

Editorials & Comments

We Fear Competency Tests

By Hoyle H. Martin Sr.
Post Editorial Writer

Two years ago an 18-year-old midwestern white youth from a middleclass family was rejected for military service because he was tested and found to be functionally illiterate. The young man's parents were outraged and protested that was not the case because their son had recently graduated from one of the best secondary schools in their state.

This incident points out the dilemma that schools, particularly public schools, face in the utilization of competency tests. Like "Career Education," the "New Math" and the "Open School" before it, competency testing has become a controversial issue because it treads in unknown waters.

Competency testing in particular is controversial because it is one measure of the skills and abilities of students, thus its difficult to deny their use. On the other hand, however, competency testing is apparently disliked by teachers because high failure rates may raise questions about their level of competency. It is disliked by school boards and school administrators because of possible charges of racial or income level discrimination if high percentages of poor and black youths fail, suggesting that schools are prepared only to teach middle and upper income white students.

It is disliked by civil rights organizations and minority group members because of fears that any extended period of high failure rates for blacks may contribute to the myth of genetic inferiority.

Finally, we believe that supporters of public education fear a poor level of performance based on competency tests results will undermine the credibility of public education and possibly lead both federal and local governments to drain the credits and other incentives to those who use private-usually church related schools to educate their children.

Ample Evidence

There is ample evidence to support our belief about these fears of competency testing. First, the major focus of concern with the competency tests given to the nearly 6,000 Charlotte-Mecklenburg 10th graders in November of 1977 appears to be the number and rate of failures by blacks. Furthermore, 10 Piedmont North Carolina School Systems that also used the Charlotte-Mecklenburg competency test in November found it necessary to say they had not yet analyzed the test results based on race. They added, however, that most students in their high school remedial programs are black and poor performance on the test is

a major criteria for admission to such programs.

This apparent pre-occupation with black failure rates reflects our observations about who fears competency tests and why. Specifically we wonder why so little attention has been given to the root causes of the overall 21,240 Charlotte-Mecklenburg students who failed in reading and math or the fact that only 36 percent of the reported 5,869 in the local schools who took the math test passed. Fortunately, school Supt. Jay Robinson puts the issue in clear perspective when he noted last week that the problem stems partly from the fact that school administrators have been unwilling to seek out the real reasons for student failures.

Black Failure

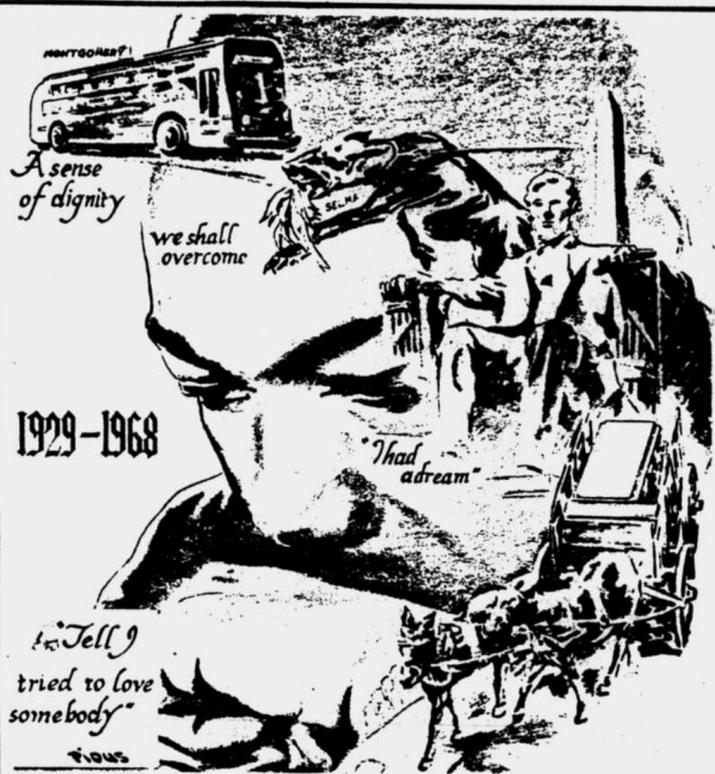
The kind of probing for reasons that Dr. Robinson mentions has led some local school administrators to admit, that black competency test failure rates relate to the schools' inability to meet some of the complex needs of some black and economically poor students. As we have noted, this raises the question of why our schools and teachers have not been prepared to meet such complex needs.

