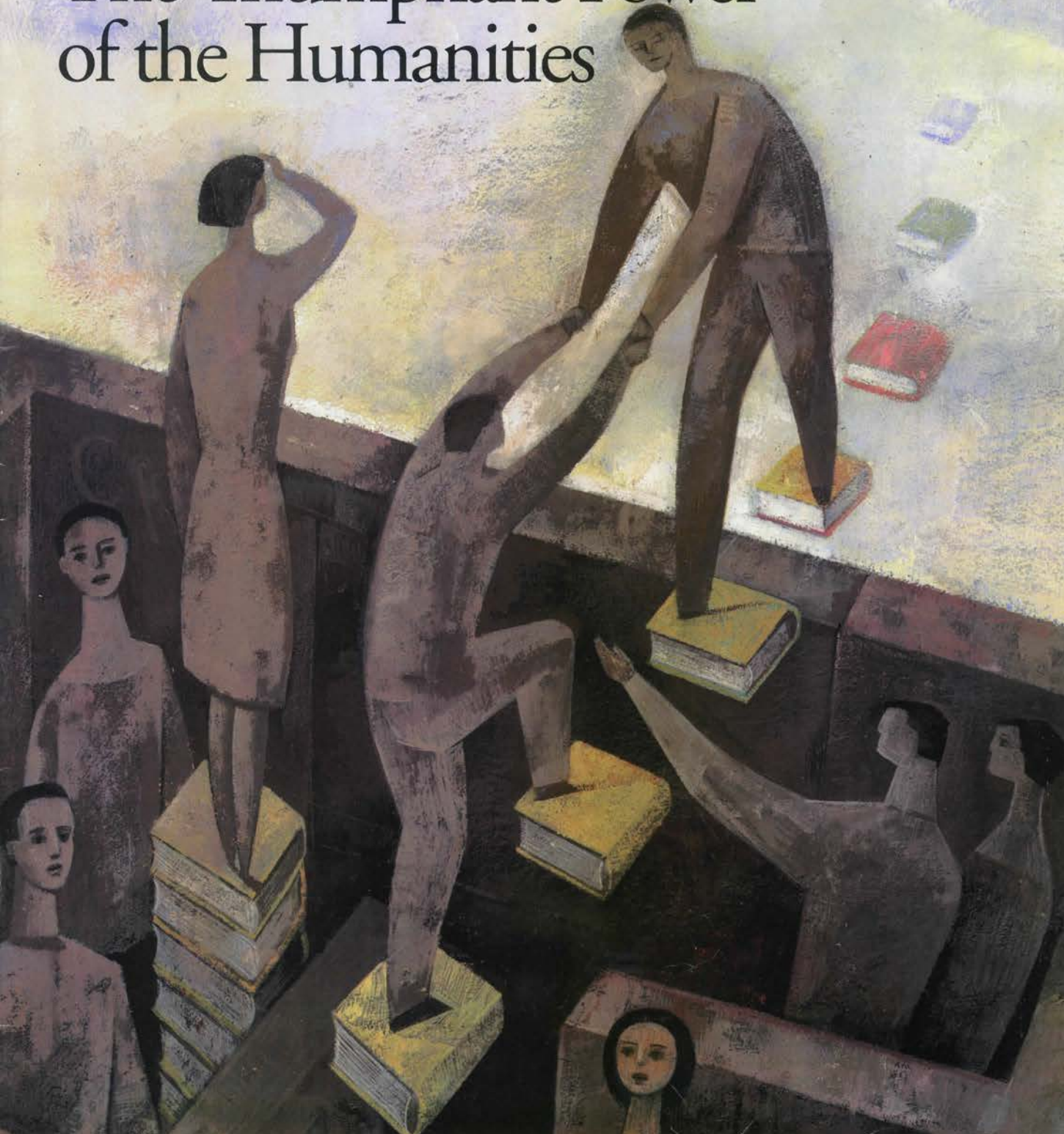


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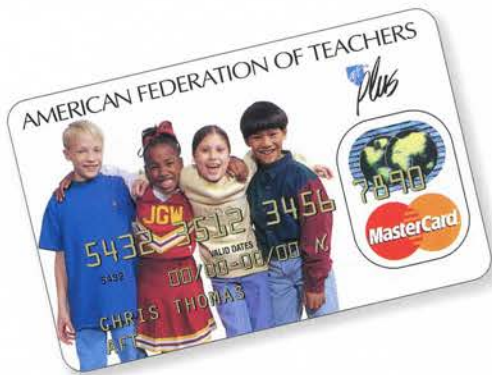
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By Earl Shorris

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THE TRIUMPHANT POWER OF THE HUMANITIES

BY EARL SHORRIS

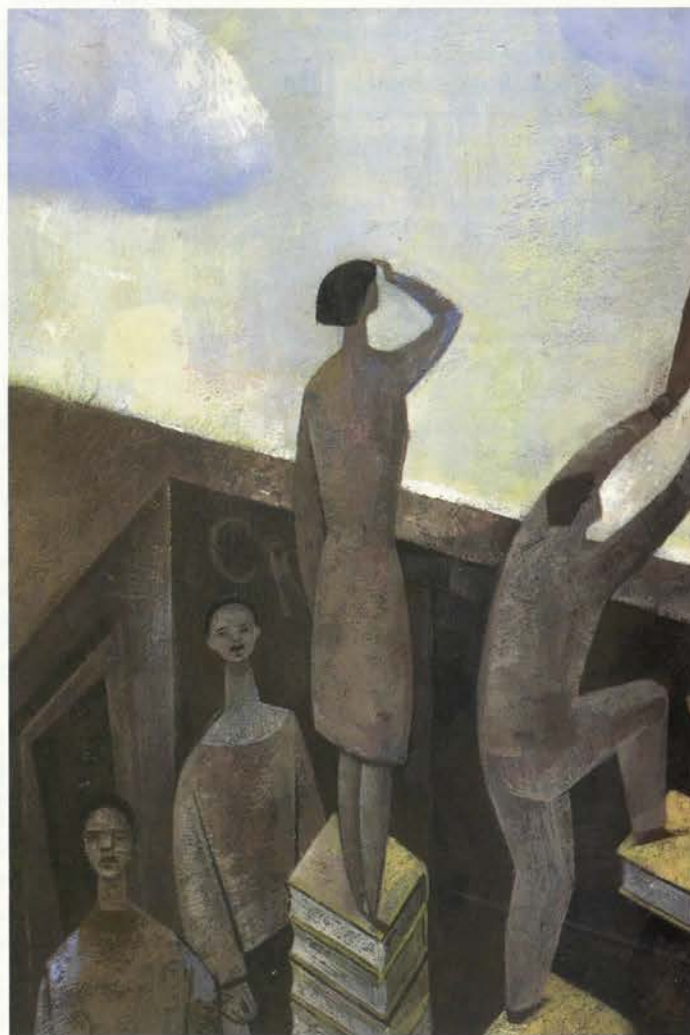
I RECENTLY published a book about poverty in America, but not the book I intended. The world took me by surprise—not once, but again and again. The poor themselves led me in directions I could not have imagined, especially the one that came out of a conversation in a maximum security prison for women that is set, incongruously, in a lush Westchester suburb fifty miles north of New York City.

I had been working on the book for about three years when I went to the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility for the first time. The staff and inmates had developed a program to deal with family violence, and I wanted to see how their ideas fit with what I had learned about poverty.

Numerous forces—hunger, isolation, illness, landlords, police, abuse, neighbors, drugs, criminals, and racism, among many others—exert themselves on the poor at all times and enclose them, making up a “surround of force” from which, it seems, they cannot escape. I had come to understand that this was what kept the poor from being political and that the absence of politics in their lives was what kept them poor. I don’t mean “political” in the sense of voting in an election but in the way Thucydides used the word: to mean activity with other people at every level, from the family to the neighborhood to the broader community to the city-state.

By the time I got to Bedford Hills, I had listened to more than six hundred people, some of them over the course of two or three years. Although my method is that of the *bricoleur*, the tinkerer who assembles a thesis of the bric-a-brac he finds in the world, I did not think there would be any more surprises. But I had not counted on what Viniece Walker was to say.

It is considered bad form in prison to speak of a person’s crime, and I will follow that precise etiquette here. I can tell you that Viniece Walker came to Bedford Hills when she was twenty years old, a high school



dropout who read at the level of a college sophomore, a graduate of crackhouses, the streets of Harlem, and a long alliance with a brutal man. On the surface Viniece has remained as tough as she was on the street. She speaks bluntly, and even though she is HIV positive and the virus has progressed during her time in prison, she still swaggers as she walks down the long prison corri-

Earl Shorris is a contributing editor of Harper's Magazine. He is the author of ten books, including New American Blues: A Journey through Poverty to Democracy, recently published by W. W. Norton. This essay originally appeared in the September 1997 issue of Harper's. Reproduced by special permission.



ILLUSTRATED BY WIKTOR SADOWSKI

dors. While in prison, Niece, as she is known to her friends, completed her high school requirements and began to pursue a college degree (psychology is the only major offered at Bedford Hills, but Niece also took a special interest in philosophy). She became a counselor to women with a history of family violence and a comforter to those with AIDS.

Only the deaths of other women cause her to stumble in the midst of her swaggering step, to spend days alone with the remorse that drives her to seek redemption. She goes through life as if she had been imagined by Dostoevsky, but even more complex than his fictions, alive, a person, a fair-skinned and freckled African-American woman, and in prison. It was she who responded to my sudden question, "Why do you think people are poor?"

We had never met before. The conversation around us focused on the abuse of women. Niece's eyes were perfectly opaque—hostile, prison eyes. Her mouth was set in the beginning of a sneer.

"You got to begin with the children," she said, speaking rapidly, clipping out the street sounds as they came into her speech.

She paused long enough to let the change of direction take effect, then resumed the rapid, rhythmless speech. "You've got to teach the moral life of downtown to the children. And the way you do that, Earl, is by taking them downtown to plays, museums, concerts, lectures, where they can learn the moral life of downtown."

I smiled at her, misunderstanding, thinking I was indulging her. "And then they won't be poor anymore?"

She read every nuance of my response, and answered angrily, "And they won't be poor *no more*."

"What you mean is—"

"What I mean is what I said—a moral alternative to the street."

She didn't speak of jobs or money. In that, she was like the others I had listened to. No one had spoken of jobs or money. But how could the "moral life of downtown" lead anyone out from the surround of force? How could a museum push poverty away? Who can dress in statues or eat the past? And what of the political life? Had Niece skipped a step or failed to take a step? The way out of poverty was politics, not the "moral life of downtown." But to enter the public world, to practice the political life, the poor had first to learn to reflect. That was what Niece meant by the "moral life of downtown." She did not make the error of divorcing ethics from politics. Niece had simply said, in a kind of shorthand, that no one could step out of the panicking circumstance of poverty directly into the public world.

Although she did not say so, I was sure that when she spoke of the "moral life of downtown" she meant something that had happened to her. With no job and no money, a prisoner, she had undergone a radical transformation. She had followed the same path that led to the invention of politics in ancient Greece. She had learned to reflect. In further conversation it became clear that when she spoke of "the moral life of downtown" she meant the humanities, the study of human constructs and concerns, which has been the source of reflection for the secular world since the Greeks first stepped back from nature to experience wonder at what they beheld. If the political life was the way out of poverty, the humanities provided an entrance to reflection and the political life. The poor did not need anyone to release them; an escape route existed. But to open this avenue to reflection and politics a major distinction between the preparation for the life of the rich and the life of the poor had to be eliminated.

ONCE NIECIE had challenged me with her theory, the comforts of tinkering came to an end; I could no longer make an homage to the happenstance world and rest. To test Niece's theory, students, faculty, and facilities were required. Quantitative measures would have to be developed; anecdotal information would also be useful. And the ethics of the experiment had to be considered: I resolved to do no harm. There was no need for the course to have a "sink-or-swim" character; it could aim to keep as many afloat as possible.

When the idea of an experimental course became clear in my mind, I discussed it with Dr. Jaime Inclán, director of the Roberto Clemente Family Guidance Center in lower Manhattan, a facility that provides counseling to poor people, mainly Latinos, in their own language and in their own community. Dr. Inclán offered the center's conference room for a classroom. We would put three metal tables end to end to approximate the boat-shaped tables used in discussion sections at the University of Chicago of the Hutchins era,¹ which I used as a model for the course. A card table in the back of the room would hold a coffeemaker and a few cookies. The setting was not elegant, but it would do. And the front wall was covered by a floor-to-ceiling blackboard.

Now the course lacked only students and teachers. With no funds and a budget that grew every time a new idea for the course crossed my mind, I would have to ask the faculty to donate its time and effort. Moreover, when Hutchins said, "The best education for the best is the best education for us all," he meant it: He insisted that full professors teach discussion sections in the college. If the Clemente Course in the Humanities was to follow the same pattern, it would require a faculty with the knowledge and prestige that

¹ *Under the guidance of Robert Maynard Hutchins (1929-1951), the University of Chicago required year-long courses in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences for the bachelor of arts degree. Hutchins developed the curriculum with the help of Mortimer Adler, among others; the Hutchins courses later influenced Adler's Great Books program.*

students might encounter in their first year at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, or Chicago.

I turned first to the novelist Charles Simmons. He had been assistant editor of *The New York Times Book Review* and had taught at Columbia University. He volunteered to teach poetry, beginning with simple poems, Housman, and ending with Latin poetry. Grace Glueck, who writes art news and criticism for the *New York Times*, planned a course that began with cave paintings and ended in the late twentieth century. Timothy Koranda, who did his graduate work at MIT, had published journal articles on mathematical logic, but he had been away from his field for some years and looked forward to getting back to it. I planned to teach the American history course through documents, beginning with the Magna Carta, moving on to the second of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, the Declaration of Independence, and so on through the documents of the Civil War. I would also teach the political philosophy class.

Since I was a naïf in this endeavor, it did not immediately occur to me that recruiting students would present a problem. I didn't know how many I needed. All I had were criteria for selection:

Age: 18-35.

Household income: Less than 150 percent of the Census Bureau's Official Poverty Threshold (though this was to change slightly).

Educational level: Ability to read a tabloid newspaper.

Educational goals: An expression of intent to complete the course.

Dr. Inclán arranged a meeting of community activists who could help recruit students. Lynette Lauretig of The Door, a program that provides medical and educational services to adolescents, and Angel Roman of the Grand Street Settlement, which offers work and training and GED programs, were both willing to give us access to prospective students. They also pointed out some practical considerations. The course had to provide bus and subway tokens, because fares ranged between three and six dollars per class per student, and the students could not afford sixty or even thirty dollars a month for transportation. We also had to offer dinner or a snack, because the classes were to be held from 6:00 P.M. to 7:30 P.M.

The first recruiting session came only a few days later. Nancy Mamis-King, associate executive director of the Neighborhood Youth & Family Services program in the South Bronx, had identified some Clemente Course candidates and had assembled about twenty of her clients and their supervisors in a circle of chairs in a conference room. Everyone in the room was black or Latino, with the exception of one social worker and me.

After I explained the idea of the course, the white social worker was the first to ask a question: "Are you going to teach African history?"

"No. We'll be teaching a section on American history, based on documents, as I said. We want to teach the ideas of history so that—"

"You have to teach African history."

"This is America, so we'll teach American history. If



'You've been cheated,' I said. 'Rich people learn the humanities; you didn't. The humanities are a foundation for getting along in the world, for thinking, for learning to reflect on the world instead of just reacting to whatever force is turned against you....'

we were in Africa, I would teach African history, and if we were in China, I would teach Chinese history."

"You're indoctrinating people in Western culture."

I tried to get beyond her. "We'll study African art," I said, "as it affects art in America. We'll study American history and literature; you can't do that without studying African-American culture, because culturally all Americans are black as well as white, Native American, Asian, and so on." It was no use; not one of them applied for admission to the course.

A FEW DAYS later Lynette Lauretig arranged a meeting with some of her staff at The Door. We disagreed about the course. They thought it should be taught at a much lower level. Although I could not change their views, they agreed to assemble a group of Door members who might be interested in the humanities.

On an early evening that same week, about twenty prospective students were scheduled to meet in a classroom at The Door. Most of them came late. Those who arrived first slumped in their chairs, staring at the floor or greeting me with sullen glances. A few ate candy or what appeared to be the remnants of a meal. The students were mostly black and Latino, one was Asian, and five were white; two of the whites were immigrants who had severe problems with English. When I introduced myself, several of the students would not shake my hand, two or three refused even to look at me, one girl giggled, and the last person to volunteer his name, a young man dressed in a Tommy Hilfiger sweatshirt and wearing a cap turned sideways, drawled, "Henry Jones, but they call me Sleepy, because I got these sleepy eyes—"

"In this class, we'll call you Mr. Jones."

He smiled and slid down in his chair so that his back was parallel to the floor.

