

Editorials & Comments

Competency Tests - A Poor Measure?

Recently three black Charlotte-Mecklenburg school seniors who had failed the state competency tests filed a suit to prohibit the use of such tests as a criteria for blacks to graduate from high school. Furthermore, the suit was filed as a class action on behalf of the alleged 3,000 plus black 12th grade public school students across the state who have failed the competency test.

Authorized by the state legislature in 1977, and first administered in the public schools in 1978, competency tests were and are intended as a tool to determine whether students due to receive diplomas had mastered certain basic skills as determined by the legislature bill.

The suit argues that the long history of segregated schools, the alleged difference in the quality of education blacks have received since so-called desegregated education began; the higher rate of black student suspensions and expulsions; the termination of black administrators and the schools' inability to compensate for language and cultural difference of black children.

In an apparent attempt to dismiss these points as valid arguments against the credibility of competency tests, a UNC-Charlotte research report released shortly after the suit was filed contends that the mathematics portion of the state competency test is not racially biased.

What apparently has been totally overlooked in much of the discussion with regard to black skills on competency tests is in the psycho-economic dimensions of mind-set of black students; and the failure of educational administrators and test planners to understand such dimensions. For example, the decline in the percentage of black teachers and the demotion of many administrators - created as a part of the new racism following desegregation - has had a lingering affect on black youth about the value of education and the related reward system.

Motivational Needs

Furthermore, many white teachers, were, and are simply, insensitive to the cultural and motivational needs of black youth. The motivational needs are magnified by the fact that the unemployment rate for them

- black youth in the labor market - has exceeded 40 percent for over three years and that black males (including their fathers) earn only about 57 percent of what white males earn.

The motivational problem is double-barrelled by the fact that these economic factors deny many black youth the opportunity to read newspapers, ma-

gazines, books and related materials in the home; nor can they attend cultural events that many white youth take for granted as a normal part of life. These readings are cultural activities discussed with parents and other adults in the home contribute much toward the skills youth need when taking competency tests. Schools apparently have no way of properly judging what black youth are lacking in this vital area of development. The

result is lower competency test scores for many youth. Until we learn to measure the impact of these variables competency tests will simply not be competent measures of black youth's educational achievement skills.

Also, two years ago an 18-year-old white youth from a middle class family was rejected for military service because he was tested and found to be functionally illiterate. The youth, who graduated from one of the best high schools in his state, had been denied an occupational opportunity because of a questionable matter on the testing program. In another situation, a high school graduate from a school of high quality where he had earned good grades was denied admission to the college

of his choice because of low scores on a college admissions test. How did such things happen? Does it mean that some variables are too often missing with regard to who may or may not score well on a particular test at a particular time?