Another reason for the relatively high competency test failure rate among blacks is that "some educators seem to have lower expectations for black children or any minority group and as a result I'm sure they don't get a fair deal," said Robinson.

These observations from Dr. Robinson's objective and unbiased initial analysis of the problem point out that desegregating schools have not yet brought about integrated quality education for all youths. Alluding to this overall problem, the Council for Basic Education said as early as 1975, "The blunt truth is that our schools are failing miserably, scandalously, outrageously, at least 20 percent of our young people."

Fortunately, while many educators can justifiably argue that there are many non-school related factors that contribute to poor school performance, some teachers will accept the poor competency test scores as a new challenge to do a better job. Likewise, parents, ministers and other adults who interact with youths need to put more stress on the value of pursuit of excellence in all aspects of life.

Thus, black youths must be directed and led to believe that the specter of racism, sexism or age discrimination should not be a deterrent to the pursuit of excellence. We can, in the final analysis, only be equal if we are individually and collectively in pursuit of excellence.



Leadership An Iron Will Combined With Integrity Of Purpose

Martin Luther King's Dream

By Bayard Rustin
Special to the Post

Last week, I was talking to a young man who - at the time of Dr. King's assassination in 1968 - was in 10th grade. He recalled that evening in early April when the shocking news of Dr. King's murder was broadcast to the world. But he had a few, if any, meaningful recollections of the great civil rights struggles of the 1950's and the 1960's. Names and places like James Meredith, Birmingham, "Bull" Connor, and Little Rock, were blurred in his mind, vaguely remembered but not fully comprehended. He was, unlike his parents and older neighbors, untouched by bitter reality of racial segregation. For him, the very concept of segregation seemed alien and peculiar, indeed unthinkable.

The attitudes of this young man, I think, testify to Dr. King's greatest accomplishment: racial segregation, whether de jure or de facto, has become politically and normally untenable in modern America. He showed America, through the beauty of non-violent witness, the true face of racism, a face which was hideous and inhuman.

But Dr. King's social dream consisted of two intimately linked components: first, the realization of civil and political rights (an area in which we have made substantial progress); and secondly, the achievement of economic and social equality by black Americans. In short, Dr. King proposed what might be called "a package deal" for black liberation. Freedom, according to Dr. King, would not and could not - come piecemeal; nor

would it come through the sheer benevolence of the white power centers. It would come only as the result of a social revolution, non-violent to be sure, but a revolution, nevertheless, in the true sense of the word.

During the ten years Dr. King's death, phase II of the civil rights movement - the economic phase - has produced a spotty and somewhat disappointing record. Although most blacks have improved their economic position, at least marginally, since the 1960's recent years have seen repeated setbacks for black people.

After years of slow, but steady, narrowing of the white-black income gap, the gap is now becoming wider. And unemployment rates among black workers remain at intolerably high levels. For certain categories of black workers, teenagers for example, the unemployment rate is double that of white workers. But perhaps even worse, the labor force participation rate for black men of prime working age has fallen drastically since 1958 - from 96 percent to 88.5 percent. This bleak statistic indicates that thousands of black workers have abandoned all hope of "making it" in contemporary America.

These disheartening trends are easily traced to the disastrous economic policies so stubbornly pursued by the Nixon and Ford Administrations. And now even with a Democratic president elected with the overwhelming support of black voters, the situation looks only slightly better. Many politicians - and here I include some liberals - fail to

grasp the concept that economic policy has become, in a very real way, the civil rights policy of the 1970's.