Before I finished attempting to shake hands with the prospective students, a waif-like Asian girl with her mouth half-full of cake said, "Can we get on with it? I'm bored."

I liked the group immediately.

Having failed in the South Bronx, I resolved to approach these prospective students differently. "You've been cheated," I said. "Rich people learn the humanities; you didn't. The humanities are a foundation for getting along in the world, for thinking, for learning to reflect on the world instead of just reacting to whatever force is turned against you. I think the humanities are one of the ways to become political, and I don't mean political in the sense of voting in an election but in the broad sense." I told them Thucydides' definition of politics.

"Rich people know politics in that sense. They know how to negotiate instead of using force. They know how to use politics to get along, to get power. It doesn't mean that rich people are good and poor people are bad. It simply means that rich people know a more effective method for living in this society.

"Do all rich people, or people who are in the middle, know the humanities? Not a chance. But some do. And it helps. It helps to live better and enjoy life more. Will the humanities make you rich? Yes. Absolutely. But not in terms of money. In terms of life.

"Rich people learn the humanities in private schools and expensive universities. And that's one of the ways in which they learn the political life. I think that is the real difference between the haves and have-nots in this country. If you want real power, legitimate power, the kind that comes from the people and belongs to the people, you must understand politics. The humanities will help.

"Here's how it works: We'll pay your subway fare; take care of your children, if you have them; give you a snack or a sandwich; provide you with books and any other materials you need. But we'll make you think harder, use your mind more fully, than you ever have before. You'll have to read and think about the same kinds of ideas you would encounter in a first-year course at Harvard or Yale or Oxford.

"You'll have to come to class in the snow and the

rain and the cold and the dark. No one will coddle you, no one will slow down for you. There will be tests to take, papers to write. And I can't promise you anything but a certificate of completion at the end of the course. I'll be talking to colleges about giving credit for the course, but I can't promise anything. If you come to the Clemente Course, you must do it because you want to study the humanities, because you want a certain kind of life, a richness of mind and spirit. That's all I offer you: philosophy, poetry, art history, logic, rhetoric, and American history.

"Your teachers will all be people of accomplishment in their fields," I said, and I spoke a little about each teacher. "That's the course. October through May, with a two-week break at Christmas. It is generally accepted in America that the liberal arts and the humanities in particular belong to the elites. I think you're the elites."

The young Asian woman said, "What are you getting out of this?"

"This is a demonstration project. I'm writing a book. This will be proof, I hope, of my idea about the humanities. Whether it succeeds or fails will be up to the teachers and you."

All but one of the prospective students applied for admission to the course.

I repeated the new presentation at the Grand Street Settlement and at other places around the city. There were about fifty candidates for the thirty positions in the course. Personal interviews began in early September.

Meanwhile, almost all of my attempts to raise money had failed. Only the novelist Starling Lawrence, who is also editor in chief of W. W. Norton, which had contracted to publish the book; the publishing house itself; and a small, private family foundation supported the experiment. We were far short of our budgeted expenses, but my wife, Sylvia, and I agreed that the cost was still very low, and we decided to go ahead.

Of the fifty prospective students who showed up at the Clemente Center for personal interviews, a few were too rich (a postal supervisor's son, a fellow who claimed his father owned a factory in Nigeria that employed sixty people) and more than a few could not read. Two home-care workers from Local 1199 could not arrange their hours to enable them to take the course. Some of the applicants were too young: a thirteen-year-old and two who had just turned sixteen.

Lucia Medina, a woman with five children who told me that she often answered the door at the single-room occupancy hotel where she lived with a butcher knife in her hand, was the oldest person accepted into the course. Carmen Quiñones, a recovering addict who had spent time in prison, was the next eldest. Both were in their early thirties.

The interviews went on for days.

ABEL LOMAS² shared an apartment and worked part-time wrapping packages at Macy's. His father had abandoned the family when Abel was born. His mother was murdered by his stepfather when Abel was thirteen. With no one to turn to and no place to

² Not his real name.



'There's something missing,' she said. 'Plato's Allegory of the Cave. How can you teach philosophy to poor people without the Allegory of the Cave? The ghetto is the cave. Education is the light. Poor people can understand that.'

stay, he lived on the streets, first in Florida, then back in New York City. He used the tiny stipend from his mother's Social Security to keep himself alive.

After the recruiting session at The Door, I drove up Sixth Avenue from Canal Street with Abel, and we talked about ethics. He had a street tough's delivery, spitting out his ideas in crudely formed sentences of four, five, eight words, strings of blunt declarations, with never a dependent clause to qualify his thoughts. He did not clear his throat with badinage, as timidity teaches us to do, nor did he waste his breath with tact.

"What do you think about drugs?" he asked, the strangely breathless delivery further coarsened by his Dominican accent. "My cousin is a dealer."

"I've seen a lot of people hurt by drugs."

"Your family has nothing to eat. You sell drugs. What's worse? Let your family starve or sell drugs?"

"Starvation and drug addiction are both bad, aren't they?"

"Yes," he said, not "yeah" or "uh-huh" but a precise, almost formal "yes."

"So it's a question of the worse of two evils? How shall we decide?"

The question came up near Thirty-fourth Street, where Sixth Avenue remains hellishly traffic jammed well into the night. Horns honked, people flooded into the street against the light. Buses and trucks and taxicabs threatened their way from one lane to the next where the overcrowded avenue crosses the equally crowded Broadway. As we passed Herald Square and made our way north again, I said, "There are a couple of ways to look at it. One comes from Immanuel Kant, who said that you should not do anything unless you want it to become a universal law; that is, unless you think it's what everybody should do. So Kant wouldn't agree to selling drugs or letting your family starve."

Again he answered with a formal "Yes."

"There's another way to look at it, which is to ask what is the greatest good for the greatest number: in this case, keeping your family from starvation or keeping tens, perhaps hundreds of people from losing their lives to drugs. So which is the greatest good for the greatest number?"

"That's what I think," he said.

"What?"

"You shouldn't sell drugs. You can always get food to eat. Welfare. Something."

"You're a Kantian."

"Yes."

"You know who Kant is?"

"I think so."

We had arrived at Seventy-seventh Street, where he got out of the car to catch the subway before I turned east. As he opened the car door and the light came on, the almost military neatness of him struck me. He had the newly cropped hair of a cadet. His clothes were clean, without a wrinkle. He was an orphan, a street kid, an immaculate urchin. Within a few weeks he would be nineteen years old, the Social Security payments would end, and he would have to move into a shelter.

Some of those who came for interviews were too poor. I did not think that was possible when we began, and I would like not to believe it now, but it was true. There is a point at which the level of forces that surround the poor can become insurmountable, when there is no time or energy left to be anything but poor. Most often I could not recruit such people for the course; when I did, they soon dropped out.

Over the days of interviewing, a class slowly assembled. I could not then imagine who would last the year and who would not. One young woman submitted a neatly typed essay that said, "I was homeless once, then I lived for some time in a shelter. Right now, I have got my own space granted by the Partnership for the Homeless. Right now, I am living alone, with very

limited means. Financially I am overwhelmed by debts. I cannot afford all the food I need..."

A brother and sister, refugees from Tashkent, lived with their parents in the farthest reaches of Queens, far beyond the end of the subway line. They had no money, and they had been refused admission by every school to which they had applied. I had not intended to accept immigrants or people who had difficulty with the English language, but I took them into the class.

I also took four who had been in prison, three who were homeless, three who were pregnant, one who lived in a drugged dream-state in which she was abused, and one whom I had known for a long time and who was dying of AIDS. As I listened to them, I wondered how the course would affect them. They had no public life, no place; they lived within the surround of force, moving as fast as they could, driven by necessity, without a moment to reflect. Why should they care about fourteenth-century Italian painting or truth tables or the death of Socrates?

BETWEEN THE end of recruiting and the orientation session that would open the course, I made a visit to Bedford Hills to talk with Niece Walker. It was hot, and the drive up from the city had been unpleasant. I didn't yet know Niece very well. She didn't trust me, and I didn't know what to make of her. While we talked, she held a huge white pill in her hand. "For AIDS," she said.

"Are you sick?"

"My T-cell count is down. But that's neither here nor there. Tell me about the course, Earl. What are you going to teach?"

"Moral philosophy."

"And what does that include?"

She had turned the visit into an interrogation. I didn't mind. At the end of the conversation I would be going out into "the free world"; if she wanted our meeting to be an interrogation, I was not about to argue. I said, "We'll begin with Plato: the *Apology*, a little of the *Crito*, a few pages of the *Phaedo* so that they'll know what happened to Socrates. Then we'll read Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. I also want them to read Thucydides, particularly Pericles' Funeral Oration in order to make the connection between ethics and politics, to lead them in the direction I hope the course will take them. Then we'll end with *Antigone*, but read as moral and political philosophy as well as drama."

"There's something missing," she said, leaning back in her chair, taking on an air of superiority.

The drive had been long, the day was hot, the air in the room was dead and damp. "Oh, yeah," I said, "and what's that?"

"Plato's Allegory of the Cave. How can you teach philosophy to poor people without the Allegory of the Cave? The ghetto is the cave. Education is the light. Poor people can understand that."

AT THE beginning of the orientation at the Clemente Center a week later, each teacher spoke
(Continued on page 43)

TEACHERS: MISSIONARIES FOR LEARNING

BY JAMES M. BANNER, JR., AND HAROLD C. CANNON

A new and elegant little book—what one reviewer called a “Valentine to dedicated teachers”—would make the perfect holiday present to give to a colleague (or to yourself). Entitled The Elements of Teaching, each chapter focuses on the qualities of mind and spirit possessed by good teachers: learning, authority, ethics, order, imagination, compassion, patience, character, and pleasure. Each chapter ends with a portrait of a teacher who exemplifies—or fails to exemplify—the quality described. “While the characters are fictional,” the authors write, “they are by no means figments of our fancy; we have drawn their traits and tactics from teachers we have known and from our own experience. . . . No single person to our knowledge has ever possessed all the virtues or vices we portray, but all these attributes of teachers have existed somewhere, sometime.”

The authors note that “teachers . . . are rarely . . . invited to think about what they are and what they know of themselves.” This thoughtful book helps fill that void. We have chosen to reprint the chapter on learning.

—EDITOR

ALL TEACHING involves the transmission of knowledge, like the handing-on of the torch in the Olympic Games. Just as the flame must stay alive while the torch passes from hand to hand, so knowledge must remain kindled if anything is to be transferred

James M. Banner, Jr., an independent scholar, writer, and teacher, was a long-time member of the history department of Princeton University and an association director and book publisher. Harold C. Cannon, now retired, was a professor of classics and dean at Manhattanville College and a division director at the National Endowment for the Humanities. Their experiences also include teaching in the slums of south-east London, in community colleges, and on assignments abroad.

This essay is excerpted from The Elements of Teaching, by James M. Banner, Jr., and Harold C. Cannon, published by Yale University Press. Copyright ©1997 by Yale University. Reproduced with permission. For ordering information, call 1-800-YUP-READ.

from teacher to student. If the fire of knowledge is extinguished in teachers, even the best students are unlikely to reignite the torch and carry it to its ultimate destination—the achievement of understanding.

Teachers are presumed to possess knowledge, which their teaching communicates to their students. It follows that in order to teach they must know what they teach and know how to teach it; and in order to teach effectively, they must know deeply and well. Teaching requires more than knowing how to learn, although that is important. Above all, teaching requires learning itself; and, if possible under the demanding conditions that face so many teachers, it requires mastery of a subject.

By *learning* we usually mean one or all of three things: either the act of gaining knowledge—“to learn something”—or the knowledge gained by virtue of that act—“that which is known”—or the process of gaining knowledge—“learning how.” All three are essential to good teaching. And each kind of learning is and must be a lifelong pursuit, not something that, as is so often mistakenly believed, fills only the years before teachers enter their classrooms.



True teachers always seek (often they must struggle) to learn more, to remain current with what is known about their subjects, to keep those subjects fresh and exciting enough to sustain the exhausting act of teaching day in and day out, year after year—in sum, to expand their ability to teach. The need to keep learning has to do also with the nature of knowledge itself. Often thought to be static, knowledge is ever-changing and ever-growing; the known is never the same from one day to the next. Thus to possess and master knowledge, one must wrestle with it constantly, fashioning and re-fashioning what one knows and how to present it. Knowledge taunts us with its difficulty, its incompleteness, its ambiguity. As Aeschylus reminds us in the *Agamemnon*, to learn is to suffer.

Yet many mistakenly believe that teachers, at least at the precollegiate levels, can get by without learning, that they can just step into the classroom after gaining the minimum amount of knowledge in order to justify their being paid while they pursue their real love—say, coaching football—from which they cannot otherwise earn a living. But students know better, as the many

jokes about coaches in the classroom and ill-prepared teachers attest. Students usually know which of their teachers think teaching a mere job and which of them approach it as a learned calling. The most ambitious students quickly spot the teacher without command of a subject or the one who has no genuine thirst for knowledge; they mark that teacher as lacking in authority, as someone whose ignorance of a subject poses a threat to their own well-being by preventing them from learning all they might be taught. And they are right, for their well-being as students depends on their teachers' knowledge, and on their teachers' willingness to learn more all the time.

By saying that the true teacher must master a body of knowledge, we distinguish knowledge from information. Much confusion results from mistaking one for the other. Information is to knowledge what sound is to music, the unorganized material out of which the structured result is composed. We do not ask teachers to convey information; we seek information from newspapers, the stock market ticker tape, or price tags on items in a store. Instead, we ask teachers to transmit knowledge, that which is organized and for-



ILLUSTRATED BY BRU ASSOCIATES

mally known about a subject—facts, findings, explanations, hypotheses, and theories accepted for their proven accuracy, significance, beauty, utility, or power.

The struggle to gain and sustain this knowledge is probably the most exacting work of any teacher, and it never ends. True mastery of any subject is probably beyond our reach, but reach we must. Sustained intellectual vitality requires a self-imposed sentence to hard labor—the kind of labor, however, that liberates rather than imprisons, with all the satisfactions and rewards of liberation.

No one should think that mastery of a body of knowledge is easy. It is devilishly difficult, necessitating a degree of devotion, concentration, discipline, and effort demanded by few other pursuits. And because knowledge is always a work in progress, it is never complete; we must run to keep up with it.

Mastering a body of knowledge well enough to convey it to others is a lonely task; it is usually a silent conversation between someone who is learning and others—authors, scientists, artists—many of whom are dead, known only through their words on the page, the symbols with which they have worked, or the art they have created. Often, too, learning must proceed without external incentives or rewards—no additional pay, no more promotions. Gaining knowledge is private, individual, solitary. How then is knowledge sustained? And why should it be?

For the most skilled and devoted teachers, knowledge comes through an intense love of learning and of a subject, a love whose origins may be mysterious and unknown, awakened perhaps by a chance encounter with a children's book, by a parent's praise, or by a cherished teacher's encouragement—by something special that forever marked the future teacher. Most devoted teachers were "hooked" early by some distinctive curiosity, whose magic and mystery continues to hold them; and thus teachers are always trying similarly to "hook" their own students. Knowledge, to say nothing of keenness of instruction, is also sustained by a never-ceasing aspiration to learn more, an insatiable yearning to know and to understand. So, too, knowledge is strengthened by teachers' openness to students' beguiling ability to involve them in their own learning, to pull teachers in with their own excitement and curiosity.

So teachers are and must be thinkers in their own right, not just "doers" who happen to teach and possess the skill to do so. Their minds must be continually restocked and nourished. They must become capable of gaining and using knowledge on their own, independent of others, and of leading others to do so, too. True teachers liberate the thinking of others.

What, then, does it mean to say that a teacher must possess learning?

Learning means knowing and mastering a subject. For many people, thrust suddenly into a new classroom and asked suddenly to teach a new subject, this may seem an impossible luxury. Yet a teacher must seek to have full command of a subject, not just enough knowledge to get by or to know more than the very best students. A teacher should possess enough knowledge of a subject to be able to consider it independently, to play confidently with it, to enter-

tain surmises about it, to imagine its possible significances and implications when it is placed in various contexts. A teacher, that is, should know enough to be a thinker as well as an instructor. When that is the case, the teacher has joined a discipline, a professional guild of people with an agreed-upon warrant to consider themselves guardians of, and contributors to, a branch of knowledge.

Learning embodies the act of learning. In many respects, the search for knowledge is infectious; it can be transmitted to others, and it can be caught. Possibly the best way for teachers to transmit learning is to embody the act of doing so—to be seen among papers and books ("these kinsmen of the shelf," as Emily Dickinson called them), scurrying toward a library, exclaiming upon the solution to a problem, expressing delight when a student proposes a plausible interpretation new to the teacher. Teachers, in showing their students how to learn, must seek to be caught *flagrante delicto* with their subject, for the aspiration to learn should be as compelling to students as the knowledge they gain. It is a teacher's infectious enthusiasm for learning itself, as much as the student's own curiosity about the teacher's subject, that is apt to captivate a student.

