A Constant Commitment:

The Southern Education Foundation's Role in Regional Change

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Introductory Note

This is a report about education in the South as reflected in the work of the Southern Education Foundation. Much of the commentary here emerged from discussions which took place April 3, 1978, at a day long meeting held by the Foundation in Atlanta, Ga., on the occasion of the retirement of John A. Griffin as Executive Director and the installation of Elridge McMillan as his successor.

That meeting, which attracted an audience of several hundred, including SEF staff, old friends of the Foundation, board members, former interns in SEF's grants program, agency heads, college presidents and other foundation representatives, was designed to outline at the beginning of a new director's tenure the Foundation's past program and to focus on some of the remaining problems of the future. Participants in the program, in addition to Dr. Griffin and Mr. McMillan, included: David Freeman, President of SEF's Board; John M. Ellison, Chancellor, Virginia Union University; Harold Fleming, President, Potomac Institute; Leslie W. Dunbar of the Field Foundation, who delivered the keynote address; David Rice, Children's Defense Fund; Winifred Green of the American Friends Service Committee; Jean Fairfax of the Legal Defense Fund and an SEF Board member; Ruby Martin, SEF Board member; Virginia Fleming, former SEF staff member; Sophia Bracy Harris, of the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama; Frieda Mitchell of the United Communities for Child Development; Robert Brown of the Southeastern Public Education Program, Macon, Ga.; Hayes Mizell of the Southeastern Public Education Program, Columbia, S.C., and Cleveland L. Dennard, SEF Board member.

SEF: Past and Present

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed Congress in the summer of that year, but the struggle for equal opportunity in the South was far from over. To many, in fact, it was only just beginning. The terror of the Mississippi Freedom summer was starting. Ahead lay Selma, Pettus Bridge. Ahead, too, lay the startling revelations of widespread hunger and malnutrition among the South's poor children. Ahead lay a host of tense school desegregation battles. In fact, what lay ahead was almost as formidable as what lay behind.

There were, of course, many organizations involved in their own special ways in the unfolding of events—Dr. King and SCLC, SNCC, the American Friends Service Committee, the Legal Defense Fund, the Southern Regional Council and its Voter Education Project. And the Southern Education Foundation. To that point SEF had not taken a very active role in the more momentous events of the civil rights movement, but its presence had long been felt and exemplified in many and subtle ways.

From its beginning the mission of the Southern Education Foundation has been to enhance the quality of education available to blacks in the Southern states. This represented a continuation of the work of four predecessor foundations—the Peabody Fund, the Slater Fund, the Jeanes Fund and the Virginia Randolph Fund which consolidated in 1937 to form the Southern Education Foundation.

Different times, different circumstances call for different approaches to what are often similar problems. In the 30's and 40's racial segregation completely pervaded all of Southern society. It was celebrated publicly in speeches, sermons, and editorials and rigidly enforced by law. Its effects were stultifying and were nowhere more evident than in the region's dual school systems. For the 1939-40 school year, for instance, per pupil expenditures for whites in the region were $50.14; for blacks, $21.54. In some states the disparities were even greater. Mississippi spent $41.71 per white pupil and $7.24 per black pupil. Disparities also existed between the salaries of white and black teachers. Regionwide, white teachers were paid $962.00 per year; black teachers, $505.00 per year. The highest white salary was in Texas—$1,122 per year. The highest black salary was in Oklahoma, $873.00 per year. In Mississippi whites earned $778.00 per year; blacks a miniscule $233.00 per year.

The need for an organization dedicated to the improvement of black education and the status of black educators thus was great and SEF's role—as the only foundation in the South with such a mission—was vital to black education. Its program during the years that followed until the beginning of the civil rights movement was largely centered on improvement of teacher training, enhancement of classroom education. The Foundation provided grants to state departments of education for a variety of purposes

Robert L. Cousins, former Associate Director of SEF, and Blanche Dixon are registered by Jean Sinclair of the SEF Staff.

including workshops for teachers, summer scholarships, visual aids, support toward salaries of black supervisors within state education departments.

The Brown decision of 1954, of course, wrought profound changes in Southern education. Despite the South's initial resistance, despite its outward manifestation that nothing would ever change, everything did change, and SEF's role became increasingly significant. Its graduate fellowship program, begun in 1954, provided grants totaling $1,200,000 to help countless Southern black educators enhance their skills and thus provide better instruction to black high school and college students. In 1965 SEF began an internship program in Southern education. Over the next nine years it identified and supported a total of 79 young people with a variety of interests and goals in an effort to help develop change-oriented leaders. Central to its purpose was its belief in people, its willingness to take risks, to provide internships not just to those with proven leadership credentials, but to others who had not had the opportunity to acquire such credentials. (Twelve of the interns, for instance, had no education beyond high school.) All were placed in positions where they could gain experience and develop their own potential for the future. Some worked with black colleges, some with community organizations, some in state education departments.