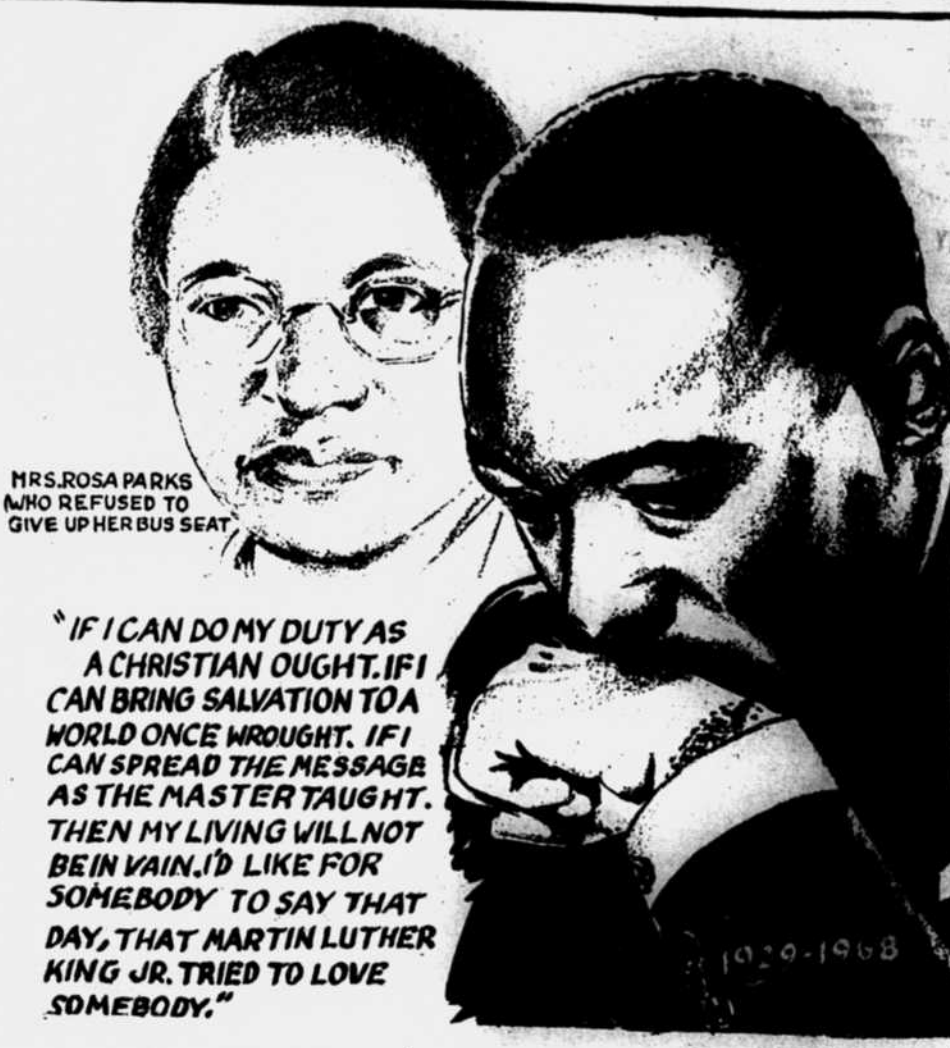
Thus, until educators can find ways to measure the unseen variables and motivational factors in individual youth, competency tests will be controversial and unfair because of the unknown waters in which they tread. Until such adjustments are clarified, competency tests should be discontinued.

Human Mission

Dr. Benjamin Mays, educator, scholar, writer and past president of Atlanta's Morehouse College was given an award recently for service to mankind. In remarks just prior to accepting the award Dr. Mays made a simply statement that has profound significance for understanding the mission of human existence.

Dr. Mays said, "I've never done anything to be deserving of an award. God put me on this earth to do two things. First, to serve my God and secondly, to serve my fellow man. This is all I've ever done or tried to do."

These words reflect a philosophy of life - if all men and all nations would adopt - there would be no need for war and rumors of war. We need not say more.



MRS. ROSA PARKS WHO REFUSED TO GIVE UP HER BUS SEAT

"IF I CAN DO MY DUTY AS A CHRISTIAN OUGHT, IF I CAN BRING SALVATION TO A WORLD ONCE WROUGHT, IF I CAN SPREAD THE MESSAGE AS THE MASTER TAUGHT, THEN MY LIVING WILL NOT BE IN VAIN, I'D LIKE FOR SOMEBODY TO SAY THAT DAY, THAT MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. TRIED TO LOVE SOMEBODY."

Less We Forget

As I See It

Competency Test Attacked Again?

By Gerald O. Johnson
Post Columnist

Three high school seniors are suing the state of North Carolina's School Board for using the high school competency test as a criterion for graduation.

The suit cites discrimination and past segregation practices as major reasons for the unfairness of the test. The three students are asking to be given their diplomas despite having failed the test.

Perhaps, if we looked closer at the situation, we could say they would like to receive their diplomas despite having failed to earnestly attempt to pass the test. They are asking for their diplomas despite having failed to attend tutorial sessions that the School Board provided.

Whatever the reason, the whole thing is a lot of bull feces. You see, three students incapable of passing a competency test should not be capable of thinking of filing a class action suit without some prodding. So, once again we the Black folk of this community will be saved by those civil rights fighters who seek out hidden injustices regardless of what it costs.

