonplace in our society, adversely affect all our children--children of white America as well as children of the various minority groups.

Prejudice has been defined as an "injury due to some judgment or action of another, as in regard to a person's right."* As Allport has written in The Nature of Prejudice, "Perhaps the briefest definition is thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant." But, as he points out, this definition is not comprehensive; there is no reference to positive or favorable attitudes which may be prejudicial.

Prejudice is not an inborn trait and usually does not appear in children before the age of two or three years. It

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

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is often a product of conflict and fear and has its real roots in an anti-human attitude--the urge to destroy the humanness of another individual.

In a period of chaotic social change, prejudice is likely to proliferate. The advance of technology, the alienation of man from the satisfaction of work, the altered role of parent and child, as well as the altered role of religion in the community make the task of establishing one's identity extremely difficult. An individual may use prejudice as one means of restoring his damaged sense of self, inflating his ego, or staving off his own breakdown or failure.

Personal and family prejudices can, and often do, spill over into the community at large. Such private prejudice provides the emotional energy, the driving force for the acceptance of common prejudices against minority groups by the wider community.

Although we usually think of racist attitudes being directed toward those whose skin color differs from that of white America, such discrimination is by no means limited to non-whites. Phrases denouncing the poor as immoral, lazy, and shiftless, and as biologically inferior, defy all color bounds. The aged, members of minority religions, female children, the retarded, and the physically handicapped suffer as well. Prejudicial attitudes toward children per se are widespread. Children are the last to be waited on in stores

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and restaurants. Schools, courts, and other institutions too often act as if guided by the old saying, "Children should be seen and not heard." All too often people who design programs for children are administrators who lack knowledge of child development. As a result, child care programs and institutions reflect inadequate thought, knowledge, and concern.

In this paper, however, we have focused upon the most crippling area--ethnic and racial prejudice. In analyzing where American society stands now in relation to prejudice, one fact is clear--as a nation we are becoming more polarized. Some evidence is encouraging; some attitudes of the "youth generation" suggest we are on the verge of a major breakthrough in demonstrating the vitality of America's racial and cultural diversity and in achieving integration and preserving pluralism. Other evidence (for example, in politics, economics, education and housing) supports the claim that racism is our most hazardous health problem.

Several national figures have reflected a tone of resignation and despair. Dr. Theodore Hesburgh, Chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, has stated that "this nation is not really serious about providing equal opportunity for all our citizens. The local, state, and federal governments and the citizens are not committed to equal opportunity for all. This nation has been told time and time again what must be done.

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We lack the will to do it." In 1969, Oklahoma's Senator Harris, a member of the National Commission on Civil Disorders, wrote (in assessing what had transpired since the Commission's report had been issued), "the response, to date, by the main-stream culture has not been amelioration of grievances but punitive action. This indifference has robbed all Americans of the psychic energy so necessary for healthy functioning."

Racism poses its most serious threat to children of minority groups who are targets of prejudicial attitudes. The child of a minority or poor group soon learns that his relationship to social institutions differs from that of other children. He learns he is likely to live in the least desirable section of town, the inner city, the ghetto, the barrio, the reservation, or the rural depressed areas. He discovers, early in life, that hunger, poor health, and demoralizing housing are the lot of those who live in his neighborhood. Poor transportation and inadequate recreational facilities restrict him to finding what entertainment he can in his home environment or in the streets.

"The conflict and confusion, stemming from the child's need for a sense of personal dignity and his inability to find his own dignity in the larger society, leads to self-hatred and rejection of his own group."¹ Children may react with anti-social, delinquent, withdrawal, or submissive behavior. Or they may rigidly conform to the prevailing middle-class standards and aggressively determine to succeed

PS 004231

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in spite of the handicaps of their minority status.

Deutsch² has written that "the school does little to mitigate the negative self-images that many disadvantaged children have developed before they enter school." The classrooms are overcrowded and teachers treat the children in accordance with stereotyped attitudes and notions of their backgrounds. Textbooks, as well as television and movies, suggest to the children that the good life is mostly white, and middle or upper class.

Many teachers, supported by culturally-based psychometric tests, respond to children, particularly of minority groups, "by establishing low expectations, anticipating failure, and true to the Mertonian self-fulfilling prophecy, find an increasing rate of failure."

In 1965 Clark³ described the situation: "It is now clear that American public education is organized and functions along social and economic class lines. A bi-racial public school system wherein approximately 90 percent of American children attend segregated schools, is one of the clearest manifestations of this fact. . . . The class and social organization of American public schools consistently makes for a lower quality of education in the less privileged schools attended by Negro and poor children and have less adequate educational facilities than those attended by more privileged children. Teachers tend to resist assignment in Negro and other underprivileged schools, and generally function less adequately in these schools; they

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are less adequately supervised, and they tend to see their students as less capable of learning. The parents of the children in these schools are usually unable to bring about any positive changes in the conditions of the schools."

In addition to educational disadvantages, minority group children are often exposed to physical health hazards; they receive limited health care and have a shorter life expectancy. Because of poor maternal health, inadequate prenatal care, and devastating housing conditions, infant mortality is almost twice as high as among the white population. Among the Indian population, the figure is even higher; one-third of Indian infants die in their first year of life--largely from preventable diseases.

A high percentage of emotionally disturbed Negro children are members of lower socio-economic, one-parent families. They are identified as untreatable in many clinics that operate on the premise that psychotherapy is effective only for the highly motivated, upper and middle class, and intact families. Until very recently, few residential treatment facilities existed that did not exclude Black children. Several that have revised their admission policy still reject the greater percentage of Negro children referred. The usual explanation is that the prejudicial attitudes of the community (in which the facility is located) would be injurious to the child.