Veteran teachers, long familiar with the material they teach, may choose to stop learning because it seems no longer justified. This is always a mistake, if only because it risks suggesting an unbridgeable distance between the teacher, who seems to know it all, and the students, who may think they know nothing—which is also wrong. Thus for a teacher to stop learning is to destroy one of the principal means a teacher has to bridge the gap between ignorance and knowledge and between despair and hope. What is more, to stop learning suggests to students that a teacher is bored with the subject; and, alas, boredom is every bit as infectious as enthusiasm.

Learning requires keeping up with one's subject. This may be a teacher's hardest task, for it requires application after the normal, depleting workday is done. Yet it must be undertaken. If a teacher falls behind in a subject, so do the students, whose preparation for advancement in competition with others is thereby diminished. Keeping current with a body of knowledge does not, however, necessitate only solitary reading and study; it can be accomplished with colleagues in study groups, in formal programs of continuing professional education, and by attendance at meetings of scholars and fellow professionals. What matters is not the means of staying abreast of knowledge but the actual pursuit of that knowledge.

Learning conveys the spirit and love of learning to others. All teachers are, in effect, missionaries for their subjects. They must care passionately about what they teach; they must be able to reveal to their students how exciting learning can be. That is an additional reason why teachers must clearly possess knowledge, or at least display a visible desire to possess it; only then can their love of knowledge be exemplified in their enthusiasm and bearing, in the sheer fun of engaging in discussion, hunting down a fact, polishing a skill, exploring a new subject, reading a book for the first

time. Of course, trying to transmit knowledge has its risks, the chief being that students often do not want to learn—or at least to learn what they are asked to learn at the time in their lives when they are asked to learn it. A pertinent story is told of John Scotus Eri-gena, an Irish teacher and philosopher in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor in northern France. Our philosopher was murdered by a group of his students who hacked him to death with their pens because, it is said, he tried to force them to think.

One moral of this tale, among others, is that not all subjects, after all, captivate students as naturally as, say, learning to drive attracts the interest of teenagers. The culture has already done a reasonably good job of explaining to the young the advantages of driving a car. But when it comes to such subjects as foreign languages or the physical sciences, teachers have more work cut out for them; it is they, and few others, who can best reveal how and why subjects scarcely known to their students offer excitement, satisfaction, and utility. And to do that, teachers must know their subjects thoroughly and assume the responsibility and risk of finding ways to impart those subjects to their often recalcitrant students.

Learning means being open to the knowledge of others, especially of one's own students. Often, because teachers must learn from other authorities in a field, they forget that their students may be authorities too, that they may surpass their teachers in love for a subject, or knowledge of it, or skill and intelligence. After all, is it not all teachers' best dream that their students become so fueled by their teachers' knowledge as to surpass it? Thus teachers must signal to their students that the search for knowledge is cooperative and collective, that its pursuit is a shared journey—though one that often requires much solitary work.

Detecting ignorance while inadvertently overlooking understanding is one of the great hazards of all teaching. That is why teachers must work hard to encourage their students to make known their knowledge to other students; that is why they must provide the settings, free from constraint and evaluation, in which students can do so. In this way, teachers themselves are helped to focus on what students know rather than on what they do not.

Learning provides the basis for independent thought. Active engagement in a field of knowledge becomes critical at that stage when teachers realize their engagement arises from the possession of enough knowledge to be confident in thinking about the field independently. Recognition of oneself as a thinker as well as a teacher—as someone who is part of a larger community of learning, as capable as anyone else of engaging in the intellectual play of knowledge—may be among the most difficult transitions in a teacher's professional life. Yet when that transition occurs, a new world opens, new authority is gained, and a new teacher is born—one who determines independently what is best for students and what they should know. At this stage, too, the teacher recognizes that learning is an end in itself, that not everything needs to be related to instruction, that thinking is a world without end, without known outcome.

Learning justifies learning. A teacher's confidence in the intrinsic worth of knowledge is fundamental to all instruction. Such deep-rooted belief makes a teacher able to relate knowledge to life, to all human experience. To students' typical questions, "Why do we have to learn this? What good is such knowledge?" the typical instrumental answers come to mind easily: "Because it's required by the school board." "Because you will do better on your licensing exam." "Because you'll need it later when you study economics." But the teacher with deep learning answers with conviction and authority more pertinently: "Because acquiring this knowledge is difficult. Because you will feel triumphant when it no longer confuses you. Because you will enjoy what you can do with it. Because in learning it, you may discover new perspectives on life, new ways of thinking. Because its possession will make you more alive than its alternative, which is ignorance."

The teachers whom we remember most vividly are those who knew their subjects best and transmitted them with the greatest intensity and love. They were confident in their knowledge, and not dogmatic; they acted out their own struggles to understand in front of us, joyful when they understood something fresh, troubled when they did not or could not know. They joined us at the laboratory bench, in the library, at the museum, puzzling with us over a test tube result, complaining about a book's interpretation, discovering a painting's meaning. They stood before us to present the act of learning with a sort of honesty that we rarely encounter in everyday life. It is such examples of passion and exhilaration that students need in their teachers. Only in that way can students meet the importunate demands of learning with a full heart; only then can the thirst for learning move them on.

* * *

FELICIA GONZALEZ tucked her two children into bed, told them each a favorite bedtime story, kissed them good night, and returned to the kitchen. With her husband away on business, it fell to her to clean up from dinner and straighten up the children's toys alone. It was 9 o'clock; she'd be up at 6:00 A.M., getting her children off to school at 7:30, and in front of her first class at 8:30. Fortunately, she had no papers to grade, and earlier that afternoon she had reviewed what she was going to teach tomorrow by skimming through class preparation notes from the past few times she had taught the same course. So she could go to bed. Yet she hadn't opened the new book that she'd bought on the establishment clause of the Constitution, and she would be teaching about the First Amendment to her eleventh-grade advanced placement history class the next day. She realized that she should try to read some of the new work. And so she did—not to her satisfaction, but enough to learn its author's argument and to reexamine what the Framers meant by an establishment of religion. She turned off the light at 11:00.

The next day, sure enough, one of her students asked her to explain not the clauses prohibiting limits on the right of assembly or of the press, which were

(Continued on page 46)

THE NEW NEA: REINVENTING TEACHER UNIONS FOR A NEW ERA

BY BOB CHASE

As many people are aware, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association have been working more closely together on a number of initiatives to improve education. On November 5, we announced the formation of a national joint council to work on three issues: school safety and discipline, school infrastructure—the repairs, renovations, and new construction that are so desperately needed—and teacher quality. This first formal collaboration signals our intention to put our competition aside and to combine our energies, resources, and expertise on behalf of our nation's public schoolchildren. In addition to this collaboration, we are continuing to explore the possibility of a merger between our two organizations.

With the development of these events, we thought AFT members would be interested in knowing about some of the discussions and changes taking place within the NEA. The direction of these discussions is closely aligned with positions the AFT has supported and indicates a growing closeness between the views of our two organizations. Bob Chase, the president of the NEA, described his vision for the organization he heads in a speech he delivered to the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., earlier this year. Many of us were there to hear it, we thought it was a terrific speech, and we are pleased to be able to share his remarks with our readers.

—SANDRA FELDMAN
AFT PRESIDENT

I CAME HERE this afternoon to introduce the new National Education Association—the new union we are striving to create in public education. By way of preface, however, I'd like to speak not about our union, per se, but about teachers and the teaching profession.

Teaching has always been more a calling than a career. Speaking from twenty-five years' experience in the classroom, I can testify: As a teacher, you never face an existential crisis about the meaning of your work. Because if you are a good teacher, you see it in

your kids' faces. You see it in the fires you kindle in their minds. You see it in your students' gratitude when they come back to visit you years later.

But there is another side to teaching—a side that can be painful: the almost casual belittling and denigration of teachers that is all too commonplace in our society.

To take just one example: Several weeks ago, John Silber, former Boston University president and now chair of the Massachusetts Board of Education, said (and I quote): "We don't have the people going into the teaching profession that we used to. The women's movement gave women alternatives more attractive than teaching. Before, it was secretary, teacher, prostitute."

In the uproar that followed, Dr. Silber claimed to have been speaking in jest. But the damage was done.

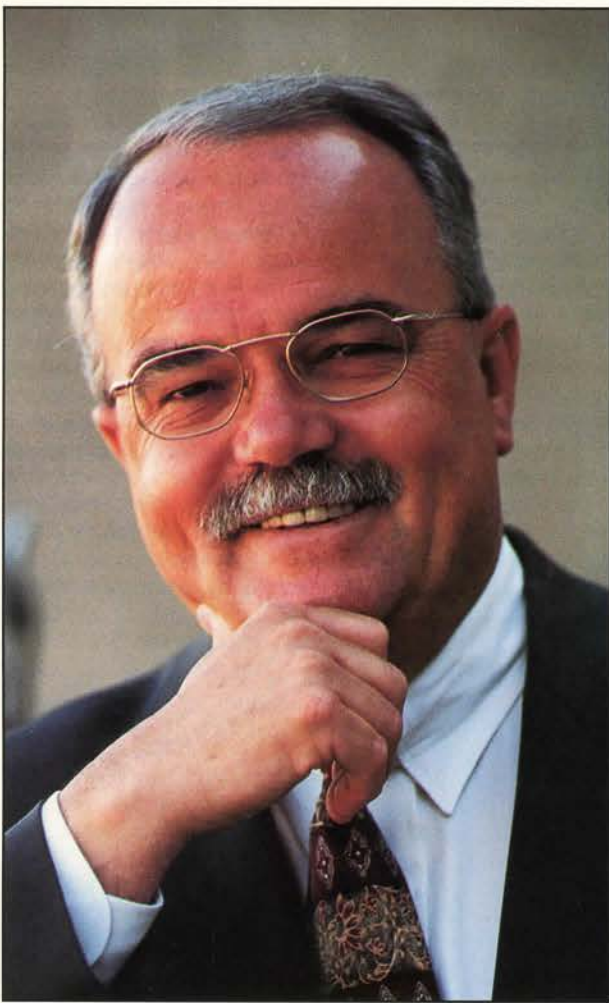
And my point is this: I will be talking today about NEA's new ideas for lifting up teachers as professionals and boosting the quality of schools. But the fact is that all our plans will come to naught if Americans do not honor the work of teachers ... if Americans don't respect the incredibly difficult and important work that public school teachers do.

When I was young, I studied for a time at seminary. And I faced a tough choice between the priesthood or a career in education. In large part because of all the terrific teachers I had when growing up, I chose teaching. And I have never regretted the choice.

I chose teaching for one reason: to make a difference for children. Likewise, last year, I campaigned for and was elected president of NEA for that same reason: to make a difference for children—but on a larger scale—*by fundamentally recreating NEA as the champion of quality teaching and quality public schools in the United States.*

Now, as we all know, the last several years have not been kind to newly elected leaders who come to Washington in the guise of revolutionaries. However, I

Bob Chase is the president of the National Education Association.



COURTESY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

am not shy about my plans to redirect our great Association in big ways. Nor am I naive about the magnitude of this challenge.

Bear in mind that, for nearly three decades now, the National Education Association has been a traditional, somewhat narrowly focused, union. We have butted heads with management over bread-and-butter issues—to win better salaries, benefits, and working conditions for school employees. And we have succeeded.

Today, however, it is clear to me—and to a critical mass of teachers across America—that while this narrow, traditional agenda remains important, it is *utterly inadequate* to the needs of the future. It will not serve our members' interest in greater professionalism. It will not serve the public's interest in better quality public schools. And it will not serve the interests of America's children ... the children we teach ... the children who motivated us to go into teaching in the first place.

And this latter interest must be decisive. After all, America's public schools do not exist for teachers and other employees. They do not exist to provide us with jobs and salaries. Schools *do* exist *for the children*—to give students the very best ... beginning with a quality teacher in every classroom.

Ladies and gentlemen, the imperative now facing

public education could not be more stark: Simply put, in the decade ahead, we must revitalize our public schools from within or they will be dismantled from without. And I am not talking here about the critics on talk radio who seek higher ratings by bashing public education and trashing teachers. I am talking about the vast majority of Americans who support public education but are clearly dissatisfied. They want higher quality public schools, and they want them *now*.

Even in the many school districts across America that are already performing at high levels—and there are thousands of them, including, locally, Montgomery County, Maryland, and Fairfax County, Virginia ... even in these high-performance systems, the public is demanding that we do better. And given these expectations, I am convinced that school unions best serve their members by pursuing an aggressive agenda of excellence and reform in public education.

To this end, we aim not so much to *redirect* NEA, as to *reinvent* it. Yes, reinvention is a tall order. But we know we can do it, because we did it once before. In the 1960s, we took a rather quiet, genteel professional association of educators, and we reinvented it as an assertive—and, when necessary, militant—labor union.

But here is a critical point: When we reinvented our association in the 1960s, we modeled it after traditional, industrial unions. Likewise, we accepted the industrial premise: Namely, that labor and management have distinct, conflicting roles and interests ... that we are destined to clash ... that the union-management relationship is inherently adversarial.

Yes, these traditional industrial-style teacher unions have brought major improvements to public education: We have won smaller class sizes and better conditions for teaching and learning. We also have fought for decent salaries to attract and retain qualified teachers. And we have put our money where our mouth is when it comes to school reform. Over the past decade, NEA has spent some \$70 million on reform initiatives—most recently, sponsoring six charter schools across the country.

So the National Education Association is a proud organization—proud of the major improvements we have won in public education. However, these gains have been inadequate. And, too often, they have been won through confrontation at the bargaining table or, in extreme cases, after bitter strikes.

Which brings me to the crux of my message today. These industrial-style, adversarial tactics simply are not suited to the next stage of school reform. After much soul-searching and self-criticism within NEA, we know that it's time to create a new union—an association with an entirely new approach to our members, to our critics, and to our colleagues on the other side of the bargaining table. But to clear the air, I must publicly speak some rather blunt truths.

The fact is that while the vast majority of teachers are capable and dedicated—professionals who put children's interests first—there are indeed some bad teachers in America's schools. And it is *our* job as a union to improve those teachers or—failing that—to get them out of the classroom.

The fact is that while some of NEA's critics aim only to dismantle public education, many others care deeply about our schools, and we have been too quick to dismiss their criticisms and their ideas for change.

The fact is that, in some instances, we have used our power to block uncomfortable changes ... to protect the narrow interests of our members, and not to advance the interests of students and schools.

The fact is that while NEA does not control curriculum, set funding levels, or hire and fire, we cannot go on denying responsibility for school quality. We can't wash our hands of it and say, "That's management's job." School quality—the quality of the environment where students learn and where our members work—must be *our* responsibility as a union.

The fact is that, while the majority of NEA members teach in successful—for the most part suburban—schools, we have been wrong to ignore the plight of inner-city schools. And to rectify this wrong, we have convened an Emergency Commission on Urban Children to put NEA foursquare in the fight to save urban children and their schools.

The fact is that, too often, NEA has sat on the sidelines of change ... naysaying ... quick to say what won't work and slow to say what will. It is time for our great association to lead the reform, to engineer change, to take the initiative, to be in the vanguard.

And, on that score, the fact is that no group knows more about the solutions that will work in our schools than America's teachers. We *know* what our schools need: higher academic standards; stricter discipline; an end to social promotions; less bureaucracy; more resources where they count, in the classroom; schools that are richly connected to parents and to the communities that surround them.

To an amazing degree, teachers, school boards, and administrators all agree on this reform agenda. And this commonality cries out for us to build an entirely new union-management relationship in public education.

Our challenge is clear: Instead of relegating teachers to the role of production workers—with no say in organizing their schools for excellence—we need to en-

list teachers as full partners, indeed, as co-managers of their schools. Instead of contracts that reduce flexibility and restrict change, we—and our schools—need contracts that empower and enable.

MANY TRADITIONALISTS within NEA, predictably, have difficulty accepting this new unionism. They say that what I propose is a threat to union clout and solidarity. To which I give a direct answer: This new collaboration is not about sleeping with the enemy. It is about waking up to our shared stake in reinvigorating the public education enterprise. It is about educating children better, more effectively, more ambitiously.

Permit me to add a personal note here. I well understand the traditional union view—the view that says a union's job is strictly "to look out for me." I understand it because I once held this view myself.

In 1983, after the *Nation at Risk* report came out, NEA president Mary Hatwood Futrell tried to mobilize our union to lead the reform movement in American public education. At the time, as a member of NEA's executive committee, I took a leading role in *opposing* her. I argued that we should stick to our knitting—stick to bargaining for better pay and working conditions.

That, ladies and gentlemen, was the biggest mistake of my career. I was wrong. And today, with all due respect, I say to the traditionalists in NEA's ranks—to those who argue that we should stick to our knitting, leaving education reform to others: You are mistaken.

