

One of the more significant accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and members of SNCC, was the Voting Rights Act of 1964. Few people today will recall the public beatings and other forms of humiliation suffered by blacks who merely wanted to exercise their constitutional right to vote in some parts of the South.

It is no surprise, therefore, that prior to 1965, only 6.7% of 22,000 blacks in the state of Mississippi were registered to vote prior to 1965.

The historic Voting rights Act is due to expire next year and Senator Strom Thurmond has served notice of his intent to destroy or seriously dilute the Voting Rights Act. Because of the Republican majority in the Senate, Senator Thurmond is now the chairman of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee. Although Senator Thurmond, in a recent television appearance, sought to assure all the "colored folks" that he seeks to do them no harm, it behooves all of us, black and white, to maintain our vigilance to make certain that the most basic and essential democratic right of all — the right to vote — remains a right for all.

According to Stephen Chapman, in a recent article in the *New Republic*, the Voting Rights Act was a drastic remedy to a disgraceful and intractable problem. Disgraceful because the voter registration machinery was being widely used in much of the South to defraud blacks of access to the ballot; intractable, because ordinary litigation, however zealous, could not keep up with the devices, legal and illegal and, oftentimes, even violent, with which lily-white voter lists were being

Getting Smart

The Right To Vote In Our Democracy

By Walter Smart

What was finally required, in fact, was a virtual seizure of the registration machinery in much of the Congress provided in the act an automatic trigger that brought it into force whenever fewer than half of the eligible voters had voted in the 1964 presidential election. The Act not only provided for federally-supervised registration; it automatically suspended literacy tests — in some places a favorite device for fraud and denial of registration.

In some Southern states, the results were immediate and dramatic. In South Carolina, black registration rose from 38.7% to 57.3% over a five year period. In Alabama (my home state), black registration rose from 23 per cent in 1964 to 64 per cent in 1970. The greatest gain was in Mississippi, where the figures were 6.7% to 67.5% during the same period.

In most Southern states, under the act, the figures for black registration and voting have continued to rise, bringing a growing normalization of elective politics and a

great increase in the number of elected officeholders. The 1965 Act did more for democracy in Southern politics than all the other civil rights measures combined.

A new conservative mood has taken the country by storm. There will be many spokesmen and women of this new mood who may be honorable and fairminded, but lacking in knowledge of all the facts. These new voices may well say, "get the federal government out of the states' election machinery." Let us remember that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. We, you and I, must do all in our power to assure that the Voting rights Act is not dismantled. Letters to your congressmen, senators, and to President Reagan will be necessary.

LET US TAKE ACTION FOR THE SAKE OF DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA AND IN THE MEMORY OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

CLOTHES HIS/HERS, YVES ST. TROPEZ, BEVERLY HILLS

Educational Testing

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their children out of public schools and into exclusive private schools.

Almost as if these efforts were not enough, an even more controversial proposal, competency based testing, is now being proclaimed as an answer to America's educational problems.

In a decade of declining test scores and "functional illiterates", competency based testing is promoted by its proponents as their way of reinforcing the teaching of basics in reading and mathematics.

Currently operating in some 35-40 state public education systems, it works in one of two ways: either as a requirement that each student at certain selected grade levels pass state tests in reading and mathematics in order to be promoted to the next higher grade or as in most systems that have adopted the competency based testing program, it requires a student to pass standardized tests in reading and mathematics before he or she can receive a high school diploma.

To put it mildly, the competency based testing concept has created a furor in the education community — where pro and con forces have battled over the equity of the concept.

Also, it has received a less than enthusiastic reception in the black community. Blacks have traditionally argued for strong basic skills programs and are therefore not opposed to academic competence. What they are questioning is whether a competency test can properly measure a student's fitness to graduate. There is also the question about the setting of arbitrary standards for passing the test which might be unfair to black students.

Perhaps an even more crucial factor in competency based testing, is the necessity for remedial programs. Without a guarantee of appropriate and adequate remediation services for students, competency testing would obviously fail in its supposed objective of identifying academic problems for treatment purposes.

Because of the credibility gap, competency testing has caused many states to now take a second look at their state requirements on this matter.

New York State has revised its test after the state legislature determined that it was inappropriate to use as a criteria for graduation.

A Florida federal court decided to postpone using the test for four years as a requirement for graduation.