There are, however, viable and time-proven strategies for attacking the economic afflictions which continue to torment the black community. For one thing, Dr. King - who died while aiding a union of sanitation men - recognized the necessity of uniting black workers and white workers in their common struggle for economic security and advancement. But black workers no matter how well organized, cannot resume the slow march toward economic and social equality within the context of a chronically ill economy. We must continue to press for a firm commitment to full employment (the recent House vote on the Humphrey-Hawkins bill is an encouraging sign). We must move ahead in the uphill battle for quality integrated education. And we must reaffirm our support for America's urban centers, so often the depressing havens of America's poorest and most dejected people.

No, Dr. King's dream has not been realized after ten long and sometimes cruel years. Nor do I really think that he expected to see the dream fulfilled in ten, twenty, or even fifty years. He knew that endurance and perseverance are the distinguishing marks of any worthwhile movement for justice. "The hard truth," he told us in 1967, "is that neither Negro nor white has done enough to expect the dawn of a new day. While much has been done, it has been accomplished by too few and on a scale too limited for the breadth of the goal.

TO BE EQUAL



By Vernon E. Jordan Jr.

Crime-Control Or Cure?

Concern about crime and violence has spawned many "solutions" to the problem, but virtually all of them would leave the amount of crime in our society virtually intact while giving the illusion of dealing with it.

It seems that every year brings a new spurious solution to the crime problem. Some time ago, New York State put through a drastic tough drug law that was supposed to end narcotics sales for good. It didn't. Today there are more drugs and pushers on the streets than ever before.

The Nixon Administration's plan to choke off drug imports from Turkey also failed. True, Turkish heroin imports declined, but imports from other countries flooded the market and drugs such as cocaine and others grew in popularity during the brief period of tight heroin supplies. The result, more and more varied illegal drugs are available than before the "get-tough" drive.

Preventive detention made no dent in the crime rate.

But the search for the big fix on crime continues. The new fad is "Swift punishment." The courts are bottlenecked, the argument goes, and other cases stack up a long time so prosecutors plea-bargain and some cases are dropped.

The result supposedly is to encourage law-breakers to believe they can get away without a prison sentence if they get caught. A corollary of this argument usually is that court decisions on rights of accused persons have handcuffed the police and allowed many guilty people to escape the penalties of the law.

Many people have seized on this new fad and are riding it hard. Adopt what we say, they imply, and crime rates will plummet. But there's no reason to assume that this new approach will be any better answer to the problems of crime than others that have been tried and failed.

Study after study shows that criminal cases are dropped or charges reduced because prosecutors don't have enough evidence to convict, witnesses move away or complainants drop charges.

Even police officials admit that court decisions on the rights of the accused haven't prevented them from dealing with crime and we ought to remember that back in the days of the third degree, long before the court decisions of the 1960s, police representatives used to claim that if the courts took away the third degree, the police might as well just go out of business.

The "swift punishment" crowd also forgets that people don't commit crimes with the expectations of getting caught, and for those who are bent on illegal activity, a prison sentence is a business risk that doesn't stop them.

It is clear that for the foreseeable future people will commit crimes for which they'll be sent to prison, but we also have to remember that nine out of ten will eventually return to society and punishment without rehabilitation will just ensure their swift return to jail.

It is easy to advocate the current "lock 'em up" answers since they give the illusion of action and of dealing with a serious social problem. But those who back such answers ought to be prepared for the dismal fact that stress on enforcement and imprisonment is no more likely to work now than in the past.

as i see it

Athletes And The Hardship Cases

By Gerald O. Johnson

I am sure many of you read about the hardships a great athlete is now facing. I am talking about the bankruptcy Joe Caldwell, former Carolina Cougar standout, is currently going through. Although the entire situation is bad there is some good that can come out of Joe's hardships. The good is the lesson to be learned from all of this.