I also say—I insist—that the new course we have charted at NEA is not strictly about vision. As British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan said long ago: "If you want a vision, consult a saint. I am a politician." And so it is with me. I am a teacher whose heart and soul are still in the classroom; I still instinctively check for chalk smudges on my clothes. I am also a committed unionist; a veteran of more hard-fought collective bargaining sessions than I can remember. I deal in practical, concrete, tangible changes. I deal in results.

The new direction we are charting at NEA is not only about vision, it is about *action*. It is about changing how each of our local affiliates does business, changing how they bargain, changing what issues they put on the table, changing the ways they help their members to become the best teachers they can be.

I repeat, the new NEA is about *action*. And, on that score, I challenge the American public: Watch what we *do*, not what we *say*.

Our new directions are clear: Putting issues of school quality front and center at the bargaining table ... collaborating actively with management on an agenda of school reform ... involving teachers and other school employees in organizing their schools for excellence.

The good news is that teachers on the front line are already advancing this agenda. They are ahead of NEA's leadership. Indeed, my motto as NEA president should be: I am their leader, I must follow them.

For example, imagine a future where teachers—under their union contract—have responsibility for

nearly three-quarters of a school system's budget ... and they use that authority to cut class sizes and boost academic quality. Well, that future is now. I just described the work of our local union in New Albany, Indiana.

Imagine a 21st century school district where the teachers throw out the traditional contract entirely and replace it with a joint labor-management "constitution"—an agreement that allows teachers, in effect, to co-manage the school district. Utopian speculation? Hardly. Our affiliate in Glenview, Illinois, has been operating under such an agreement since 1989.

Or imagine the president of a local NEA union taking the lead in founding a public charter school ... a new school that she and her colleagues manage by themselves, without a principal. I just described the work of Jan Noble, president of our affiliate in Colorado Springs.

By any measure, these are bold new arrangements. But a growing number of NEA teachers insist on going one step farther. They argue that it's not enough to cooperate with management on school reform. Quality must begin at home—within our own ranks. If a teacher is not measuring up in the classroom—to put it baldly, if there is a bad teacher in one of our schools—then *we* must do something about it.

To the traditional unionists who say that this is heresy—a threat to union solidarity—I say: Come visit our NEA local in Columbus, Ohio. The Columbus Education Association designates senior teachers to serve as full-time consultants in the classroom. They intervene to help veteran teachers whose skills need sharpening. In most cases, this intervention is successful. But in roughly 10 percent of cases, the consultants—*members of our union*—take the lead in counseling a problem teacher to leave the profession ... and, if necessary, they recommend dismissal.

This is courageous work—work that entails real political risk for teacher-leaders within their local unions. I believe it is exactly the right course for the new NEA.

And while I'm on the subject of teacher professionalism, I'd like to use this occasion to announce that NEA has entered into a partnership with Stetson University to play a major role in the new Celebration Teaching Academy. This remarkable academy will be part of Walt Disney Company's new town of Celebration, Florida, and it will work hand in hand with the local public school. It will be for educators what a teaching hospital is for doctors: a place where teachers from around the nation can come to sharpen their skills and be exposed to "best practices." NEA professionals on site will help to shape the curriculum and to direct the academy's Master Teacher Institute. And we'll have other partners in this venture as well, including Johns Hopkins, Auburn, Harvard, and the University of Minnesota.

As you can imagine, we are delighted to play a major role in this important project. Indeed, the Celebration Teaching Academy is exactly what the new NEA is all about: A commitment to lifting up teachers as professionals and to revitalizing public education.

This commitment is good for children. What's more, as I have argued today, it is also tough-minded union-

ism—looking out for the enlightened self-interest of our members ... responding to their demands for a union that cares deeply about quality.

At the end of the 19th century, labor pioneer Samuel Gompers famously stated the goal of his union in one word. "More!" Today—entering a new era—teachers are setting forth another goal for their unions: Better!

So let me state categorically what NEA will do.

To parents and the public, NEA pledges to work with you to ensure that every classroom in America has a quality teacher. This means we accept our responsibility to assist in removing teachers—that small minority of teachers—who are unqualified, incompetent, or burned out.

To the business community, NEA pledges to work with you to raise and enforce standards for student achievement, to ensure that high school graduates are—at a minimum—literate, competent in the basic skills, equipped for the workplace.

To President Clinton and the Congress, we at NEA pledge our enthusiastic support for the extraordinary agenda—a truly 21st century agenda for children and education—set forth in the President's State of the Union address.

To school boards and administrators, NEA pledges to engage you in a new partnership—at the bargaining table and in our day-to-day relationship—aimed at transforming the quality of our schools.

And to those who seek genuinely to reform public education—and not to dismantle it—NEA pledges to join with you to challenge the entrenched system, to fight for the changes that we know are urgent and necessary.

These are our pledges.

FINALLY, PERMIT me a closing thought about my colleagues in the teaching profession. I dare say that everyone listening to me today has been changed for the better by teachers. Some—including me—have had their entire lives turned around by inspired teachers.

I began my remarks by quoting John Silber on teachers. For sake of balance, I'd like to share a passage from Pat Conroy's *Prince of Tides*. Many of you will remember that the book's main character, Tom, is an English teacher and high school football coach. Toward the end of the book, his sister argues with him, and she accuses him of being a failure. She says, "You sold yourself short. You could've been more than a teacher and a coach."

To which Tom replies: "Listen to me. There's no word in the English language I revere more than *teacher*. None. My heart sings when a kid refers to me as his teacher and it always has. I've honored myself and the entire family by becoming one."

Ladies and gentlemen, every time I read that passage, *my* heart sings. It expresses the respect I feel for America's teachers.

With that respect comes my absolute confidence that we can build the new NEA I have described for you this afternoon. What's more, I have absolute confidence that this new NEA can be a driving force in revitalizing public education for America's children. □

BUILDING AN EXCELLENT TEACHER CORPS: HOW JAPAN DOES IT

BY CAROL J. KINNEY

Because of the consistent high ranking of Japanese students in comparative international studies, it behooves us to continue to probe why this is so. We know there are many elements involved. These include a rigorous national curriculum, with strong incentives provided by examinations that are tied to that curriculum; deep cultural and family support for education and the widely held belief that hard work is more important than innate ability in determining how well a child does; a student body less beset by the often wrenching problems that stem from poverty on the one extreme and indulgence on the other; and the high quality of Japanese teachers. It is this latter factor that is explored in the article that follows.

Writing in this magazine six years ago, researchers Harold Stevenson and James Stigler—this country's preeminent authorities on the differences between Asian and American educational systems—made this observation: "We, of course, witnessed examples of excellent lessons in American classrooms. And there are, of course, individual differences among Asian teachers. But what has impressed us in our personal observations and in the data from our observational studies is how remarkably well most Asian teachers teach. It is the widespread excellence of Asian class lessons, the high level of performance of the average teacher, that is stunning."

To account for this widespread excellence, we must look to the college preparation programs and exams required of aspiring Japanese teachers; their salaries, benefits, and working conditions as compared to other college graduates; their standing in society; their treatment as professionals in their schools; and last but not least, the vast array of opportunities to keep on learning throughout their careers, most markedly the rich collegial interaction that every profession requires if it is to build and refine its knowledge base.

The following article is adapted from an extensive series of background papers for the Case Study Project as part of the Third International Mathematics and Sci-

ence Study (TIMSS), the results of which were announced earlier this year. The background papers include both a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and a case study component designed to provide more in-depth information on a number of topics involving three of the nearly fifty countries studied. The case study sites represent a sampling of regional variation within each nation as well as a sample of schools with high, middle, and low levels of academic achievement. In Japan, the primary research site was Naka City, on the main island of Honshu, with secondary sites in the North (Kita City) and South (Minami City).

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—EDITOR

HOW DO Japan's schools attempt to recruit, develop, and keep teachers who not only are highly motivated and like children but also have the requisite skills and knowledge? The answer was hinted at when a principal told me they must nurture all types of teachers through their various life stages. More directly, teachers and administrators described extensive training opportunities. Equally important, according to the teachers and administrators studied, the closely knit communities of teachers in each school that I observed and the continual sharing of information and casual banter that develops along with a regular rotation of teachers, provide an atmosphere of support and learn-

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ing. Underlying the nurturing, training, and sharing described to me by the teachers interviewed in this study is a sense among teachers that there is some respect for their profession, competition to enter teaching jobs, an adequate salary, work hours that compare favorably to those in companies, chances for advancement and new responsibilities, and job security.

The teachers interviewed reported that they believe their profession is fairly well respected and of above-average pay, although not high paying. Their work lives are busy, but teachers also report some flexibility in their use of time. Teachers report that the amount of time they spend outside of the usual 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. workday depends on their personality, their goals, and their stage in life. In general, teachers reported that they are both responsible for and in control of most of what occurs in their schools. Although both teachers and administrators described a few circumstances when administrators assert control and assign teachers to tasks or schools that were not requested, teachers see most assignments as part of what they expected when they became teachers. Teachers are generally required to be at their schools for at least eight hours a day. Junior high school and high school teachers usually only teach four of the six hours of classes each day. Elementary school teachers sometimes teach more class hours and are expected to be at school for planning, meetings with other teachers, advising students, and socializing for about a half-hour before classes begin in the morning and for at least an hour after school ends in the afternoon. Most teachers reported that they do all their school-related work at the school, which contributes to much interaction among teachers.

Almost all teachers have graduated from four-year universities and are required to have taken many credits in their area of specialization. Teachers interact with other teachers, attend inservice training, and many voluntarily participate in small research and study groups. Novice teachers are assigned formal mentors during their first year on the job. The teachers interviewed reported that throughout their teaching years they look to other teachers for guidance and help. Teachers told me they feel they are effective at the basic tasks of teaching, and they described being explicitly taught about lesson planning, the use of materials, and more basic skills such as how to write on the chalkboard. A variety of teaching techniques and presentation styles were observed, and most teachers demonstrated a substantial repertoire of methods. Most teachers interviewed expressed a desire to improve themselves and their ability to reach out to all students.

RELATIVE TO other jobs for college graduates in Japan, teaching provides comparable pay and high job autonomy. It is difficult to compare Japanese and American teachers' salaries directly because of different benefits and costs of living in the two countries. However, using an exchange rate of ¥125 per dollar, the average annual total monetary compensation for Japanese teachers was approximately \$42,600 at the elementary school level, \$42,000 at the junior high school level, and \$45,500 at the senior high school level in 1992 (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995, p.

121). The average wages for all college graduates in Japan were approximately \$52,000 for men and \$34,000 for women across all industries (Statistics Bureau of the Management and Coordination Agency, 1995, p. 112), so for women, teachers' average salaries compare favorably. In Japan, the average annual total monetary compensation for beginning teachers at the elementary and junior high school levels was approximately \$25,000—the same as the average for college graduates overall (Statistics Bureau of the Management and Coordination Agency, 1995, p. 112).

Approximately 58 percent of elementary and 36 percent of junior high school teachers were female in 1992 (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995, p. 119). Although elementary and junior high school teachers are hired by the local city, town, or village, prefectural governments pay half of all salaries in order to ensure uniformity of compensation within the prefecture. The compensation in each prefecture is based on the pay received by national school teachers, which is specified by national law (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995, p. 121). Teachers also are eligible as civil servants for extra monetary allowances for dependents, financial adjustments (such as cost of living), housing, transportation, assignments to outlying areas, administrative positions, periodic costs (such as those incurred when traveling with sports teams), and diligent service.

The average length of service of teachers in Japan at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels in 1992 was between fifteen and sixteen years. The average teacher is about forty years old; less than 20 percent are under thirty, and only about 10 percent are over fifty-five years old (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995).

Teachers must pass rigorous examinations to become teachers, usually taken after graduation from a four-year college program. Graduates from teacher-training universities included 63 percent of elementary, 43 percent of junior high, and 20 percent of high school teachers; the rest graduated from general universities. Approximately 20 percent of elementary, 10 percent of junior high, and 3 percent of high school teachers have two-year degrees; the rest have at least four-year degrees (Ministry of Education, Science, & Culture, 1995). In order to obtain a teacher certificate of first class, held by all teachers with a bachelor's degree, elementary school teachers must have a minimum of eighteen college credits in their specialty subject and forty-one college credits in teaching. Junior and senior high school teachers must have forty college credits in their specialty subject and nineteen college credits in teaching. For example, a junior high school teacher of mathematics must take at least forty college credits in mathematics including twenty in some combination of algebra, geometry, analytical geometry, probability and statistics theory, and computers. Elementary school teachers are required to have taken a minimum of two college credits each in Japanese language, social studies, arithmetic, science, life environment studies, music, art and handicrafts, homemaking, and physical education (Ministry of Education, Science, & Culture, 1995). Although universities design their own teacher-training courses, the Min-

istry of Education, Science, and Culture, or *Monbusho*, certifies courses and provides oversight of the content of the courses and the teaching faculty at all certified universities. Teachers and administrators are able to focus on motivation and liking students as key qualities for becoming a good teacher partly because the academic standards attained by all prospective teachers in Japan are high.

It is hard to determine the level of prestige and respect that comes with the profession of teaching. A few teachers I interviewed complained that they are often blamed for many problems ranging from bullying to academic competition to students' lack of interest in their futures. Although students and parents may believe that the effort put forth by students is more important for achievement, teachers regard their teaching skills as essential, and they hold themselves and their colleagues to high standards of work. I found many teachers continually striving to be well-rounded models and competent teachers for their students. Despite relatively high levels of support, training, and respect, teachers were quick to wish for even more support, criticize training as too systematic, bemoan the fact that sufficient training does not occur in every school, and state that the status of teachers cannot be taken for granted. When asked directly about whether they feel the profession of teaching is respected, my interviewees generally answered that it was still a respected profession but not as much as long ago. The following excerpts are from a conversation with three fourth-grade teachers about the level of respect for teachers in Japanese society today:

Mr. A: If I'm outside, like on the subway, and it happens that a child comes up and says "sensei!" (teacher) to me, right? I don't like that.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Mr. A: I wonder. Somehow, to be thought of as a teacher, I don't like that. I feel that maybe that means I don't think my position is being seen well by society. Maybe it is because I don't think of it as good work.

Ms. B: I really don't like that. I can't quite explain it fully to everyone, but it would be good if how busy we are could be understood. No matter how I'm seen, if I am trying as hard as I can and satisfying myself, I end up thinking that society doesn't totally grasp or understand our work.

But Mr. A. concluded that it was a dignified profession, after a long discussion of many aspects of their feelings about being referred to by students as "teacher" in public:

Mr. A: Parents think that those who teach their children are socially very important. When I go home to my own area, everyone knows that I am a teacher. If there is some problem, something in the neighborhood, like they need advice on the baseball team, or anything, they quickly come to me and ask me to do it. It's okay when you have a kind of dignity. People don't think, "Oh, he's a teacher" (said in a negative tone of voice). It isn't necessary to feel inferior. What I said earlier

about being embarrassed when called "teacher" on the subway, that is somehow different. I guess I am just a bit shy.

Although these teachers do not necessarily like to be pointed out in public, they are still viewed as reliable people in their neighborhoods and are asked to be community representatives or leaders, which indicates a degree of respect for their position. These elementary school teachers believed that high school teachers were highly respected.

BECOMING A TEACHER in Japan today is quite competitive, although there is variation in the degree of competition depending on the level of school and the subject. In Naka, I was told that the ratio of applicants to those accepted for high school teachers is recently as high as thirty to one, depending on the city, type of school, and special area of competence. A math teacher pointed out that it is not as difficult for a candidate in the field of mathematics. For example, the student-teacher training began on the third day of my visit at Meiji High School. Thirty-two student teachers, all graduates of this high school, arrived to do their two-week training for certification. I was told by the vice principal and several teachers that it would not be unusual if none of these students actually were hired as teachers next year because of the stiff competition. However, of the thirty-two students, not one was aiming to be a math teacher.

Both the requirement of a college degree and the competition to enter the profession reinforce the high status of teaching. Competition is also rigorous at the elementary and junior high levels, although it is not quite as intense as for high school teachers. These levels have a combined application process, so even though teachers may expect to be assigned to elementary school and apply for that position, they may find themselves hired for a junior high school, or vice versa. According to a report published by the Naka City Public Schools, of qualified applicants who sat for the examination to become an elementary school teacher for the school year beginning in April 1995, 61 of 455, or 13.4 percent, were hired. For those applicants wishing to teach kindergarten or children with physical or mental handicaps there were 12.3 and 8.5 applicants respectively for each of these positions. In 1992, there were 3.2 applicants per position for elementary schools nationally, 5.0 for junior high schools, and 6.4 for senior high schools (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995, p. 122). With the economic downturn continuing through the 1990s, however, the rates have been increasing, probably because more college graduates who cannot find jobs in private industry aim for the security of a teaching position. Within Naka City junior high schools and high schools (separate from the prefectural schools examined in this study), the competitive rates ranged from 35-to-1 for social studies majors to approximately 10-to-1 and 9-to-1 for math and science majors, respectively. The least competitive positions appeared to be in technical and vocational fields, but those numbers are somewhat deceptive since decreasing student enrollments have been publicized and have led to fewer applicants overall for technical teaching positions. Ad-

ministrators reported that the ratios of applicants to positions at the prefectural level were similar to those at the city levels for different school levels and fields.