In the mid-sixties as the pace of the civil rights movement quickened, SEF expanded its program to deal more closely with the emerging issues of the day. Its program coalesced around three major areas, actually the three traditional stages of education—pre-school, elementary and secondary school, and higher education.

Early Childhood Education

SEF had earlier been involved with early childhood education through efforts to promote kindergartens in the Southern states. Only one Southern state at the time allowed state funds to be spent on schooling below the first grade. SEF organized an advocacy program throughout the region for early childhood education. Gradually state attitudes changed so that kindergartens are now accepted parts of state education programs.

Today the Foundation's program in early childhood education is in support of organizations who are providing day care for poor children in their pre-school years.

Day care is a term suggestive of nursery school and baby-sitting. It does, of course, encompass both, but to SEF and others concerned with comprehensive child development it has far broader implications. It is important for working mothers to have a place where they can bring their children and it is important that the quality of care be of the highest standard. It is important that poor children, prior to entering school, have the same opportunities to develop their potential as children in more affluent circumstances. Last year the Children's Defense Fund, which has been the beneficiary of SEF funding and which is a powerful voice for rights of children in every aspect of society, put the matter this way in testimony before the House Welfare Reform Sub-Committee;

> The absence of sufficient places for children who need some form of day care has been well documented. In March, 1972, there were about one million places for children in approved day care centers and family care homes. These places could provide coverage for less than 5 percent of the 20 million children under six; for less than 16 percent of the 6.5 million children under 6 with working mothers; or for less than half the 2.3 million children under 6 in female-headed households. Poor children have even fewer slots available. In 1975 Head Start reached about 350,000 children, less than 20 percent of those eligible. Followthrough served only 78,000. The same year, over half the children enrolled in nursery school and kindergartens were from families with incomes over $10,000.
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> In the belief that universally available child care services are absolutely essential the Children's Defense Fund intends to work with others to pursue development of such a program, independently of, but linked to the development of, new income maintenance policies. The principal objective of such a program would be to provide child care services to families who want and need them in order to meet the comprehensive needs of their children and carry out their child rearing responsibilities more effectively.

The comprehensive approach to day care taken by day care organizations supported by SEF can be illustrated by the activities of FOCAL, an Alabama federation of day care centers. FOCAL is made up of 80 centers in 37 counties. These centers are staffed by 675 low income women and serve more than 3,000 families. In addition to providing child care, the centers assist mothers in obtaining food stamps, give board members an opportunity to make decisions affecting the community, and expose them to broader community issues. In brief, the centers serve in the capacity of community organizer, a followthrough of community organizing concepts of the civil rights movement, and as a grass roots lobbying arm for the needs of poor children and working mothers.

Primary and Secondary Education

In addition to its traditional concerns of enhancing Southern black education through grants to improve teacher training and the quality of education available to blacks generally, SEF in recent years has been concerned with two quite controversial issues—second generation school desegregation and school finance reform.

In 1972 SEF helped to fund a study of second generation desegregation carried out by six civil rights organizations—the Alabama Council on Human Relations, the American Friends Service Committee, the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches, the Legal Defense Fund, the Southern Regional Council, and the Washington Research Project. That report, entitled *It's Not Over in the South,* found that many vestiges of a segregated past survived in supposedly desegregated schools. Among major problems remaining, the organizations reported inadequate and outmoded court orders and desegregation plans, continuing segregation among faculty, ability grouping plans which had the effect of re-segregating students, and, finally, inordinate numbers of minority student suspensions in desegregated circumstances.

This latter finding was documented regionally in further detail in another publication, *The Student Pushout,* issued in 1973 by the Southern Regional Council and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial. The Children's Defense Fund in a study that same year revealed that the problem went beyond the South to schools throughout the nation.

"Many people say that it's harder now than it used to be, that it was all so simple in the 60's. Yes, it's hard to devise ways to answer the difficult question of what you do when the door is finally open... how do you implement programs and practices to achieve an educational system that opens options for all children."

—WINIFRED GREEN

As a followthrough to the findings of these reports SEF has provided support to the Southeastern Public Education Program of the American Friends Service Committee in its efforts to help school administrators find more positive alternatives to suspensions in dealing with the ever complex problems of school discipline.