The circumstances that surrounds Joe's downfall, two points stand out in my mind. First, Joe left college as a hardship case thereby never completing his education. Second, Joe is no longer a young man.

These two points are the reasons Joe is in the trouble he is in.

To the aspiring young athlete, it is important to realize that athletic ability is a temporary asset. Its intrinsic value depreciates as your age appreciates. Therefore, it is not enough to be athletically inclined to be successful in our society. You must have something else to offer to society

once your athletic ability is valueless.

That something else more often than not can be gained through a college education. With a degree you can reshape your lifestyle and still make it.

Joe Caldwell has no degree. It is obvious that he could at least make a valuable contribution to a school's athletic program. But he can't get a degree. He is a wasted resource. Ironically, it is his own fault.

It is cases like Joe's that cause me to be opposed to the hardship draft.

The hardship draft exploits the poverty situation a hardship athlete has been exposed to.

A poverty stricken youth sees the opportunity to leave the ghetto environment through athletics. He will play a few years in college, make a name for himself, and wait to be drafted as a hardship case.

Overnight he finds that he has become a rich man. More often than not his mental maturity has not grown as rapidly as his wealth. Consequ-



Gerald Johnson

ently, his wealth vanishes almost as rapidly as it appeared. Some people have suggested that if they were in this situation, that they would go with the hardship case and return to finish their education later. Not a bad idea, but one that the facts will not bear out.

Once a hardship athlete starts drawing a paycheck, that's it. He feels that since he is making more money than most people make with a degree, why bother. Moreover, he is spending too much time living the life of glamor. Consequently, he will never

return. Yet year after year athletes continue to file bankruptcy.

A simple calculation can show that being a great athlete will leave you with nothing but memories if you can't carry on in something else. Let us take an athlete at age 18 and barring any injuries of the like, let us say he will last until 38; Two unlikely hypotheses. Let us further assume that through this 20-year career that our athlete averages \$100,000 a year; another unlikely hypothesis. If our athlete lives to be 65 he would have made enough money to have an average yearly income of \$42,553.20. Not bad! But it is not bad if our athlete realizes this and lives 20-year career based on a yearly income of \$42,553.20. Instead, making \$100,000 a year he will live like a king on a yearly based income of \$100,000. Consequently, when he reaches age 40 his glamor years are over and so is his financial stability. Note, that our example was extremely generous. Most athletes will last only 10 years at most.

Most will not earn \$100,000 a year. Therefore, our figures will change drastically. On a ten year career leaving everything else constant our athlete will only earn \$21,276.60 a year based on age 65.

Lou Hudson of the Atlanta Hawks said it best when teammates ridiculed him about being cheap. Lou replied "I live a lifestyle that I can sustain and maintain." Lou lives in a modest home, drive simple cars, and dressed modestly. Lou is an intelligent athlete.

Hence, if you are a young aspiring athlete and you are going to use your athletic ability to lift you out of the poverty stricken environment you are now in, remember these points: 1) Athletic ability is not forever.

2) A college education is forever.

3) Budget your earnings while being an athlete on age 65.

4) Hire a good firm to manage your money.

It is not much that can be done or said to make Joe Caldwell's situation any easier to bear. But Joe Caldwell's hardship can be used to help others gain success.

Vernon Jordan has recently attacked President Jimmy Carter on unfulfilled promises the President has made to black people. Jordan has said this administration is more concerned with balance budgets than balanced lives.

Carter is not God and his wants are not automatically turned into action, Jordan knows this. Moreover, Jimmy Carter is President of the entire U. S. not just the black folk. I think the man is doing one heck of a job and I take personal offense to attacks on how he is doing his job. Yes, I have found some Carter decisions questionable, but Carter has the facts and I only can go on heresy and what I read.

But I pay close attention to little subtle points that go unnoticed by most. For instance, Carter's press conferences are filled with black reporters. I never once saw a black face in a Ford or Nixon press conference, let alone a chance to ask a question.

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