Well, this injustice could cost a plenty. If this case gets off the ground - I don't think it will - then the taxpayers (you and I) will foot the bill. You see, we pay for the School Board's expenses in law suits. Depending on the income bracket of the student's family, we may have squeezed our pockets to pay for that, too!

Now, let's assume the case goes to court and the students win. Even if they



Gerald O. Johnson

win the case they will still lose. Receiving a diploma without an education is useless. The diploma is to document the fact that you have learned basic skills. If you haven't learned those skills, but you have a diploma, means absolutely nothing.

You have postponed the stigma of being a failure, until such time when it will really hurt.

Why then is the case being brought up? Money. Lawyers will make a fortune out of this case. We, the taxpayers, lose; the three students lose; but justice must be stomped out at any cost.

The competency test is a vital part to the assurance of equal education to black children.

The transitional period of integration found black children being passed through the school system like beer passes through the kidneys. The kidneys don't have to change the beer's color so, beer passes on through. This "social promotion" has produced kids unprepared to face the new challenges that are coming. Consequently, we, the taxpayers, have to tote

the note through welfare or some other government program.

The competency is the first step in trying to correct this injustice. The test has some short term inequities, but over the long run it could prove to be a blessing in disguise to many black children who think education is a joke.

The price you pay for failing the competency test is short lived, but the price for ignorance is a lifetime of indebtedness.

I am disappointed that any black lawyer would help to perpetuate ignorance for a price. Many men and women, both black and white, have given their lives to erase the injustices of a segregated and racist society. As the curtains of injustice continue to be pulled open, they are unveiling black preying on blacks. I find it both disgusting and disheartening to witness.

I find that many have died to give us the opportunities that exist today, yet the mass of black people are not in a position to capitalize on it. The attack on the competency test is an indication that a lot of us would like to see the trend continued.

Inflation

And Energy

Inflation and energy costs are having a big influence on home furnishings in the 1980's.

Both are reducing the size of home a family can afford to buy, according to Wilma Hammett, interior design specialist with the North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service.

By Vernon E. Jordan, Jr.

TO BE EQUAL



Balanced Budget Has High Cost

The corridors of the Capitol are running with the blood of programs viciously slashed in the name of balancing the budget. But this symbolic exercise of bringing federal revenues and expenses into balance bears a tremendous cost for America's poor people.

That cost is made even more unbearable by the knowledge that a balanced budget will not do what its supporters claim - slow the inflation rate.

Even President Carter, who submitted a revised budget, admitted at a news conference:

"It is true that by itself, in direct effect, a \$15 billion reduction in federal expenditures, compared to a more than \$2 trillion economy, would involve less than a half of one percent (cut in the inflation rate)."

The cuts are justified by the supposed "confidence" they would instill in people that the government is serious about controlling inflation. But no one suggests the obvious - that "confidence" can be achieved through means other than brutalizing the poor, and that substance, not symbolism, is the way to deal with inflation.

Even if a balanced budget is necessary - and there are no convincing arguments that it is - there are other ways to go about it. Taxes could be increased to balance expenditures. Federal spending could be slashed in areas that don't hurt the poor. New military initiatives such as the costly MX missile system could be scrapped or delayed.

Instead, the cuts fall heaviest on those too poor and powerless to prevent them. The Administration's proposed budget cuts are unfortunate, but even worse is Congress' hit list.

Food stamps have become a prime target. The Senate Budget Committee proposed chopping \$1.4 billion out of the food stamp program, a move that would push many to the brink of hunger.

Food stamps are under attack because the cost of the program has risen sharply. But why blame the poor who depend on food stamps? The rise in food prices is responsible for the program's higher costs. And that rise makes the program even more crucial to America's poor.

Current benefits are based on a low-diet plan that provides the bare minimum of nutritional adequacy. Cutting benefits or excluding some who are now eligible won't balance the budget or cut inflation, but it would increase the numbers of America's hungry.

Public service jobs are another target of the budget cutters. The Administration, which has done so much to make public service jobs available to more of the jobless, proposed cutting CETA job slots. But the Senate Budget Committee wants to end the anti-recession jobs program entirely.