The issue of school finance reform drew national at-

tention in 1973 when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a federal district court ruling in the Rodriguez case in which a San Antonio, Texas, man charged that the system of local school financing was unconstitutional. Rodriguez pointed out that local school funds were raised from the property tax and that in the district in which he lived the value of property was only $5,960 per pupil. In a more affluent, nearby district the property value was $49,000 per pupil. People in Rodriguez's district paid $10.50 on every $1000.00 of property and citizens in the more affluent district paid $8.50 per $1000.00 of property. The result was that residents in Rodriguez's district raised only $26.00 per pupil while the residents of the more affluent district raised $333.00. The Supreme Court ruled that while the situation was unfair, it was not unconstitutional. That decision left the matter of school finance reform in the hands of state legislatures.

"Dualism may be perpetuated and reinforced if traditionally black colleges are classified in the state's higher education hierarchy along with small, predominantly white institutions whose limited missions preclude their ever being assigned major educational roles of statewide significance."
—JEAN FAIRFAX

In recognition of this problem the Southern Education Foundation provided funds for the Southeastern Public Education Program (SPEP) to do a study of school finance in the state of South Carolina where SPEP was already actively involved in other education issues, including school desegregation. The study, published in 1972, revealed that school districts with the poorest property values spent less on their schools, but taxed their citizens more than wealthy districts. Partly as a result of the study's findings, South Carolina today has school finance reform legislation. Moreover, SPEP staff now work in various communities to interpret the provisions of the new law and encourage wider citizen participation in the decision making processes of school systems.

Higher Education

The issues involved in what has come be be known as the *Adams vs Califano* case have shaped much of SEF's program in higher education over the past few years. Up until 1972, the federal government's efforts toward desegregating public schools had been mainly directed toward primary and secondary schools. HEW took the view that enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act requiring the withholding of federal funds from institutions not in compliance was discretionary insofar as higher education was concerned. This position was challenged in a Washington, D.C. federal district court in 1972. The Southern Education Foundation, which for some time had been concerned with dualism in higher education, helped support the litigation through grants to the Legal Defense Fund. In November, 1972, the court handed down a decision requiring HEW to begin prompt affirmative action to enforce Title VI provisions in the states not in compliance.

HEW then called on the states to submit plans outlining their proposals for ending dual systems in higher education. The agency repeatedly rejected the states' plans as unsatisfactory. But in 1974 when HEW had to report on its progress to the court, it approved plans from eight of the states. Mississippi's was rejected. Louisiana had declined to submit a plan and was being dealt with in separate litigation. The accepted plans were concerned with increasing numbers and proportions of blacks in formerly white colleges, and numbers of whites in formerly black colleges, with speeding up faculty and staff desegregation and providing additional support services for disadvantaged students. Some set timetables; others did not. Civil rights advocates felt that the plans were inadequate. In 1973, supported by an SEF grant, the Legal Defense Fund organized Black Coalitions to study the issues in the *Adams* case in several Southern states. The Coalitions included citizens who had not previously been associated with higher education and alumni groups of black state supported colleges. The Coalitions met with officials in the various states to tell them what they wished to see in the state plans.

Later, the Coalitions produced their own written recommendations which were given to HEW. Those recommendations encompassed the points outlined in the earlier state plans, but also called for more specific commitments, fixing of responsibilities, funding goals and timetables. They called for enhancement of traditionally black institutions, placing them on parity with traditionally white institutions.

The following year the plaintiffs went back to court and charged that HEW's guidelines to the states had not gone far enough. The court agreed and ordered HEW to submit new ones. After several months new guidelines were submitted, approved and issued in June, 1977. Some of the plans submitted in response to the new guidelines met most of the criteria outlined by the Black Coalitions; most did not—notably in the critical area of bringing about parity between traditionally black and traditionally white institutions.

The issues involved in this case obviously affect black access to and graduation from post-secondary institutions in the South. SEF recognized this fact in providing support to the plaintiffs in the original suit and since then has supported various activities related to the litigation and its consequences. This has included, in addition to support of the Black Coalitions, region-wide conferences, the commissioning of studies and the publishing of other materials. At a conference on black access to post-secondary education which SEF and the Ford Foundation jointly sponsored in July, 1975, the conferees called for special funding to correct past inequities in public colleges and universities serving mostly black students, alternatives to testing as a prerequisite for college admission, a variety of recruitment methods to bring black students into higher education, educational delivery systems which place upon institutions and faculties a degree of responsibility for the retention and graduation of their students.