The degree of competitiveness and the status of teachers vary with the overall economic situation: According to respondents who are administrators, teaching becomes a more desirable career when other jobs are less available or more unstable. A high school math teacher explained to me that when he became a teacher more than thirty-five years ago, most teachers were "rich, only people with a certain status. Now those kinds of people don't go that way at all [become teachers]." He explained that at the beginning his salary was very low and, since he had to live off his salary rather than being independently wealthy like most teachers, it was difficult. He first worked at a commercial high school and many of the students took jobs after graduation at textile mills. They often encouraged him to quit teaching and to come work with them because they made so much more money! He felt the situation was better for teachers now. Another teacher told me, "Now the economy is bad so lots of people want to become teachers. But at that time (nineteen years ago when he took the examinations) there were only about two times as many (applicants as positions)." A math teacher at Meiji High School described the general hiring situation for teachers of mathematics:

At my time it wasn't that difficult to become a teacher. Maybe it was quite different between math and other subjects. But for mathematics, there aren't very many at all who have the license [the license is obtained through credits at college]. Of those people, those who try to become teachers are again a small percentage. So I didn't really think it would be that much of a problem to become a teacher. Because it was within mathematics.

This teacher continued to say that it still isn't difficult to get a job as a *mathematics* teacher because the coursework is so demanding and, thus, there aren't many qualified applicants.

I haven't yet had a student teacher in mathematics, they are that few. Even if you want to become one, a regular person can't do it. Those who are just so-so at math won't make it.

So, becoming a math or science teacher appears to be less competitive, because the college course work and the employment examinations are difficult. Math and science teachers constitute a select group. In addition, high-achieving math and science students have many opportunities in industry that are unavailable to humanities students. As noted above, the competitive rates are currently nearer ten to one than the thirty or more applicants to each position seen in the humanities.

The principal at Matsu Elementary school, who had spent several years at the Naka City Board of Education and had been involved in hiring and promotions, remembered the selection process as follows:

There are various credits you take to get a teachers' license.... Within universities they have thought a lot about the curriculum, and even if it

is well constructed, not all students will necessarily develop along with it. The license isn't enough in order to become a teacher; they have to take an examination. Next year there will be 170 Naka City elementary school teachers hired. According to yesterday's newspaper, there are now about sixteen times that many who have applied. How we choose them, I think that is the second most important thing. It is hard to know what type of test is best. It's not only a paper and pencil test. It is quite difficult to test how much teaching ability they have.

Academic ability alone does not allow an individual to enter teaching. The principal at Tancho Elementary school, who also had experience interviewing applicants, talked in detail about what he remembered about the procedures for selecting teachers. He described them as follows:

I guess it is about what kind of person they are. First there is a test of their abilities—in all of the subjects. For those who are above a certain basic level, we then have an interview. There we are looking at their personal character and their ideas toward education. Their way of thinking and ideas about children. Their kindness and thoughtfulness (*yasashisa* and *omoiyari*). That is the most important for teachers. So we evaluate that at the interview. And then, only those who are employable are chosen. We present various problems. For example, "You are in the classroom, and now you are about to go on the school excursion. What cautions are you going to tell the children?" We have them think that the interview meeting is a classroom and to think of the interviewers as the children. There are about five of us there. For example, "Next week is the school trip. Among the five of us, one is sick, how shall we treat that person?" And we also ask them various common-sense questions about education. I said "common sense" right? Since they are trying to become teachers, we, of course, expect them to know all about the contents of the *Course of Study*. We ask them about the important points only. And through that sort of thing, we can tell if they are the sort of person who would be a good teacher of the students.

The description summarizes the contents of the screening process for new teachers. The process is lengthy and conducted by older teachers with years of experience, like the two principals quoted above.

TRAINING takes place formally as directed and is provided by the city or prefectural board of education and also within individual schools. All prospective teachers spend two to four weeks in a school as part of their college training. The school in which they do this student teaching is usually either affiliated with their college or university or is one from which they graduated.

Training for novice teachers. Beginning in 1989, education authorities agreed to institute more extensive training for novice teachers. By 1992, all new teachers at national and public elementary, junior

high, and high schools and at special education schools were receiving the first-year training. During their first year, all high school and junior high school teachers work a reduced teaching load of about ten hours of teaching a week and are expected to go to the Educational Center one day a week for training. Training involves visiting other schools and other education-related institutions and writing extensive lesson plans. Some of the trainees present lessons while others take the role of students and must write lengthy critiques. At the elementary school level, there are ninety hours of training time, sixty of which are within their school. The principal at Tancho told me that the training within the school was the most important because it is the closest to the teachers. He described how administrators carefully balance the mix of teachers at each grade level, especially if one is a novice teacher:

If there are three classes (at a particular grade), class one will be a veteran teacher, class two will be the new teacher, and class three will be a teacher in the middle (in terms of experience as a teacher).

This system ensures both an assigned mentor to each new teacher and a group of colleagues with varying levels of experience. The system attempts to reinforce sharing of information among teachers and the guidance of younger teachers by more experienced teachers.

On-going training. In Naka Prefecture, as in most prefectures in Japan, teachers spend extra time during their sixth and tenth and twentieth years at training sessions outside of their school. These sessions again provide a chance to interact with teachers at other schools who are at the same career stage. The sessions also usually provide some time to meet with others who teach the same subjects. Teachers also are required to submit lengthy lesson plans and other reports during these years. When a teacher becomes a grade-level head teacher or advances to other administrative positions, they also attend training sessions.

Teachers have chances during certain training experiences to visit major research centers and to see advanced laboratories and equipment that their schools might purchase. A few teachers complained that they have no chances to return to graduate school in order to update their science training; however, plans have been made since 1993 to allow up to 1,250 teachers to return to graduate school for one to two years (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995, p. 128). All new teachers participate in a training session that involves overnight stays, sometimes in the form of a cruise to cities in Japan with colleagues from other prefectures. Teachers also periodically participate in overnight outings devoted to training sessions in their subject area or on specific tasks, such as career guid-

ance, within a school.

Two teachers in this study were also planning overseas training trips: nationally, among teachers older than thirty-five, 1,200 are sent overseas for thirty days and 3,800 are sent for sixteen days. Among teachers under thirty-five years of age, 180 teachers are sent abroad for sixty days (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 1995, p. 129). In addition, some cities, such as Naka, have additional programs for overseas and other types of training.

The vice principal at Shimagawa junior high school explained to me that in Naka City, seventy-five teachers are chosen each year among those with at least seventeen years of experience to be "researchers" (*kenkyu-uin*). Most people apply several times before being chosen, and an administrator's recommendation is required to be eligible to apply. This is called "in-country exchange study," and chosen teachers get time off from their own school to travel to a place of their choice within Japan for a few weeks of study during the year. One teacher is also chosen to go abroad from this group. There are also twenty-five younger teachers chosen for another program and they are called "research students" (*kenkyuuiinsei*). He told me that it is hard to get chosen and then the research itself is difficult. Most of the meetings among those chosen for these special research positions do not start until 6:00 P.M. or 7:00 P.M. on school nights, so the positions are time consuming.

A COMMON aspect of Japanese schools is the opportunity for teachers to observe each other. The architecture of most schools allows teachers to hear each others' classes throughout the day. Teachers must interact regularly in the teachers' room and on their way to classes. More informally, individuals seek each other out to talk about how best to solve problems and to get ideas for teaching and advising. Many teachers socialize during free time at the school and casually discuss more personal issues. Watching demonstration classes together is valued by teachers and administrators, and schools schedule these special classes as often as possible. Teachers also look for lessons left on chalkboards and other displays to better understand how their peers teach.

Teachers learn directly about each others' plans and styles when they talk with each other in the teacher's room and between class periods. For example, an elementary school teacher spent the climb to his fourth-floor classroom discussing a science lesson with another teacher, and two junior high school teachers spent the walk to their third-floor classrooms discussing student safety and how to prevent falls in the stairways and hallways. Teachers seemed adept at using their time together to learn and plan. Three sixth-grade teachers began their day by discussing details of the day's biology experiment before the morning informational meeting. Then, during the ten-



minute break, after they had all finished teaching the biology experiment, one teacher described how she used the TV monitor to show the microscope slides of good examples to the entire class. Another teacher said he wished he had done that, too, but he had forgotten how to use the monitor. This brief interlude between classes turned into questioning about how best to reach all students, because one teacher reflected that he did not teach his class well enough and that many students did not get to see the results under the microscopes. This type of interaction seemed common among teachers. There seemed to be a general willingness to reflect on one's own weaknesses, to seek advice, and to share good ideas.

Two teachers, one at Naka Vocational High School and one at Matsu Elementary School, described in detail how they learned from their peers during more casual interactions. When I asked in a joint interview at Naka Vocational High School about what types of training is most useful, they responded as follows:

Younger teacher: I say that I'm troubled about this kind of thing, can I go see your class? We do that a lot.

Interviewer: Really? And you don't feel nervous about it? What if an older teacher comes to watch your class?

Younger teacher: If it is *bim* [pointing to the older teacher], I don't worry. If it were a different person I might be uptight.

Older teacher: This year there are three new teachers at our school. And they aren't used to vocational school students, right? And then I say, "come see my class." And we talk about various kinds of things and that becomes training.

Although many teachers agreed that the best training was watching other teachers teach, they also reported that it was unusual to be allowed to observe casually. But at Naka this seemed to be the atmosphere that prevailed. For one class period, the above two teachers had me watch each of their first-year math classes for twenty-five minutes of the fifty minutes total and then wanted to hear all my opinions about differences in how the students behaved and the teachers taught. There was no animosity, only a mutual expectation of learning from each other.

One elementary school teacher commented, "We talk a lot. In the fourth grade, we are all great talkers (all three fourth-grade teachers laugh). Real talkers. It is really true that we just say what we want to say." Later, after discussing how much of this was her own personality versus a common experience of teachers, she continued:

Teacher: We have opinions. But we each add those in a gentle way (*sunao ni*) and we don't hesitate about those things. So, things like age or experience or our qualifications, those don't re-



ally come into play. When we have a grade meeting, or more than a grade meeting, a meeting at school, she too can put forth her opinion (referring to the first-year teacher). But I have never had an experience when I couldn't do that, really.

Interviewer: That's good isn't it? That atmosphere?

Teacher: Right, and that atmosphere depends on human relations. Other than that, you can't do it. It is even good if we just go eat lunch together or something. To have time together and share the things we are thinking about. And when we do that, we can decide on things, since we aren't with the children. So then we can talk about things together, anything.... We are always telling jokes and laughing together. But I think that kind of thing is really important. And because we have that, when there is something I need advice on, I can think that there are really people I can talk to. I am really grateful for that. So it is a good grade. But really, I have had that all along. That's why this school is a school like this.

The older teacher who had taught at several schools disagreed slightly and pointed out that not all schools have such good relationships, saying, "There are some people who really are problematic. And when those people are in your grade, it is a problem." The novice teacher continued to comment on how important the casual socializing is to her learning as a teacher:

At first I came to school feeling really nervous. And when I heard that I would be in fourth grade, I wondered what it would mean. But from the start, we went to eat lunch together (these were the days before classes began), and everyday, everyday, they talked together with me. So very quickly I felt comfortable.

At Chuo Junior High School there were chances to observe other teachers in a formal setting. The vice principal told me:

Twice a year within the entire school we have someone give a class and everyone observes and reflects on it. For a junior high school that is rather rare. We are the kind of school that can do that. And here we also have a teachers' meeting in the morning, and also in the afternoon; it is that sort of place.

He was proud that their school can take the time to observe classes together twice a year and have an extra afternoon meeting everyday. All the schools strive to have some demonstration classes each year and, as mentioned above, teachers regularly have chances to observe demonstration classes during periodic inservice training.

Teachers also observe other teachers' classrooms and attempt to get ideas from chalkboards and other

displays. For example, one teacher at Hasu Elementary School who was known for his ability to produce quick, entertaining sketches, periodically sneaked into various classrooms and drew a picture on their chalkboard. When I asked him about this, he pointed out that it was also a good opportunity for him to observe how other teachers were using their classrooms and what lessons were on their chalkboards.

Throughout my interviews, when asked about what makes a good teacher, I heard that people can become good teachers through learning from others and having many types of experiences. Specific skills such as ways to use materials are taught to teachers either informally by experienced teachers, or formally through inservice training. One elementary teacher carefully described the typical way to learn necessary classroom skills:

One of the teachers who is good at art demonstrated various ways to use the art supplies—how to use this and how to hold that. That teacher taught us about that. And last year another teacher taught us about calligraphy materials, how to use them. That part of teaching—like writing on the board, for example—is difficult. Especially when they are things that require you to use your body. For example, we teach physical education and things here, too. Even if you are taught about it, it doesn't mean you can do it well, but in elementary school there are a lot of teachers who are good at these various things and there are lots of chances to learn those sorts of things.

Her description of learning various teaching skills emphasized the importance of having a variety of teachers in the school and the seemingly easy way teachers learn from each other. After observing one fourth-grade physical education class where the teacher in her mid-thirties skillfully demonstrated somersaults of various kinds, I remarked to her that she was quite a good gymnast. She replied that she really wasn't, but had been practicing basic gymnastics with a teacher who had some training, and over the past few years had developed enough skill to teach the class well. She went on to complain about how much her body ached during this part of the year when she was teaching gymnastics!

Even writing on the chalkboard was described as a skill to be mastered from peers. Learning how to write on the chalkboard in a way that conveys the main ideas of the lesson was described as an important skill for all teachers. One elementary school teacher explained how she measured this skill and why it is so necessary. To her, a clear chalkboard presentation is useful to both students and to other teachers:

During my first year, I was always told by various older teachers about the correct way to write on the chalkboard. For example, first always write the purpose (*midashi*)—what we will be studying. The children may not be looking at it, but by looking at the chalkboard, they can tell what we did during this one hour. The main point is on the board and is useful for note taking. Various teachers also come to my room and see what I have written. We will look in and see. It doesn't

have to be something great, but is a reference, and for others looking at it as a reference, it is really useful.

Elementary and junior high science teachers reported that they are not assisted by extra staff. At Shimogawa a teacher described how they prepare a budget for science materials and order the materials. He said they cannot do as many experiments for biology, partly because materials must be very fresh, and it is difficult to schedule all the classes and prepare the materials in a timely fashion on his own. During chemistry and physics sections they do more experiments. The teacher at Chuo Junior High School also told me that he has no help. He and another teacher share the science responsibilities in each grade. For example, when he had done the preparation and the experiment, he leaves things for the other teacher and the reverse. But this year he has all three third-year classes, so he has to do all the preparations on his own.

At the elementary school level, too, I observed teachers in the same grade level sharing preparations and supplies for science projects. In addition, two experienced teachers were involved in the production of a teachers' handbook to accompany the science textbooks. One told me:

It's for the teachers who aren't science majors. It has everything written out right in order so when they teach it to the children they can do the bare minimum of science teaching.

This teacher added a note to the teachers' guidebook draft after the class I observed. He was teaching the children about the necessity of scales for weighing things and suddenly had the idea to have a child stand with his hands out like a scale and try guessing the relative weights of different numbers of paper clips in each hand. The teacher had one boy close his eyes and try to guess which hand had more weight and to the other children's great delight, the boy guessed incorrectly two out of three times. Through this entertaining action, he demonstrated the necessity of scales for weighing differences that humans are unable to perceive accurately. This is the sort of tip that they include in the teachers' guidebook that carefully follows the textbook lessons and is a classic example of how teachers' academic knowledge is continually replenished through interactions with other teachers. □

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LEARNING TO LISTEN



BY WILLIAM H. ARMSTRONG

At least in pedagogical circles, the art of listening seems to have gotten itself inseparably attached to an image of passivity, and the phrase "passive listening" makes frequent appearance in our educational lexicon. This leaves the impression that when one is listening, one is not doing anything. Too bad, because as the following essay makes clear, effective listening is not only one of the most important methods for acquiring knowledge, it is also perhaps the hardest, most active work any learner is called upon to do.