Frequently, one hears that the ills of the poor and minority groups are of their own making. It is said that these people have no desire to be clean or simply don't care.

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But, how often is it that the services (such as garbage collection and police protection) provided for the more affluent communities stop at the edge of the ghetto or barrio or whatever the least desirable section of the city is called. In recounting some of his childhood experiences, the dark-skinned, American born, Puerto Rican writer and artist, Piri Thomas wrote: "Tell me, olders, did you ever fill your dreams with magic at what you wanted to be and cursed the bitching mornings for dragging you back on the scene? Did you ever worry about anything at all, like a feeling of not belonging? Did you ever stand on a street corner and look the other way at the world of muchos ricos (many rich) and think I ain't got a dime? Did you ever count the garbage that flowed down dirty streets, or dug backyards which in their glory were a garbage dump's dream? Did you ever stand with outstretched hands and cop a plea from life and watch your mom's pride on bended knees ask a welfare investigator for the needed welfare check, while you stood there getting from nothing and resenting it just the same? Did you ever feel the thunder of being thrown out for lack of money to pay the rent, or walk in scared darkness--the light bill still unpaid--or cook on can heat for a bunch of hungry kids?"

The effects of racial discrimination upon children of the majority group are usually less obvious. Dr. Kenneth Clark has written "the same institutions that teach children

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the democratic and religious doctrines of the brotherhood of man and the equality of all human beings also teach them to violate these concepts through racial prejudice and undemocratic behavior toward others." To resolve this conflict, the white child develops specific behavior patterns, which Clark describes as: (1) rigid repression or a refusal to recognize the contradiction of the democratic creed inherent in racial prejudice; (2) partial or temporary repression of one or more of the contradictory ideas; (3) acceptance of rationalizations offered by parents or other adults; (4) uncritical acceptance of the "superiority" and the related assumption of "inferiority" of the rejected groups; (5) development of intense guilt feelings; (6) development of hostility and greater rigidity of stereotyped ideas about the minority group; and (7) development of moral cynicism and a disrespect for authority.

However difficult it may be to measure the effects of racial discrimination upon children of the majority group, it seems certain that such psychological patterns breed the alienation and hostility of our youth. The disparity between the lofty ideals we preach and the sorry reality of practice can only continue to undermine our institutions and our society.

Racial policies and attitudes pose a serious threat to our society whose viability depends on everyone's achieving a full measure of growth and development. Discrimination perpetuates poverty, crime, semi-literacy, poor education, and poor physical and mental health. While financial costs

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of eradicating racism will obviously be immense, millions who would have been wasted human beings will become contributing members of society. They will become new consumers for all national products, commercial relationships with other nations will be improved, and welfare spending will be cut. The investment appears to be unusually sound.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing the authority and power of the office of the President of the United States, we strongly urge the President to issue a statement on the effect of prejudice on children and to support the implementation of the following recommendations:

We recommend that the chief school officers of each state and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs:

1. Preserve the cultural characteristics of ethnic groups as a healthy aspect of American life.

- In accordance with the May 25, 1970 Memorandum of the Director of the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, we recommend that where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes minority group children from effectively participating in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take steps to rectify the

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language deficiency. The forum, moreover, believes this Memorandum should be expanded to require that wherever 10 percent of the children of a given school are fluent in a language other than English, as in certain Spanish-speaking communities, the school curriculum in all grades should be offered in the minority language as well as English. The minority language should also be designated an official language in such communities.

- In accordance with the President's message of July 8, 1970, we recommend that Indian tribes be given control of government-operated schools on reservations, or control the allocation of Johnson-O'Malley Funds to non-reservation schools.

2. Require that training programs for teachers and school administrators include the study of cultures of American minority groups, and that the foregoing proposal be brought to the attention of directors of college and university schools of education.

3. Require that American history curricula at all grade levels include the heritage and contributions of all ethnic groups in America.

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4. Ensure that textbooks perpetuating ethnic myths and stereotypes be eliminated from public school curricula.
5. Abolish psychometric testing in elementary education.
6. Ensure the increased availability of compensatory education and scholarship funds so any handicapped, economically or socially disadvantaged child may receive higher education.

We recommend that the governors, mayors, and county commissioners remove all local constitutional or statutory barriers to the election (rather than appointment) of local school boards to ensure community representation.

We recommend that the President and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget take special measures to evaluate and implement the recommendations of the U. S. Civil Rights Commission in its recent report on Federal Civil Rights Enforcement.

We recommend that the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development be instructed to use the legal powers at his command and move ahead with his "Open Communities" program in urban and suburban areas.

We recommend that the Congress amend the Federal Communications Act to provide that program content embodying discrimination based on race, color or creed be grounds for the Commission's

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revocation of a broadcasting license.

We recommend that the President instruct the Executive Secretary of the Domestic Council to review the recommendations of the Committee on Minority Group Children of the Joint Commission on the Mental Health of Children and of the Commission on Civil Disorders and report to the President the extent to which the recommendations have been implemented.

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1. Kenneth B. Clark, Prejudice and Your Child (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).
2. Martin Deutsch, "Some Psychological Aspects of Learning in the Disadvantaged," Integrated Education 3, No. 3 (June-July 1965).
3. Kenneth B. Clark, "American Education Today," Integrated Education 3, No. 6 (December 1965-January 1966).