Thus SEF's program today, as in the past, continues to focus on the hard issues facing Southern black education and to formulate innovative, people-oriented approaches to finding solutions. Every aspect of its program over the years, in fact, has been characterized by a belief in people. It is a small foundation with a small staff and, though this has limited its ability to do many of the things it might want to do; it has enabled it to stay close to changing events and close to the people who are involved in those events. It has thus become a vital—and quite unique—philanthropic force in the South.

Board members, former board members, and staff of the Southern Education Foundation, seated from left to right: Elridge W. McMillan, John A. Griffin, Edgar Epps, John Bryan, Sam Nabrit, and Ruby Martin. Standing, left to right: Anton H. Rice, Gordon Foster, David Freeman, Harold C. Fleming, Cleveland Dennard, Wiley Bolden, Jean Fairfax, Virginia Fleming, Edgar Smith, Elaine Alexander, and John M. Ellison.

The Shape of Things

"This is a far different South and nation than twenty years ago, and a better one, too. Twenty years ago we had a South where in Arkansas 91 black youngsters were in school with whites, 11 were in North Carolina, 19 in Tennessee—and except for west Texas that was it. Twenty years ago we had a South where everything was segregated and unequal...This has all changed and it was you and people like you who did it."

—LESLIE W. DUNBAR, SPEAKING AT THE SEF SYMPOSIUM, APRIL 3, 1978.

The lesson of the past decade or so is clear. One of the most dreadful of human evils to pervade a society—racism—is not invincible. Its effects can be altered; change can come where people are informed, where people can affect the political process, where individuals can organize their collective strengths. This has happened in the South, though the cost was sometimes dear. To face the clubs of highway patrolmen, the snarls of police dogs, to feel the mid-night terror of a fire-bombed home and in the face of it all to persist took a supreme sort of individual courage. To know that one's job might be lost if one enrolled one's children in an all-white school, or registered to vote, or spoke out against the tyranny of a small town sheriff, took courage of no less a magnitude.

And so today Central High in Little Rock is fully desegregated and one of the nine black students who first attended it is now an Assistant Secretary of Labor. The fire hoses and police dogs are shameful memories to Birmingham's business and professional leadership. The power of black votes has opened up jobs in state and local governments, elected blacks to scores of public offices and made white officeholders more sympathetic to black needs and aspirations. The legal and illegal barriers to those needs and aspirations have been broken. What remains is the full implementation of the rights now gained.

The Brown decision of 1954 which declared unequal educational opportunity to be unconstitutional, of course, was the spur that precipitated the civil rights struggles of the fifties and the sixties. And so it is appropriate to ask what is the status of race and education in the South today? What remains still to be done?

Some matters, of course, which have traditionally plagued public education—apart from their racially discriminatory aspects—have not lessened: the need for larger financial commitments by state and local

Leslie Dunbar:

"The Southern experience of the past two or three decades is one of the great, if not the greatest, transformations in American history. One way of summarizing it all is to say that during these years the South moved into the present.

It had never before lived in the present. White Southerners were always looking back to the past, for some meaning to their lives; and forward to the future for some hope. They had so boxed themselves in ideologically and politically that only the rare white could find either meaning or hope in the present. The present was not much good for anything except play, and play for some of the "good old boys" became a dreadful thing. Black Southerners played too in the present. They worked in it also, worked hard, but did so to escape from the present, to flee from a past of misery and pain, to reach out and find a future which supplied for them both the hope and the meaning of their lives.

Now, the South lives in the present, whether all like it or not. James McBride Dabbs, mentor to so many of us, said better, and more bluntly, what I have tried to convey. He used an image not of time but of place; specifically, the piazza. Listen to Dabbs:

> We make a great show of our personal relationships, but these are largely the froth of sociability; as to our intimate personal life, we are often like the old aristocrat, Major Buchan, of Allen Tate's *The Fathers*, who, when interrogated by a young acquaintance, "Sir, may I ask you a personal question?" thunders, "Sir, you may not!" The trouble here is not that the personal life of the Southerner is too deep to be expressed, it is rather too shallow for him to trust it.
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> Considered in this respect, southern culture (Dabbs was writing this in 1969) is a piazza (or porch) culture... We built piazzas because the weather suggested it...(We) became piazza people ... Ideally, piazza people should possess the strength gained from years of deep companionship within the home and the ease and *savoir-faire* of men of the world... But the South, having built its material world upon a basic and ever more flagrant injustice, could not find real support for this world within the deep privacies of its being. It therefore avoided these deep privacies and heightened the laughter on the piazza in order to hide the vacancy within. In such a world, so purposefully social, asking a personal question became a threat rather than an invitation to human sharing, and "Sir, you may not!" thunders the Major.