Mr. Armstrong's commentary and practical advice are written for a student audience and might make good reading at the beginning of each year or semester. To our modern ear, his suggestions may have a quaint quality, based as they are on the old-fashioned idea that learning is hard work, that it is students' "basic obligation" to assume that work—even when they don't "feel" like it—and that not much learning can take place until they do. Mr. Armstrong's uncompromising insistence on the self-discipline required by students (and the satisfaction and self-fulfillment they will reap from it) reminds us of the necessity for balance in the learning equation. Teachers' efforts to make lessons more effective must be joined by an effort on the part of students to become better learners. Learning to listen is a good place to start.

—EDITOR

It is paradoxical that listening is the easiest way to learn but the hardest study skill to master.

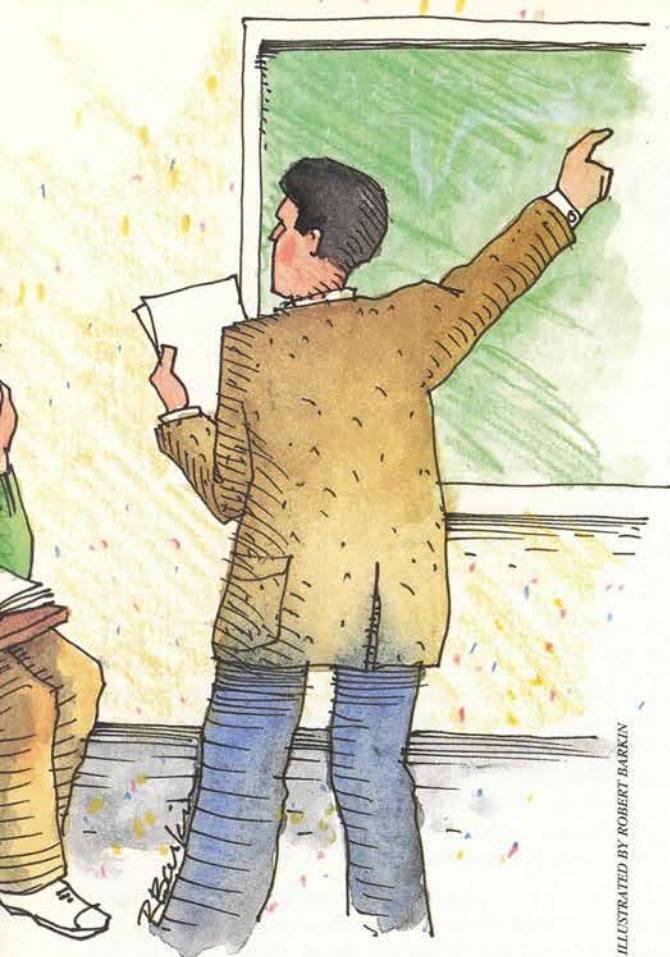
□

If you love to listen you will gain knowledge, and if you incline your ear you will become wise.—SIRACH

Interest Measurement Test

1. Do you hear the names of people who are introduced to you?
2. Are you waiting to listen when your teacher begins to speak or do you miss the beginning remarks?
3. Are you thinking of what you are going to say next while someone is speaking to you?
4. Are you addicted to the fatal belief that you can listen to two things at once?
5. Have you ever consciously tested yourself to see

*William H. Armstrong is best known for his 1970 Newbery Award winner, *Sunder*. He taught history for over fifty years at The Kent School in Kent, Connecticut. This article is excerpted from his book *Study Is Hard Work* and is reprinted by permission of David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc. Copyright © 1995 by William H. Armstrong.*



ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT BARKIN

how much you can remember of what is said to you?

If the answer to each of these questions is an honest "No," you need not despair. You can console yourself that you are with the great majority. You can also resolve to train yourself to listen and be successful in the training.

While listening is the easiest and quickest of all the ways to learn, learning to listen—and to use listening as one of the most effective of all the learning processes—is the hardest of all the learning processes to master. Your teachers have been able to help you learn to read and to think, but it is almost impossible for the teacher to give more than awareness-aid to the process of listening. It must be almost wholly self-taught. It was not emphasized in your early training; it is the least susceptible of all the learning processes to discipline; and it is never accomplished except by active and continued practice. Few ever achieve it, but those who do are counted among the students who learn the most and the persons in society most desirable to know.

Now to learn to think while being taught presupposes the other difficult art of paying attention. Nothing is more rare: listening seems to be the hardest thing in the world and misunderstanding the easiest, for we tend to hear

what we think we are going to hear, and too often we make it so. In a lifetime one is lucky to meet six or seven people who know how to attend: the rest, some of whom believe themselves well-bred and highly educated, have for the most part fidgety ears; their span of attention is as short as the mating of a fly. They seem afraid to lend their mind to another's thought, as if it would come back to them bruised and bent. This fear is of course fatal to sociability, and Lord Chesterfield was right when he wrote his son that the power of attention was the mark of a civilized man. The baby cannot attend, the savage and the boor will not. It is the boorishness of inattention that makes pleasant discussion turn into stupid repetitive argument, and that doubles the errors and mishaps of daily life.¹

Before books and printing, the primary element in acquiring knowledge was listening. A "lecture" originally meant a "reading" from some precious manuscript. The reader read slowly and stopped to explain difficult passages to his listeners. The process has changed; reading is no doubt the primary element in acquiring knowledge, but listening remains the second most important element.

Why is listening, doubtless competing with the proper use of time for first among good study methods, the most difficult of the learning processes? The practices of seeing (reading), writing, and thinking are exercised within the person. But listening takes on the complexity of the listener having to coordinate their mental powers with an outside force—the person or thing to which the listener is listening. This demands the discipline of subjecting the mind of the listener to that of the speaker.

The second problem in learning to listen arises from lack of associated control. When you learn to read, your eyes control the speed with which you read. When you write there is actual physical control in your hand. In thinking, the analysis of thought travels at exactly the speed capacity of your mind. But when you begin to train yourself to be a good listener, you are faced with a difficulty not unlike that of trying to drive a car without brakes. You can think four times as fast as the average teacher can speak.

Only by demanding of yourself the most unswerving concentration and discipline can you hold your mind on the track of the speaker. This can be accomplished if the listener uses the free time to think around the topic—"listening between the lines" as it is sometimes called. It consists of anticipating the teacher's next point, summarizing what has been said, questioning in silence the accuracy or importance of what is being taught, putting the teacher's thoughts into one's own words, and trying to discern the test or examination questions that will be formed from this material. If you can train yourself to do this you will: (1) save yourself much precious time by not having to read what has already been taught; and (2) you can give a more thoughtful and acceptable answer either in the give and take of class discussion or on a written test.

When you have learned to adjust your speed of thinking to the rate of a speaker, you have added two valuable elements to your character: (1) ability to discipline your mind to the present; and (2) you have made yourself a follower. Your mind performs in time, but it tries desperately to steer your thoughts into the pleas-

¹ Jacques Barzun, *Teacher in America*, Little, Brown and Company, 1945, p. 35.

(Continued on page 47)

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES: A MEANS, NOT AN END

BY ELAINE WRISLEY REED

THE LESSON was about Abraham Lincoln, and the primary grade teacher came up with what she must have thought was a nifty "hands-on activity." The students were instructed to make a Lincoln Log Cabin by pasting Popsicle sticks onto milk cartons. They may have learned something about pasting sticks onto cardboard, but they probably learned little about the sixteenth president or why he made a difference in the story of our country.

This is but one example of an educational fad gone awry. Under pressure to get students actively involved in learning, projects frequently wind up keeping youngsters busy without really teaching them anything of importance.

As Claudia Hoones, a teacher in Indianapolis who served on the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools, once observed about such projects:

Now, something like this has happened to me, and probably to you. You find an activity you love, the kids love, it's peaceful, they're involved—so let's go for it! But when we're talking about teaching history [or any subject] responsibly, we need to ask ourselves regularly whether an activity we've planned is really hitting the nail on the head.

Below are a few other examples of activities I have come across recently that either lacked serious content or strayed from the point of the lesson. They are all drawn from the field of social studies—which seems to bear the brunt of this problem—but comparable examples can be found in literature, science, and, increasingly, even in math.

■ A history teacher assigns students to build a "pioneer home." There is no research involved, nor any requirement that the students explain why their structure looks the way it does. One student decided she would build a wattle-and-daub house and was flunked because it was not a "pioneer" cabin; everyone knows "pioneers" made log cabins.

■ One lesson about the treatment of Native Americans

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notes that the Cherokee Nation had their own newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*. It then goes on to suggest creating a newspaper about your class. The second activity in the lesson indicates that Sequoyah developed a written alphabet of the Cherokee language; create an alphabet of your own.

■ A lesson on exploring world cultures, in a recent issue of a social studies magazine, provides instructions for making multi-colored beads from strips of magazine paper, cut into triangle pieces. This is intended to address the theme of "time, continuity, and change," and is meant to be a discovery project for "beads around the world."

These are all "hands-on" projects. The students probably passed their time in class enjoyably and had something to take home to show their parents. But how did the activities help students learn about history, and what did the students know when they finished?

Pressure for more and more activities has grown intense. Some textbooks, anxious not to be behind the curve, can't seem to cram their pages with enough of them. And in some schools, God help the teacher whose students aren't up and about and "doing" something.

Behind the push for the increased use of projects and activities seems to lie theories from three different but converging directions. First is the idea—heavily influenced by the writings of Jean Piaget—that young learners are "developmentally" unable to deal with abstract ideas or factual knowledge and that, therefore, it is better to approach learning through concrete, "real-world" terms. Piaget argued that children move through a series of progressive stages—sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. According to Piaget, during the first two stages, infants and young children do not yet possess the levels of understanding and logical reasoning that are characteristic of older children and adults. Starting around age six or seven, however, children begin to develop concrete operations—cognitive capacities that enable them to solve concrete (hands-on) problems logically, adopt the perspective of another person, and consider intentions. Starting around age twelve, according to Piaget, they begin to develop "formal operations,"

which allow them to engage in more complex and abstract thinking without being so dependent on direct experiences or concrete examples.

In 1960, Jerome Bruner of Harvard disputed the contention of developmental learning by proposing that any subject could be taught in an "intellectually honest way" to students at any level of development.

Piaget's theories have more recently been questioned by such researchers as Dickinson and Lee, who warned that Piaget's notions about students' ability to reason historically, for example, could cause teachers to underestimate the complexity of their students' thought processes and to underappreciate the possibilities for teaching.

To continue in the area of history teaching and learning, which seems to indicate challenges to Piaget in other fields as well, researchers Levstik and Pappas found that (1) children were capable of constructing intelligible historical narratives; (2) even the youngest children were receptive to historical information and found aspects of history very appealing; and (3) historical context and style of presentation were both key elements affecting what students learned.

If these are accurate pictures of cognition, an overreliance on "hands-on" activities will delay the opportunity for children to make the shift from novice thinkers to experts.

The second theory underlying the popularity of "hands-on" activities and projects is the idea that the knowledge we acquire on our own is better than the knowledge we get from others. A full discussion of this idea—sometimes called "discovery learning" and frequently identified with a "constructivist" point of view and an "experiential," inductive approach to learning—is beyond the scope of this short essay, but I do want to note two cautionary points made by



E.D. Hirsch, Jr. in his recent book *The Schools We Need:*

... discovery learning is an effective method—when it works. But there are two serious drawbacks to preponderant or exclusive reliance on discovery learning. First, students do not always make on their own the discoveries they are supposed to make; in fact, they sometimes make "discoveries" that aren't true.

Hence, it is essential to monitor students to probe whether the desired learning goal has been achieved, and, if not, to reach the goal by direct means. Second, discovery learning has proved to be very inefficient. Not only do students sometimes fail to gain the knowledge and know-how they are supposed to gain, but they do not gain it very fast. Research into teaching methods has consistently shown that discovery learning is the least effective method of instruction in the teacher's repertory.

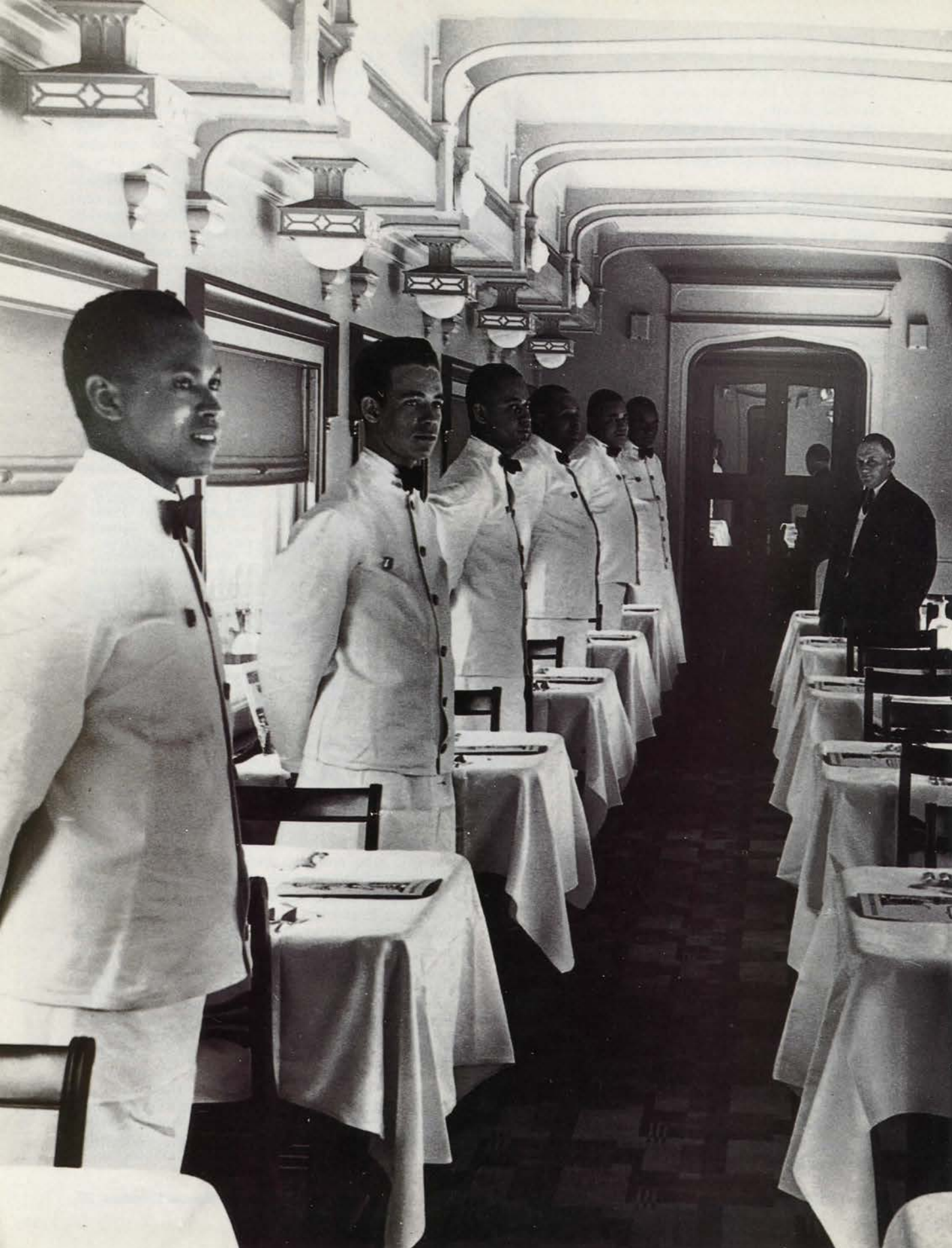
Most recently, the push for "hands-on" activities has acquired new life from the largely non-critical acceptance of theories regarding "learning styles." The rush to honor "tactile" or "bodily-kinesthetic" learning can lead to a general disparagement of verbal learning. Again, Hirsch comments:

Caution is especially required when the phrase "hands-on" is used to imply disdainfully that visual and verbal learning is artificial and unengaging. Antiverbal prejudices spell disaster for disadvantaged students, who have not been exposed to a breadth of verbal learning outside the school. In contemporary life, the verbal has a strong claim to being just as "lifelike" as the tactile.

Certainly, "hands-on" projects have their place in the curriculum. I am not suggesting their elimination, only that we not be pressured into having a "hands-on" component to a lesson when there are better

(Continued on page 48)

ILLUSTRATED BY GUY SCHUM



THOSE PULLMAN BLUES

BY DAVID D. PERATA

WHEN ABRAHAM Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation Act in 1863, the United States had made little provision for the future employment of the freed slaves. As a result, former slaves who left the plantations found few opportunities other than those

This article forms the Introduction to Those Pullman Blues: An Oral History of the African-American Railroad Attendant, the first oral history centering on the unique experiences of black porters and railroad attendants during the heyday of railway travel.

The author, David D. Perata, is a freelance writer and photographer. During the 1980's, he worked as a porter on Amtrak's long-distance trains, where he met many of the workers whose reminiscences inspired the book.