Just as the nation enters what many economists believe will be a severe recession, those Congressmen want to kill the only program that provides federal job support for recession's victims.

The kicker is that these futile gestures will just nudge the economy deeper into a recession.

What a miserable formula has been chosen for the future!

From Capitol Hill

Administration's South Africa Policy Only Mild Rhetoric?

Alfreda L. Madison
Special To The Post

It has become a Jimmy Carter habit in the past few months to play his campaign rallying Iranian song. It has been the same theme since the hostages were taken in November but with some variations. The tune is played at press conferences. In November the refrain echoed President Carter as pouring out compassion for the ailing Shah and condemnation of the inhumane Iranians.

Then later there was the flag-flying day and letter writing campaign for a show of patriotism with the hope of impressing the Iranian that all America is behind the President. The failure to light all Christmas trees but one was emphasized at the Christmas tree lighting to show that the President and Americans were, symbolically, making Christmas sacrifices for the hostages. Then, of course, the morning of the Wisconsin primary there was the 7 a.m. press call to express that hostages would be turned



Alfreda L. Madison over to the Iranian government.

Now after the loss in New York and Pennsylvania, the rescue mission was made, even though it is reported that preparations began in November. Yet, it seems the decision to carry out the mission during the week of April 20, gives rise to questions, whether or not the Texas and Indiana primaries were considered in the decision making.

The April 29 Presidential press conference concentrated almost entirely on the rescue mission. Mr.

Carter stressed the fact that the mission decision was his and that there is a deeper failure than the loss of eight lives, five persons injured and millions of dollars in equipment and not one hostage rescued - which was better than no attempt.

Evidently, Secretary Vance, the Methodists around the world, some members of congress and many citizens and European allies don't share the President's views that the mission was proper. The Europeans have expressed a partial sanction support, but they are against military action.

One of the most pointed questions asked at the press conference was the one asked by Aska Muhammad. He called the President's attention to his own words, when he said a great nation like the United States can be forgiving, and since painful bloodshed, loss of life and suffering of so many innocent Iranians under the Shah for 27 years, and that we have 53 hostages, the loss of

eight soldiers, couldn't he find some honorable way to resolve the mutual sorrow of both without further confrontation? Mr. Carter responded with a long discourse on the inhumane, irrational ghoulish Iranian terrorists, with no real government, so such a course would be an impossibility.

Mr. Carter has been saying that just about all the foreign decisions have been his alone. Well he has had a series of "no wins." Bringing the Shah here gave us fifty hostages, Russian grain embargo and Olympic boycott have inconvenienced Americans, but has not had an affect on the Russian-Afghanistan question, rescue mission, which he says was not a failure, so it must have been a success, but no hostages were freed. The drunk in the little delicatessen, that I ran into as shelter from the rain, expressed it best. He said, "If President Carter calls those victories, what in the hell does he call losses? He and I must be using different dictionaries."

Now that the President is getting out on the campaign trail, is he going to level with the people or is he going to give a snow job; shake a few hands, kiss a few babies and say now the problems have been alleviated, while inflation and unemployment are soaring and nothing has been accomplished in the foreign policy? Is he going to lead the public in singing a gullible non-reasoning tune?

Business Activity Edges Upward

The level of business activity in North Carolina edged upward in March, according to the Wachovia Business Index. The Index registered 157.8, up 0.1 percent from the revised February level.

Non-manufacturing employment was up slightly, while manufacturing employment declined. The workweek in manufacturing industries was unchanged from February. Average hourly earnings of manufacturing employees were down in March after adjusting for price increases.

In the manufacturing sector, employment decreased 0.3 percent due to employment losses in durable goods industries. Non-durable goods industries registered a gain from

the February level, led by an increase of 1,000 workers in textiles. The rise in non-manufacturing employment was supported by increases in contract construction, services and government jobs, while trade employment was unchanged from February.

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for North Carolina was 5.4 percent in March, up 0.4 percent from February. The national rate for March was 6.2 percent, up 0.2 percent from February.



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