In all of this, Dabbs was, as is evident, talking about the white South and Southerners. He extended his thought to embrace Negro Southerners, but he like Faulkner was never really half so perceptive and insightful with them as with the whites they knew in their very marrow. Indeed, it some time ago came to seem to me that neither black nor white Southerners knew each other really so well as they claim to do. They knew how to make use of each other, and to hide from each other, and sometimes life would throw black and white individuals together in shared suffering; but that was and probably is about it. Quite possibly, none of us penetrates very well the mind and heart of another. Emerson said that two persons are like globes, which can touch each other only at a point. Sometimes I think he was wrong in saying that; but then again I'm not sure, and imagine he may have been right.

Black people were piazza people too, all over the South. Whites sat on those porches, keeping an arm's length away from both the public world which seemed so meaningless, and the private world they feared. Maybe it has been the same with black people. Maybe to get away from the unbearable tension and artificiality of those

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governments to public education, the need for more innovative attitudes on the part of educators toward the teaching of children, the need for better teacher training, a keener recognition by citizens of their duty to be more actively involved in decisions affecting the public schools. These considerations, of course, do affect efforts to equalize educational opportunity. More specific issues, however, revolve around the availability of day care for poor children, the problems that still exist in school desegregation and in bringing about more equitable school finance; black access to higher education. All these matters finally are interrelated, for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds often have difficulty in being admitted to college due to disadvantages that began with early childhood and secondary education.

Day Care

An example of the present activities in the field of early childhood education has been pointed to in Alabama, where the Federation of Child Care Centers of Alabama provides services to 3,000 poor black families. The need, however, is so much greater than this one organization alone can fill. The actual number of children unreached by day care centers in the state can only be conjectured, but Bureau of Census figures show that there are nearly 87,000 poor black families with children in the state and that nearly 20,000 of these live on less than half the poverty income. A precise measure of the total need among poor black families cannot, of course, be derived from such figures, but the Children's Defense Fund estimate that Head Start reaches only 20 percent of eligible children nationwide at least is suggestive of the dimensions of that need.

One way to improve the situation until more centers are created and more slots are available would be, as the Children's Defense Fund has pointed out, to target available slots in Federal child care programs "on those families most at risk: those who have special needs, poor children, children of single parent and working parent families; those families who, without the option of part-time or occasional child care might have to place their children in foster care."

School Desegregation

Sadly, in larger cities today there is a growing resegregation characterized by the term "white flight," which is often presumed to have been caused by "busing."Studies of the subject show no correlation between the two, yet the myth persists. Unquestionably, however, more affluent whites have abandoned inner city schools in vast numbers. But so also have many affluent blacks. Both have helped to create socioeconomic segregation, particularly with the continuing influx of low income people of both races into cities where they are served by schools that are often inadequately staffed and ill equipped.

The interrelated issues of student pushouts, student behavior and discipline have been greatly discussed, but remain unresolved despite efforts on the part of organizations such as AFSC's Southeastern Public Education Program to assist schools in finding alternatives to expulsions and suspensions. However, there is evidence that school administrators themselves realize the dangers to society that the student pushout creates. Frequently now the AFSC is called upon by these administrators for consultation and advice on the problem.

Testing, tracking, ability grouping have been examined in recent years in light of serious questions raised about their possible discriminatory use, but school systems throughout the region still make use of all three.

One issue of increasing concern is the attitude among many whites and blacks that desegregation does not matter much any more, that efforts should be directed simply toward improvement of schools regardless of which race predominates in them. The attitude is understandable from a parent's perspective in

"Many of the efforts to expand educational opportunities in the South have been and are being made possible because of SEF and its belief that people, given the resources and information, can affect in a positive way their government and the institutions meant to serve them."

—WINIFRED GREEN

Leslie Dunbar *(continued)*

piazzas was what led the most restless, the most hurt and provoked, of both races to flee off to the North.

What Southerners today, black or white, can believe in the North in that old way? We live now in the present. The termites and tornados have got to those piazzas; anyway, they don't build them on ranch-style houses in the new subdivisions, or on public housing. *Now,* it seems to me as I visit the South, that many Southerners, people like you, are seeking to integrate personal and public values without suppressing either, are seeking to integrate regional and national and even international responsibilities without neglecting either.