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Those Pullman Blues can be ordered at your local bookstore. Signed copies may be obtained by sending \$34.00 to: A. Philip Randolph Museum, 10406 S. Maryland, Chicago, IL 60628 (Illinois residents add 8% sales tax.) Price includes priority mail shipping. A soft cover, edited scholastic version of the book will be available sometime in 1998.

Below: The Southern Pacific Lark, an all deluxe, first-class Pullman overnight train running between Los Angeles and San Francisco, 1942-43.

to which they had become accustomed: manual labor in the fields and factories or domestic positions as cleaners, cooks, and servants. The new-found wealth generated by the Industrial Revolution increased the availability of such jobs, but the choices available to the African American would remain unchanged for decades.

The railroad sleeping car was being developed at this same time and, within a few short years, would provide the free African-American male—and to a lesser extent, the free African-American female—with new employment opportunities. The organization that pioneered this innovation and that would employ almost exclusively African Americans for nearly a century was the Pullman Sleeping Car Company.

George M. Pullman, the man who would change the course of railroad and labor history forever, was born in 1831. He began life as a poor farm boy whose only skill related to car building he had learned while employed at his brother's woodworking shop in New York state. Pullman acquired his first taste of wealth and prosperity at the age of twenty-two, when he acquired a contractor's license and began moving houses for the Erie Canal Project, then under way in Chicago.¹ It was at this time that George Pullman had occasion to travel on what then passed for a sleeping car. His inability to sleep (no sheets, blankets, or pillows were provided) fully clothed on a hard bunk sparked his idea of providing a better arrangement for the traveler.²

By 1858 he had made good on his plan,



joining forces in New York with Benjamin C. Field, who held the patent rights to the Woodruff sleeping car. The Woodruff Company was one of a handful of eastern firms engaged in building and operating sleeping cars, a novel idea during a time when the function of the railroad was evolving beyond that of providing only simple locomotion and crude accommodations for passengers and freight. Pullman and Field began operating sleepers on the Chicago and Alton Railroad in 1858. These early cars amounted to no more than remodeled coaches outfitted with bunks. One of these cars was the now-infamous Number 9, which made its maiden run in September 1859 and has been credited as George Pullman's first sleeping car.³

By 1863 Pullman could foresee the completion of a transcontinental railroad and the enormous potential for sleeping car routes it would represent. He began in earnest to acquire as many sleeping car contracts out of Chicago as possible, even buying up entire companies whenever the opportunity arose. But it did not take Pullman long to also figure out that if new markets were to be tapped on the scale he envisioned, sleeping cars would have to be refined to encourage general ridership. He decided to build his own cars from the ground up rather than relying on rebuilt day coaches or equipment manufactured by other firms. In 1864, using a small building on the Chicago and Alton property as his workshop, Pullman assembled the finest carpenters, pipefitters, varnishers, upholsterers, and other tradesmen the Chicago area had to offer. He then personally supervised the construction of his first major breakthrough in sleeping car design: the Pioneer.⁴

The Pioneer was constructed in 1865 for \$20,000, at a time when the average coach sold for about \$4,500.⁵ The additional cost was largely due to its lavish interior decoration. Although previous sleepers were equally gaudy, the Pioneer rose to historical prominence in part because it was Pullman's first car built at his own plant.⁶ In addition, railroads of this era had not yet set dimensional standards for passenger cars. George Pullman's Pioneer, built by his own standards, was taller and wider than the conventional car of the period.⁷

Had it not been for an uncanny stroke of fate, the Pioneer might have gone the way of a grand mechanical orphan, useless for interchange over rail lines with limited clearances. After the assassination of Abraham Lincoln on 14 April 1865, transportation was needed to carry his body and the funeral party from Washington, D.C., to Springfield, Illinois. It has been reported that the Pioneer was included in the Lincoln funeral train and that platforms and bridges all along the train's route had to be altered to accommodate its oversize dimensions. It is estimated that this single event, which gave George Pullman valuable publicity for the vast operational empire that would follow, shaved fifty years off the time it would otherwise have taken the railroads to make these changes.⁸

With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the Pullman Palace Car Company—the new company name—extended its route miles into

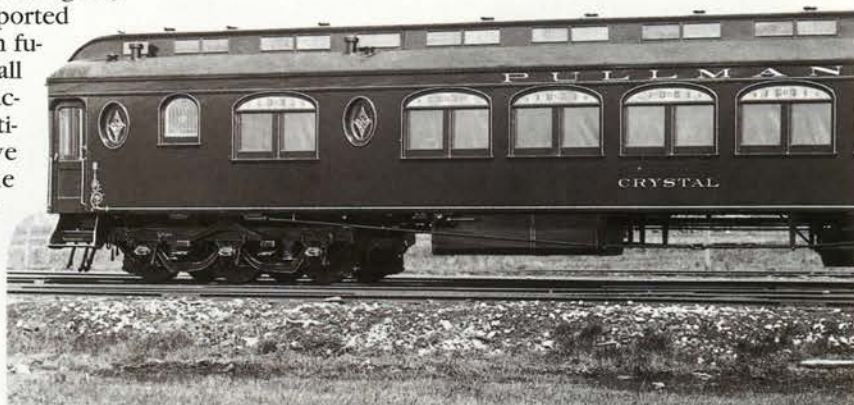
every major city and many small towns across America. By the end of 1881, the organization's earnings were estimated at nearly \$3 million, and it had more than eight hundred cars in operation across the United States and Canada.⁹

For all the accolades and nostalgia that have surrounded George Pullman and the Pullman Company over the years, it must be recognized for what it really was: a finely tuned, big-money operation more interested in profits than in employees. The company's philosophy adhered to the strange dichotomy of values held by its founder. George Pullman was a deeply religious man who, on the one hand, was the morally forthright, benevolent patriarch who built a 3,600-acre Utopian-like town for his 12,000 employees at Lake Calumet, Indiana. Appropriately named Pullman, the town had its own churches, schools, mercantile stores, post office, library, and erecting shops for the building and maintenance of sleeping cars.¹⁰ On the other hand, George Pullman was a shrewd businessman with an insatiable appetite for control and power: he paid his employees poor wages while controlling their income, rent, commercial trade, and social lives. His attitude toward the African-American working class was no less parochial: keep the black man doing what he has always done, and pay him as little as possible to do it.

These practices eventually burst the idealistic bubble over the company town of Pullman. Workers often lived in poverty through the company's manipulation of both their income and living environment; the ensuing tension erupted into the Great Pullman Strike of 1894. Led by the labor activist Eugene V. Debs, this strike was the first attempt to organize all shop crafts associated with the railroads and the Pullman Palace Car Company. Pullman, however, refused to recognize the newly formed American Railway Union, and in the end twelve people were killed as federal troops attempted to break up the strike.¹¹ The Pullman Palace Car Company's unwillingness to negotiate with its labor force would become the company's hallmark for years.

After George Pullman died in 1900, the company was reorganized under a new corporate title, the Pullman Company. Rail traffic between 1900 and 1910 tripled; the year 1913 saw rail profits of more than \$19 million.¹² The Pullman Company reached its peak in

Below: Exterior of Pullman car. Right: Women being served tea in Oriental Limited observation-lounge car, circa 1924. Far right: Interior of the parlor car of the Australia, built in 1892.

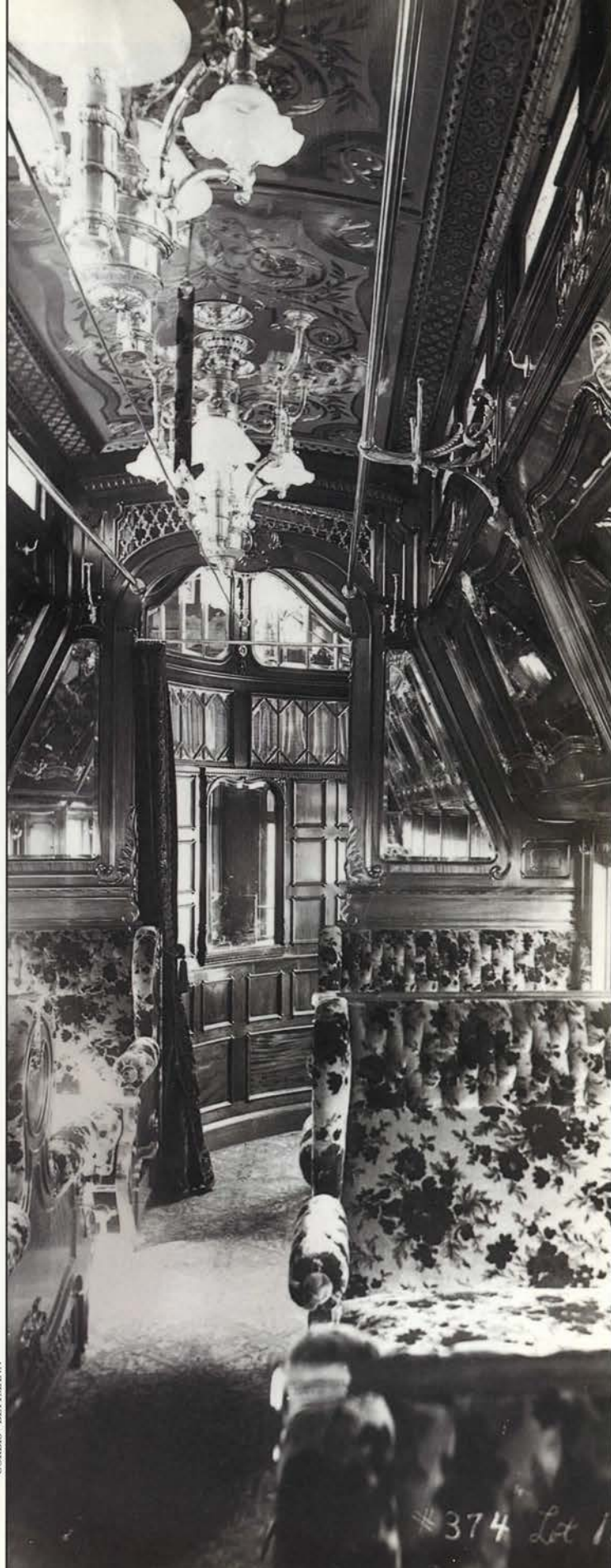


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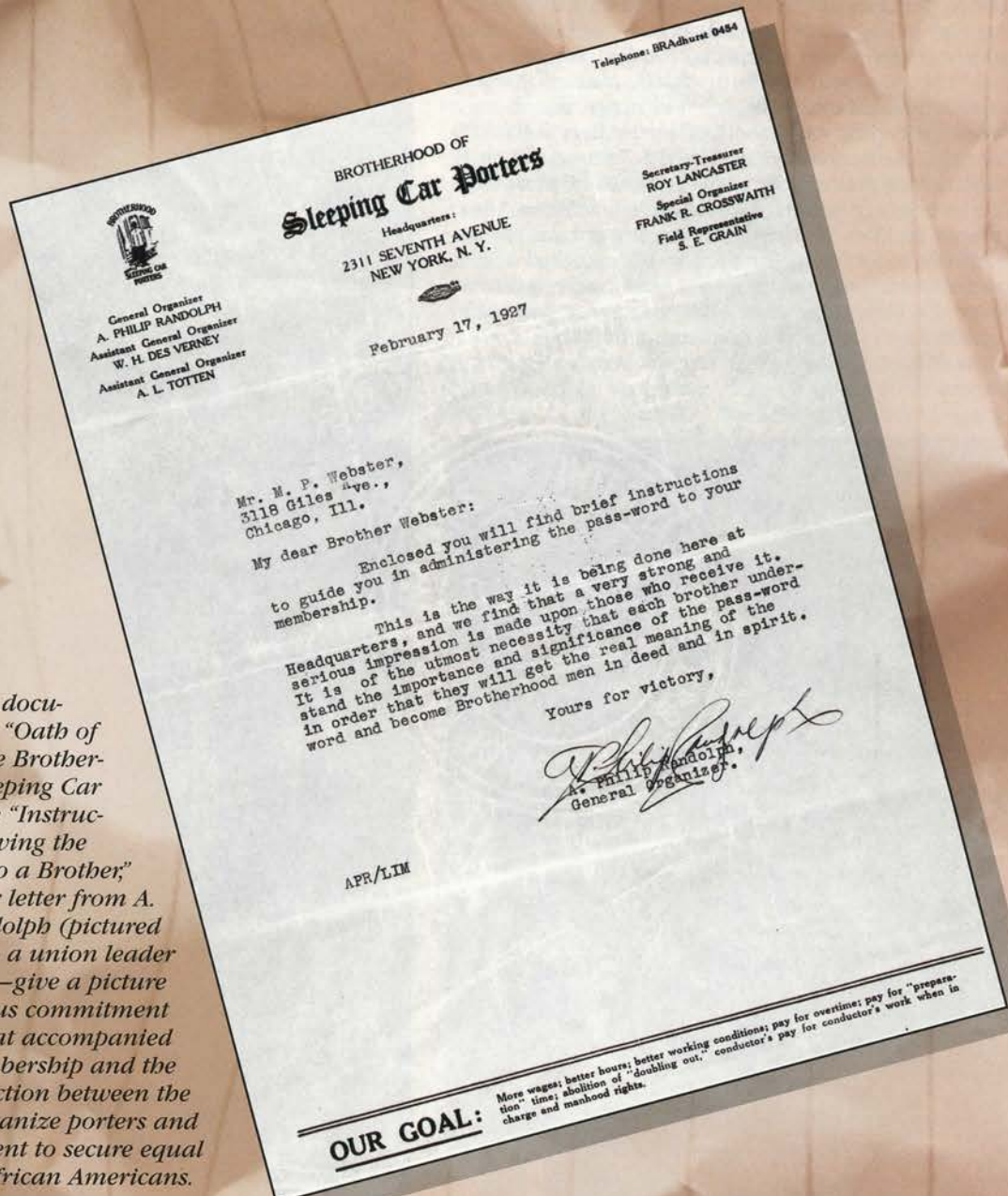
the 1920s when 35 million passengers per year slept between Pullman sheets, and the company became the largest single U.S. employer of African Americans, with more than nine thousand porters.¹³

Given George Pullman's attitude toward the African American and toward labor as a whole, it should come as no surprise that the labor pool from which he hired service personnel for the Palace sleeping cars in 1870 was the ready-made work force of recently freed slaves.¹⁴ There were no special job requirements beyond the domestic skills to which so many African Americans had been confined. For many, becoming a Pullman sleeping car attendant was simply a transfer from the plantation to the railroad. Indeed, whether Pullman fully realized the implications of his actions or not, he in effect sentenced thousands of African Americans to another 100 years of servility aboard the nation's railroad cars. The railroads not only had access to a constant supply of employees but conveniently retained the plantation racial infrastructure, redefined in a manner now acceptable to the general public.

The Pullman sleeping car brought African-American "servants" into almost every American town through



Membership Oath and Password Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters



These 1927 documents—the “Oath of Fealty to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters,” the “Instructions for Giving the Pass-word to a Brother,” and a cover letter from A. Philip Randolph (pictured opposite) to a union leader in Chicago—give a picture of the serious commitment and risk that accompanied union membership and the deep connection between the effort to organize porters and the movement to secure equal rights for African Americans.

