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Education 210
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TWO MODEST PROPOSALS

CULTURAL DEFICIT VS. CULTURAL DIFFERENCE;

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Dear Sirs:

My colleagues and I have carefully reviewed Dr. Hagivhurst's table "Income

Level of Big City Schools in Relation to Characteristics of Pupils." The data

are without flaw in their convincingness. In Table A and B, we see that the

poorer the student, the worse his IQ rating, the lower his score on the Iowa

achievement test; the higher probability he has of ending up in detention school,

dropping out, or failing English; the less frequently will he request transcripts

for college; the less frequently will he be identified as gifted. The figures

increase or decrease in all the above dependent variable categories in a regular

order based on income. In all instances those who have the higher average income

do significantly better on tests, offer fewer detention problems, are more gifted,

are more motivated to go to college. Without exception those in the poorest ses

quartile do the worst in the dependent variable categories.

How can we explain these deplorable findings? Certain misguided individuals

have attempted to locate the problem in - of all places! - the school itself, and

focus their attack on the teachers, the curriculum, even the buildings. While

Hagivhurst does not deal directly with this line of reasoning, one look at his

data suggests that while there is very little difference in the quality of the

buildings between Groups I and II, there certainly is a difference in regard to the

number of pupils sent to detention schools. Thus, one might draw the tentative

conclusion that the condition of the school is not really a crucial factor.

Certain other social scientists, of whom Dr. Jennings is the most notorious

example, have argued that the failure of Head Start programs and other interventionist

strategies, coupled with the marked difference in IQ scores recorded in the

Hagivhurst data, forces them to uphold a doctrine of genetic inferiority. However,

we of the social pathology school of thought are in no way racists, and

adamantly reject this pessimistic interpretation. Although in practice there is

a positive correlation between low income populations and people of color, it is important to recognize that Havighurst's study has as its independent variable income, not color. My colleagues and I believe that all people, regardless of their skin, are potentially equal.

Given this assumption, how can we explain the data? The explanation, unfortunately, is simple. These people are so injured by the inadequacies of the environment in which they are born and raised, that in subsequent years they are never able to overcome the disadvantages. In short, they are culturally deprived. Havighurst's data reveal that lower income students have a very poor grasp of the English language. This is hardly surprising, given their home environment. There are no books in the home. The mother rarely, if ever, reads to her children. There is little use of public libraries. There are no adult models who speak properly. Their peers suffer from the same speech pathologies. And the effects of this linguistic deprivation are far-reaching. It is generally recognized that linguistic competence is a measure of cognitive ability. Obviously, as Havighurst and Hess et. al. both show, based on the use of standard English, (which, I would like to remind skeptics, is the language we use in this country), lower income students have inadequate language development. The crucial relationship between language and thought is confirmed by the fact that they have low IQs, low achievement, and are less gifted.

The deprivation of the home environment is also responsible for the high number in detention schools, the drop-out rate, the small percent continuing on to college. To put it bluntly, the home environment of lower income students is often a criminalized way of life. It is not surprising these children so often end up in detention schools, when their brothers and fathers are often petty criminals. Further, the ghetto has a high rate of unemployed, who provide excellent models for the child considering dropping out of school. Finally, this community does not have the values (such as the work ethic, or deferral of gratification) which would encourage young people to go to college.