Others of us—and perhaps they are the most numerous—have raced into the present bent on out-hustling and out-consuming anybody and everybody. And we do all enjoy the nice hotels and restaurants and stores they have provided us. Sometimes it appears, though, that the suffering of Albany, Birmingham, Selma, New Orleans, Bogalusa, St. Augustine, Danville, Orangeburg, Monroe, Little Rock, Clinton, and Mississippi only freed the South to become the nation's new style Yankee peddler. If all the storm and pain and human dedication of the long years of distinctively southern history end with a race of managers and problem solvers, with little or no sense of purpose or values, sent off by a prideful people to executive suites and Washington offices, if all that history lastingly taught was a veneer of southern manners and fondness for southern cooking, it does seem somehow unfulfilled. Or, as some might say, unredeemed.

Recently I was reading again Ralph Waldo Emerson, and there suddenly flashed through my head the realization that his awesome essay on "Self-Reliance" had had at least one southern exemplar: the one that struck my memory was Richard Wright's *Black Boy.* Listen to Emerson, the deeply and widely educated Yankee:

> Whoso would be a man, must be a non-conformist... Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.

Listen now to Wright, looking back on a miserably impoverished, ill-educated Deep South boyhood:

> It was inconceivable to me that one should surrender to what seemed wrong, and most of the people I had met seemed wrong. Ought one to surrender to authority even if one believed that authority was wrong? If the answer was yes, then I knew that I would always be wrong, because I could never do it.

Listen again to the New England sage, this time from his essay, "Experience."

> Into every intelligence there is a door which is never closed, through which the creator passes.

Listen to Wright, puzzling over how it happened that he, unlike so many others, had not been crushed by what the Deep South did to him:

> The face of the South that I had known was hostile and forbidding, and yet out of all the conflicts and the curses, the blows and the anger, the tensions and the terror, I had somehow gotten the idea that life could be different, could be lived in a fuller and richer manner.

How do we, in fact, account for such a one as Wright? He came out of wretched poverty, had neither books nor teachers, had no father to speak of. A social misfit from

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Cleveland Dennard, right, President of the SEF Corporation, introduces Elridge McMillan.

view of the controversy that trying to bring about increased desegregation oftentimes produces. But the argument may be self defeating, bringing about a modern day version of "separate but equal" schools, which the Supreme Court in 1954 described as "inherently unequal."

School Finance

In school finance the question is not so much a matter of tax efforts by local citizens, but as emphasized in the *Rodriguez* case, the value of property within the school district upon which taxes are levied. The Supreme Court has ruled that such conditions are not unconstitutional and left the matter of reform in the hands of state legislators. A study of school finance by the Southern Regional Council in 1974, however, pointed out that court rulings and legislative action are not the only incentives for change.

"Federal legislation could be much more specific and more far reaching in the plans it encourages," wrote author Virginia Fleming. "They (Congress and the Office of Education) could assist in working for solutions to school finance reform. They could provide public information on plans already studied and initiate appropriate new legislation. Federal legislation could address inequalities among states as well as within states. It could provide funds to ease the state's assumption of local costs if that proved to be the most popular solution."

Whatever the ultimate solution, at this point no easy answer to equalizing tax efforts for the South's public schools has been universally agreed upon and the issue of school finance reform remains high on the agenda of Southern educators.

Higher Education

Today's problems in higher education are no longer those of the sixties when James Meredith's admission to the University of Mississippi precipitated a full scale riot on that campus. The right of blacks to attend any college they wish has been established. Other, more subtle obstacles are now apparent. Among such barriers are admissions standards and standardized aptitude tests, lack of money, poor elementary and high

Leslie Dunbar *(continued)*

the beginning, he scrapped and fought with everyone: family, churches, schools, neighbors. Indeed, the reader gets a sense of young Wright having to fight his way through , win his freedom of action from, the black community in order to get to the point where he could confront the white society, which he had known from his youngest years was his real enemy. It was somewhat, as I earlier suggested to you may have been the deeper purpose of the civil rights movement itself, a freeing of ourselves to confront the real enemies, militarism and poverty.

Yet somehow, through amazing grace perhaps, Richard Wright made of this unlikely material a self, put together a self-reliant person. His way to that led through reading and books, and the books he read seem mainly to have been by white writers, novelists mostly, though the writer who first shoved him into an unappeasable desire for study and learning was the essayist H.L. Mencken, a man who might accurately be described as a racist. Even earlier, he assuaged his appetite for words with a weekly "KKK" tabloid, the only reading he could find. Wright was ready to explore whatever was offered, seeking what he could use. His way toward confrontation with the dominant white society led him to go North—taking, as he said, "a part of the South to transplant in alien soil to see if it could grow differently"—and in doing that he was like so many talented blacks then; and like so many talented whites, too.

What is different *now,* ladies and gentlemen, is that the South is habitable. The 1950's may not have brought us to Canaan-land, but— and this was and is a great thing—they made it possible and inviting for the best of young Southerners, black and white, to stay at home and to work here.