The judge in that case felt that the "taint of segregation" in Florida schools must be removed before the test could be utilized.

Properly used a competency based test program can be a valuable, diagnostic tool to measure a student's subject matter capability and academic capability.

It should not be a certifying instrument to determine high school graduation, or should it be used as the sole determinant of academic promotion.

Its most important task should be to help schools identify student weaknesses and to then build programs to rectify those weaknesses.

Letter to the Editor

The article, "Black Colleges-Another Look" by Dr. Ada M. Fisher, *The Carolina Times*, January 17, 1981, was less than poignant; it lacked perception. However, I wish to thank her for having the fortitude to broach some issues that needed to have been discussed long ago.

The thesis statement of the article indicates that the writer believes that the financial difficulties of the predominant Black institutions stem mostly from the passive, disinterested attitude of most of the graduates. Here, I offer no explanation for this attitude in the past; however, I can suggest some explanation for this attitude today.

Initially, one must view with scrutiny, the situation of the Black students in many of these schools. It is necessary that this assessment is made before the students graduate. Black students have to endure many humiliating experiences. Many of these experiences evolve from the fact that some of these schools are no longer predominantly Black. These schools have undergone a radical change, all to the detriment of the Black student. The composition of the faculty and student body has become too white. These schools are no longer structured and cultured to meet the needs of the Black students. The mission of these Black institutions has been aborted, corroded and corrupted.

Most critical, many of the white faculty members lack the needed sensitivities to teach students with particular kinds of needs. As a matter of fact, some of them would be "hard-pressed" if they were required to teach a dog to bite. I am persuaded that some do not care if the Black students do not succeed.

Many of these white instructors arrive on the Black campuses with the fallacious, pre-conceived notion that Blacks are inferior, unqualifiable, and unworthy. When these faculty members come to the Black schools, they are given unparalleled academic freedom which they often abuse. Some of the attitudes they display would not be tolerated at white schools. The evidence of these attitudes surfaces in many overt and subtle ways. The unwary may not be aware of it, but these attitudes are indeed real.

Instead of concentrating on the curriculum, many students are forced to expend wasted energy trying to dispel these notions. This should not happen. But it is a part of the overall scheme of things, the checks and balance game, designed to rid the Black students' minds of visions of success. If these students attempt to address issues emanating from the irrational attitudes and actions of these white faculty members, the students are labeled radicals or rebels. These students may be harassed and humiliated to the point of exhaustion. Some are even forced into submission or resignation. The aim is to graduate apathetic, "assembly-line oroes."

Some of these white instructors, as incredible as this may sound, are placed in these Black Colleges to impose upon the students that malignant doctrine of Negativism. Simply stated, they are there to denigrate the status of Black people. One of my instructors was known to preface her class period remarks each week by telling the class that some of us can not be successful. She seemed duty-bound and determined to convince us that we need to seek other means of education and let some deserving person have our seats. I believe this is one of the reasons that a nationwide correlation exists between the increase in the number of white faculty members at Black institutions and the decrease in the number of Black graduates of these schools who successfully take the state board and bar examinations.

I state with affirmation that many of the experiences of the Black students at these once-Black Colleges are far from being enjoyable. Therefore, when they do graduate, they have minimal fond recollections of people who have treated them with respect, concern and kindness. This may be the reason that Black graduates do not exemplify the allegiance to their school's Alumni Association. They do not contribute to the Alumni Association because they feel estranged from the schools.

Dr. Fisher was correct in her assertion, in the article, that Black graduates should show more concern for their schools. They can not be re-iterated enough. But a portion of that article could have addressed the reasons for the lack of concern, commonly known as the disease of apathy. Her insight should have guided her more to the disease, instead of its symptoms. The cure for this disease is elementary.

The Alumni Association must ban together to address the problems that create apathy for the students.

I voice concern for the many Black graduates who have had to endure these traumatic experiences while they were students. I am yet disturbed with them because they have allowed these conditions to prevail. Their cognizance of the conditions that existed when they were students should make them more determined to lend assistance to their brothers and sisters who are left to endure the same.

It is interesting to know that it is within the power of the graduates, as the article stated, to effect admissions, and to implement sound academic policies and programs. How many of the Black graduates are aware that they have the right and capacity to effectuate such changes?

Let us hope that the articles inspires all alumni to get in touch with their respective Alumni Associations.

—A. Hamilton Daye



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