What will they do, what will they work at? I don't know. I've already said that too many seem intent only on showing they can out-hustle anybody, anywhere. But I do believe that still alive and throbbing in the South is the same spirit that Richard Wright found in himself and which he described as "a sense of the world that was mine and mine alone, . . . that gave me insight into the suffering of others, . . . that (kept) alive in me the enthralling sense of wonder and awe in the face of the drama of human feeling which is hidden by the external drama of life."

And this is a good place for me to stop, standing with him in wonder before the drama of individual human feelings, despite the external, and usually saddening, life around them; for this is where I began, celebrating Elridge and John, and the many others of you who come hell or high water, come principalities and power, come think tanks and smoke filled rooms, come Wall Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, will go on working to make this life fit for humankind. You will do so as Southerners, because everybody has to be somebody and you cannot be and would not want to be other than Southerners, men and women, black and white, living and working with each other in more equality than blacks and whites, women and men, ever shared before: and *that* you did, you brought *that* about. You, with a little help from your friends, have in fact done so well and gone so far at overcoming those ancient barriers of discrimination and separation that there will shortly be no excuse for our not going on to the main fray, to humanity's long postponed rendezvous with the evils of war-making and poverty. And though the odds may be against success, can we believe, can we afford not to believe, that there too we shall overcome? ❞

school preparation, and a resistance to change among more elitist, traditionally white colleges and universities.

Public and private black institutions—disadvantaged financially in comparison to traditionally white institutions—remain a major source of education for blacks. This is why the issues involved in the *Adams vs Califano* case are so crucial to the future of black education in the South.

But why not—since the dual school system has been declared unconstitutional—simply close black public institutions of higher education? After all blacks can go to traditionally white schools now. The question could be asked the other way. Why not close the traditionally white institutions? An honest answer to the latter question would be that a larger investment has been put into the white colleges and universities; they offer opportunity for a better quality education. The truth is, though, that if the traditionally black institutions were closed some black students would be denied access to higher education and the whole effort toward increasing the numbers of blacks in higher education would be jeopardized. The answer is not to close such institutions but to strengthen them, to provide larger funding and new programs that will continue to appeal to blacks and increase their attraction to whites.

An illustration of the issues involved can be seen in the state of Tennessee, where the University of Tennessee sought to open a branch of the University at Nashville, site of Tennessee State University, that state's historically black institution. A suit was filed to prevent the University of Tennessee from going through with its plans and a federal judge ruled that it would be continuation of dualism for the University of Tennessee to conduct a program of higher education in the same locality of a state institution originally created for blacks, but now desegregated.

Despite the problems described, despite the obstacles to equitable educational opportunity still existing, there is reason for hope and even optimism. For what increasingly can be seen today across the whole spectrum of race and education in the region is the effect that organized efforts by such groups as SPEP, FOCAL, and Black Coalitions can have—and have had on decisions and policies affecting the children of the South.

"Hiding behind the claim that qualified blacks are not available for instructional positions, yet refusing to subsidize the enlargement of the pool of black academics by using their own universities as training centers, states will undoubtedly continue the abysmally slow integration of their faculties. Influencing the pace and quality of this effort must be given high priority by SEF."

—JEAN FAIRFAX

SEF: Looking to the Future

At the retirement of Dr. Griffin and the installation of Mr. McMillan, both men emphasized the underlying concepts that have guided the Foundation throughout much of its history. Dr. Griffin described SEF's chief contribution as a connector, facilitator, supporter of people. He articulated SEF's goal of making school systems more responsive to the needs of black youth and he emphasized the need for increased black leadership development if, as he put it, "cultural pluralism is to become a full-blown reality."

Mr. McMillan noted that the concept of education in recent years has expanded to include a host of activities which take place outside traditional institutional settings. The reason for this is that to effect change in the conditions under which people learn educators have to deal with a wide range of complex social and political questions. Thus, he said, SEF will be involved more and more with matters of public policy. He also pointed out that few other Southern foundations have played a major role in social change grantsmaking and he challenged them to do so.

Neither the retiring nor the new director set forth any panaceas for all of the problems of Southern black education. Both men are too experienced in dealing with institutions and governments to believe in any such instant solutions. But what was clear from their remarks was that the Southern Education Foundation's leadership role in attempting to bring about needed change will be expanded and intensified in the future.

Dr. Griffin:

"It is difficult for me to assess how important has been SEF's part in the struggle for greater equity in educational opportunity. Certainly our troops have been few and our ammunition in short supply. In fourteen years I have signed off only about a thousand grants. Although from time to time we have dipped into our capital funds, we have not managed to spend as much as a million dollars in any year. However, these modest funds sometimes have been applied strategically. By targeting our efforts on smaller but significant targets we have sometimes had the feeling that we had strength beyond our size.

Our Board member, Sam Allen, has called SEF the friendly corner foundation with the drive-in window. In Sam's description there is some truth. Our usefulness has been related to the fact that for a certain group of clients, we have been very available—and frequently on short notice.

Occasionally we have been lucky enough to see our seed money produce abundant results when we have provided the early support for an idea that later attracted larger support from other sources.

Perhaps more so than in most institutional settings, the chief contribution of the Southern Education Foundation has been its function in serving as a connector, facilitator, supporter of people. The measure of our contribution is not so much the funds we have distributed as the kind of people who have used our funds. We didn't make the winners but we have sometimes been able to make some difference for the winners.

Obviously there is nothing new about a foundation betting on people; when the history of the Rosenwald Fund was written it was called *Investment in People*. But SEF's people have been remarkable because of their regional orientation and their particular concern for bringing about changes related to race and education.

Always the goal has been to make the systems more responsive to the needs of black children and youth, to support efforts toward greater parental involvement, to increase access, to prepare Blacks for the leadership positions they must occupy if cultural pluralism is to become a full-blown reality."

Mr. McMillan

"Tonight represents a transition. As we mark this transition, it is important to remember what the Foundation has become. The substance of SEF's programs over the next few years is solidly rooted in its previous accomplishments. There is little question, I am sure, that given the changing needs of our constituency, particular program activities may also undergo change.

Three major program thrusts are posited for the Foundation. The first is a continuation of our traditional basic grant-making activities. The second involves support for Foundation-operated programs—we are now specifically interested in maintaining the direction of our current higher education program. The third component will formally recognize, and expand, SEF's ongoing efforts in public policy. We see these areas as complementary components of a strategic whole—a comprehensive and synergistic attempt to utilize our resources, and to give encouragement and cooperation to others, to continue what has been so ably begun.

In discussing our basic or "traditional" grant-making program, it is important to understand that the word "traditional" is used here to refer more to the Foundation's program than to the type of activity which is supported. For it is through this component that SEF has had its most consistent and effective impact upon the citizens of the South. SEF's grants have provided support to a wide range of activities. Often these grants are the difference between survival and extinction for worthwhile organizations who for one reason or another cannot attract support within the region and have not yet been recognized by grantor agencies outside the South. It is especially important today, as problems become more complex and technical, that the Foundation continues this general and widespread, although modest, support. Inequities based on class and race still plague the South and SEF must continue to nurture those institutions which offer solutions to persistent problems.

The Foundation will support old friends who demonstrate the ability and willingness to grapple with new problems—day care and other pre-school activities, and selected aspects of elementary and secondary education will con-

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Mr. McMillan *(continued)*

tinue to attract our interest. The desegregation effort will continue, as will assistance to traditionally black colleges and graduate programs. Special and deliberate efforts will be made to deal with the problems of professional education for minorities in the region, particularly in the areas of medical education and related health fields. Some attention will be given to educational opportunities for persons who have had no, or no recent, education—the illiterate and those who have been disadvantaged by technological change in the South. The Foundation will continue to be interested in the delivery of educational services: in teacher performance, system accountability and the problems associated with reaching an equitable means of financing public education.

This thrust speaks to our commitment to a wide-ranging program of grants within the region and a willingness to take measured risks. We intend to remain open to experimentation, to new solutions, and to those who cannot get a proper hearing elsewhere.

The Foundation's public policy thrust will, over the next several years, move beyond the institutionalization of our previous and current efforts. It will be aimed specifically at the world of action and it will operate on two distinct, but complementary levels. In considering requests under the traditional grant program which I have previously addressed, the Foundation will consider the potential impact of the proposed activity on various local, state, regional, or perhaps federal policies. While this procedure will by no means rule out support of activities which are not policy-relevant, it will recognize the Foundation's commitment to positive change in the region and underscore SEF's determination to assist those efforts directed toward bringing that change about.

The second aspect of SEF's formal adoption of a public policy component will enable the Foundation to initiate and/or operate specific programs for stated durations of time. These may be in any relevant area the Foundation determines is particularly pressing: competency testing, decision-making practices, technical assistance to selected education policy-makers, and special education are some examples which may concern us in the near future.

The Foundation then has planned an ambitious program. It is one which we believe has strong roots in a distinguished past, and one which is directed squarely toward future needs.”