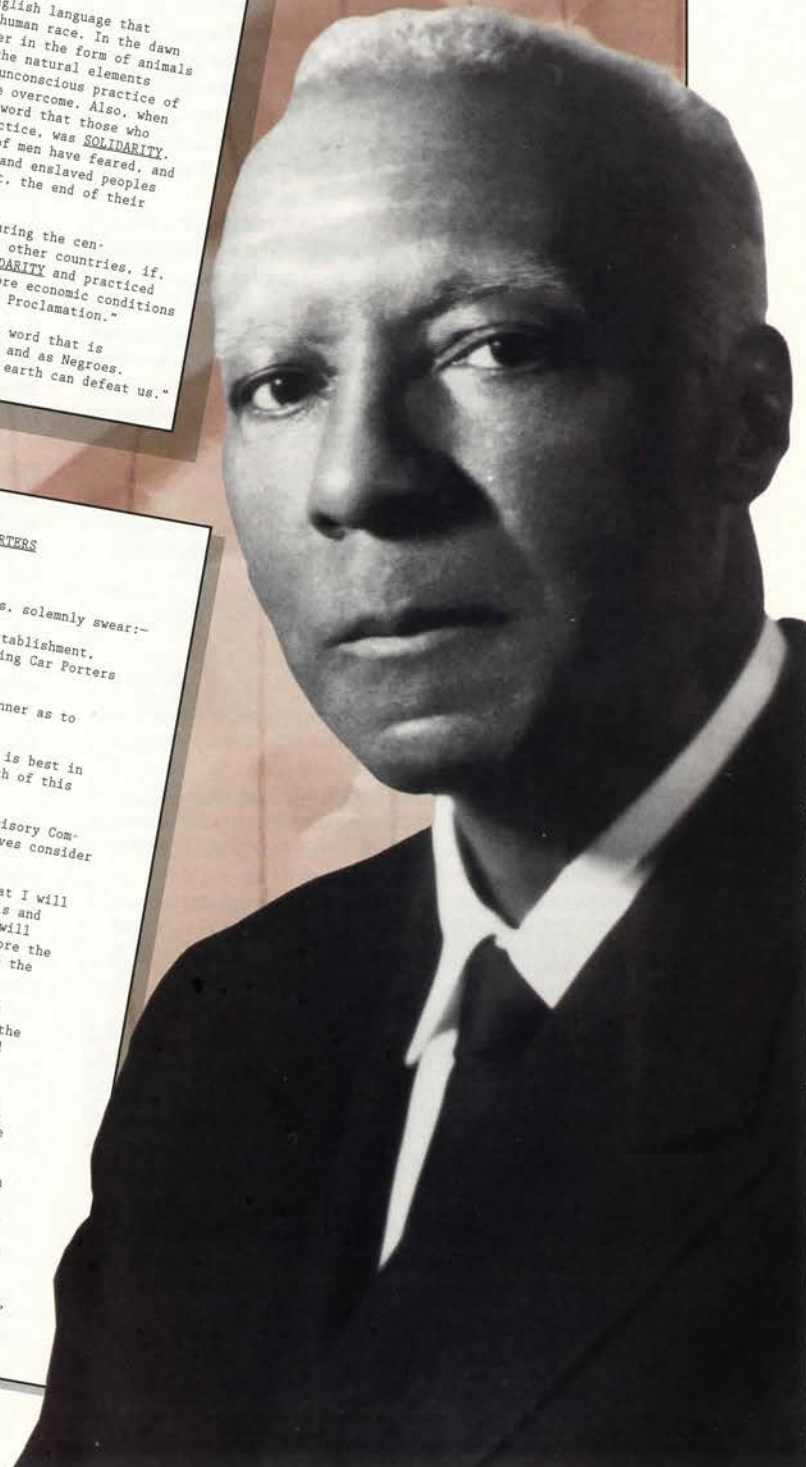
Documents courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society. The two documents to the right have been re-typed to improve their legibility but are not changed in substance.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GIVING THE PASS-WORD TO A BROTHER

- 1.... Read the oath aloud to the applicant. He must answer "I DO" after each point in the oath is read. (There are 9 points) After the last point has been read and the applicant repeats the words "SO HELP ME GOD," then give him the pass-word with your right hand and his clasped in the act of shaking. Your left hand and his should extend straight downward by your sides clenched, fist-like.
- 2.... After you have given him the pass-word, then give him a short talk as follows:
- 3.... "Today you have been given the pass-word of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the largest Negro trade union in the world. It is more than a union; it represents the most significant effort ever made by our race to advance. It holds out to the Negro boys and girls of the future their brightest hope for a man's chance in the struggle to live."
- 4.... "The word **SOLIDARITY** is one of the few words in the English language that is inextricably bound up with the history of the human race. In the dawn of man's career, surrounded on every side by danger in the form of animals which he did not understand, it was only thru the unconscious practice of **SOLIDARITY** (solidly united) that these dangers were overcome. Also, when man began first to enslave his fellow man, the one word that those who were enslaved needed to know the meaning of and practice, was **SOLIDARITY**. It is also the word that the rulers and oppressors of men have feared, and still fear, because they know that if the oppressed and enslaved peoples understood the meaning of **SOLIDARITY** and practiced it, the end of their rule-ship would follow."
- 5.... "Especially is this true of the race to which we belong. During the centuries that we have been slaves in this country and in other countries, if, as an enslaved race we had learned the meaning of **SOLIDARITY** and practiced it, we would have been able to free ourselves long before economic conditions forced Abraham Lincoln to issue the famous Emancipation Proclamation."
- 6.... "Therefore, in choosing **SOLIDARITY** as our pass-word we have a word that is of tremendous significance to us both as Pullman porters and as Negroes. Guard this word and practice its meaning and no power on earth can defeat us."

OATH OF FEALTY to THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

- I do hereby, in the presence of God and my brothers, solemnly swear:-
1. That I will abide by the rules laid down for the establishment, growth, and maintenance of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and maids;
 2. That I will always and at all times act in such a manner as to secure its best welfare;
 3. That I will work faithfully and well, giving all that is best in me for the physical, mental, moral and spiritual growth of this Organization;
 4. That I will hold inviolate all deliberations of the Advisory Committee, giving out only such information as the executives consider politic for its victory;
 5. And further, I hereby solemnly and truthfully declare that I will never criticize or disparage in any way, openly, officials and brothers of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, but will bring whatever cause there may be for dissatisfaction before the proper tribunal for adjustment, abiding by and adhering to the decision reached;
 6. That no desire for personal aggrandizement, ambition, petty jealousy, or bribery shall swerve me from my allegiance to the Brotherhood or weaken my support to the cause of justice and freedom for my Union, my race, and my class;
 7. That in the event of my severing my relations with this body, for any cause whatever, the knowledge gained while within the ranks will be held sacred and never be given out except by the sanction of the proper authorities;
 8. Recognizing that organization is necessary for the amelioration and final emancipation of labor in general and the Negro in particular, I unswervingly and unselfishly herewith dedicate my body and mind to the high and noble mission of constructive, militant and fearless advocacy of the principles and policies of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; and
 9. I therefore, of my own volition, upon my honor as a man, a worker, and a Negro who has pride of race, pledge, in the interest of generations of Negro boys and girls yet unborn, my undying fealty to the letter and spirit of the Brotherhood, so help me God.



the vast system of railroad passenger trains. For the price of a Pullman ticket, even a common man could be waited upon and pampered in the grand manner of the privileged southern gentry. White America's willingness to preserve antebellum attitudes provided George Pullman with a ready market for his services. The rail's going public may not have consciously demanded white tablecloths, fine china, sparkling silver, and black servants, but they easily become accustomed to such amenities through Pullman's adaptation of plantation hospitality.

IN 1924 the Ku Klux Klan boasted nearly four and a half million members; over 1,000 Negro lynchings had taken place since 1900. "By being raised up in a segregated environment," recalled Julius Payne, a long-time Pullman employee, "you knew [racial discrimination] was going on. You resented it, but you could not change it individually. All you could do is get yourself in a lot of problems. The easy way to deal with it was to stand your ground to a certain level and gracefully get away from it."¹⁵

Like Julius Payne, successful black employees developed certain psychological skills to help them handle abusive passengers so as to diffuse explosive situations before they escalated into threats of violence. In doing so, however, they were forced to swallow their pride for the sake of their job. Those who reacted emotionally were usually fired.

Norman Bookman, another seasoned Pullman veteran who worked every class of service from sleepers to private cars, offered an example of such restraint:

One time a man was riding with us on the Lark. He was talking and they were discussing politics, and they were saying, "Well, there's so many niggers in San Francisco and so many niggers in L.A.," and so on. The woman with him looked up at me—I didn't say anything. I'd fixed them a little hors d'oeuvres, you know. So I didn't say anything till the next morning.

[The train] came in, and she was with him. They were not together. And I said, "Pardon me, I'd like to ask a question if I may. What did I do wrong last night? I've been up all night wondering what was done wrong. I thought I was giving fair service."

Then he started apologizing for having made the mistake in saying those words, and he wanted to give me a little piece of change for it. I said, "Oh, no, you don't owe me nothing."

But now, you see, I could have put it another way or jumped in that night. They're all drinking, and it could have been an embarrassing thing, or he could have gotten angry, or maybe I got angry and cussed him out, or something else. So you learn to handle these things this way.¹⁶

Even though the Pullman porter was a national figure and entrusted with generations of young and old alike, the unenlightened traveling public still regarded the Negro as having his proper place both on and off the trains. He was socially acceptable in his working environment, owing to his servant status, but that acceptance did not often carry over into civilian life once he stepped down from the steel vestibule. For example, many women thought nothing of undressing in front of the porter, almost as if he were invisible. It is doubtful that a white woman would have ever undressed with a white hotel bellboy present. Thousands

of mothers entrusted their children to the porter's care while they went off to socialize in the club car or eat in the diner. How many mothers today would do the same? By contrast, relations between black porters and male passengers were sometimes not so trusting. Most of the confrontations between black train personnel and white male passengers were fueled by the latter's excess liquor consumption in the club car. In Pullman Company advertising of the era, the body English between the porter and his white male passenger always suggested dominance by the passenger.

The Pullman Company capitalized on the folkloric images of the maternal Negro mammy and the docile black servant to establish the porter as an extension of the notorious plantation hospitality of an earlier era.

THE AFRICAN AMERICANS who worked on passenger trains were employed by either the Pullman Company or the individual railroads. According to a report by the Department of Labor in 1926—in what is generally regarded as the peak decade for the railroads—20,224 African Americans worked as Pullman and train porters, the largest category of black labor on U.S. railroads. The Pullman Company had sole control of the thousands of its employees who provided the sleeping and café/buffet car service offered on every railroad in the nation, whereas each railroad handled a much smaller personnel roster confined to commissary points along its own lines.

Railroad on-board service employees who did not work for the Pullman Company included coach and parlor porters, cooks, chefs, bartenders, and dining car waiters. Only the chefs and cooks, who were fairly well insulated from the traveling public because the kitchen was off limits to all but the dining car crew, seldom experienced racial discrimination while working aboard the trains. But as one black chef observed, passengers ate food prepared by black hands who would have otherwise refused to shake that same black hand off the train.

The coaches did not require the porters to experience as much intimacy with passengers as did the sleepers, which by their very nature exposed porters to most every facet of the human condition, good and bad. Although a coach full of children or complaining adults could prove challenging, for some porters the chair cars were far less stressful than the sleepers.

A railroad dining car on the crack trains was like a restaurant open all day, serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner; on a train with five hundred people aboard, each meal often ran right into the next. Southern Pacific waiter Alex Ashley describes the dining car crew's life on the railroad's new streamliner, the Shasta Daylight, in the early fifties. After departing from Oakland's 16th Street station at 8:22 A.M., the train arrived in Portland, Oregon, nearly 16 hours later:

We started seating in 16th [Street] Station—train loaded—and you know, I didn't sit down till I got to Portland? That's facts. Didn't sit down! We pulled into Portland that night—people still at the tables eatin'. Didn't have time to eat, just grab us something and started walkin'. You get into Portland around eleven o'clock at night. You get over to the hotel around twelve o'clock. You get to bed—look like before you get to sleep good,

they're waking you up five o'clock in the morning to get back on this train, see. No, you could never get a good full night's sleep.¹⁷

The Pullman porter was undoubtedly the most universally recognized of the African-American employees who worked aboard America's passenger trains. The quintessence of the Pullman Company's vast operation, he represented the basic building block around which the entire premise of first-class accommodations revolved. On the thousands of rolling hotels that operated each day for the company, the porter served as innkeeper, maid, waiter, bellman, electrician, and entertainer, all embodied behind one compulsorily smiling face.

There were four classifications for Pullman onboard personnel: busboy, sleeping car porter, café/food service attendant, and private car porter. All four types of

positions required bed-making skills, an ability to handle the public, and a working knowledge of the assortment of air-conditioning systems and car types that Pullman operated. Cooking classes were mandatory for those entering food service.

The Pullman busboy worked on the buffet and café cars that ran either as a supplement to railroad-owned and -staffed dining cars or as the sole source of meals on smaller runs. He was given the basic sleeping car porter training in addition to training in food handling. The title "busboy" is somewhat of a misnomer, for he also waited on tables and reset them.

The sleeping-car porter attended only to the sleeping car and associated duties. He set up the car while in the yards, greeted passengers, and settled them into their rooms, making sure that their every need was taken care of while they were on board. He was also

The Pullman Blues Tour

On February 9th of this year, author David D. Perata and retired Pullman porters Virgil and Babe Smock embarked on an eight-day whistle-stop railroad tour to honor the accomplishments of A. Philip Randolph, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and all of the African-American men and women who sacrificed to make this part of American history possible. Sponsored by the A. Philip Randolph Institute, the NAACP, and Amtrak, among others, the Pullman Blues Tour's vintage private rail cars dating from the 1950's began rolling in Oakland, California, and made scheduled stops at Los Angeles, Kansas City, St. Louis, and their ultimate destination at the historic Pullman district in Illinois, where George M. Pullman had built his vast company town in 1880.

At each stop, the cars were uncoupled from the rear of their Amtrak train and parked for viewing near the station. The tour afforded the public a first-hand look at a beautifully-restored Southern Pacific Art Deco-styled lounge car that fed and entertained the entourage on their trek across the country, along with a sleeping car that had once been assigned to the famous streamliner, the *Sunset Limited*. At St. Louis, three hundred people walked through the cars, talking to the Smock Brothers and sparking many memories for those old enough to recall the elegance of what is now referred to as the "Golden Age of Railroading."

Ceremonies were organized in every town, and civic leaders and local union officials spoke about the tremendous struggle for unionization and the importance of Randolph and the porters. Virgil and Babe Smock recalled stories from their combined forty-seven years of Pullman service, and author Perata urged the assembled crowds to pass along this history to the children lest the same mistakes be made again in the future. "Randolph's twelve-year struggle with the Pullman Company, which he and the Brotherhood ultimately won, is a lesson in determination and focus against seemingly insurmountable odds," Perata commented.

National Public Radio, whose staff accompanied the tour from St. Louis to Chicago, produced a twenty-minute "Tour Special" on their national *Weekend Edition* program, and newspapers and local TV news carried the story from San Francisco to Chicago.

The great success of the Pullman Blues Tour has spurred an ongoing interest in this historic labor movement, and plans are in the works for a PBS documentary based on the book.



Felix Anderson, age 91, pauses at Union Station in St. Louis, where he had come to meet former Pullman porters in connection with the Pullman Blues Tour.

THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS/KAREN STALLWOOD

responsible for monitoring the cars' air-conditioning and heating systems, making the beds and cleaning the rooms, shining shoes, pressing suits, mailing letters and telegrams, and bringing meals into rooms on request. Of all the employees on the train, his psychological skills were perhaps the most highly developed, owing to the extreme intimacy of the Pullman car.

The café/food service attendant was instructed in very much the same manner as the busboy but was also taught to prepare meals. He often doubled as the porter in those cars that contained rooms as well as a buffet section.

The private car porter, the cream of the Pullman

men, worked on special cars and assignments, such as serving presidents, visiting dignitaries, entertainers, charter groups, and the like. The Pullman Company handpicked private car porters, usually veterans with years of service, for their exceptional expertise in all phases of Pullman operations.

Rendering service, reinforced by proper etiquette and decorum, was at the core of the Pullman philosophy. It is this dedication to service, with pomp and circumstance, for which the Pullman porter is still remembered. The cars themselves were designed with service in mind. Each room contained porter call buttons, individual room temperature controls, electric





The Smock Family, circa 1937. Left to right: Babe, Virgil, George, and father Garrard.

fans, shoe lockers for the porter's traditional nightly task, and numerous other amenities. It was the porter, of course, who was expected to make sure all these systems ran smoothly.

To ensure that porters adhered to a uniform standard of service, the Pullman Company devised a mind-boggling array of rules and regulations on everything from how many inches to fold back a bedsheet to the proper way to pour a bottle of beer. Norman Bookman underscored Pullman's strict adherence to its 127-page manual: "They wanted you to do it like they wanted it, and they didn't force it on you. Whatever was done—whatever instruction was given—they would go over it again and again. And when you said, 'Okay, I understand it,' you signed that you understood certain things. There was no way you could go and say, 'I didn't understand that.' You signed it!"¹⁸

The making of a Pullman porter was a gradual process; few young black men came off the street with sufficient polish and poise to work on the Pullman cars.

Young men of good stature and with a clean-cut appearance were picked for the extensive training program. Each man's background was thoroughly checked, even to the extent of asking questions about him in his community, such as, "Does he have any bad habits?" or "Is he a big drinker?"

Once the applicant passed the initial test, he underwent a fourteen-day instruction period in the yards that covered all the fundamentals of the Pullman operation. Then, he received further training, depending on the job category to which he was assigned.

Norman Bookman recalled his advanced classes:

If you were an attendant, you had to take cooking and bar courses. Now, we used to have a head chef out of Chicago. He would take a steak, and this is all he would do the whole period of time—he would determine which is the best place to puncture a steak, where not to puncture a steak, and so on. And he would give you reasons after it was over. He could take your pastry and crumble it like that and tell you where you've done wrong. But we'd go through whole classes without anybody saying one word until it was over. Then we'd say, "The waiter leaned in too close, his coat would probably drag in his soup," or something else, and all of the operations were really thorough.¹⁹

After such classes were completed, the new porter was sent on a student trip with at least two veteran porters. These were most often short overnight runs to put theory into practice with actual passengers. During his first six months, the new porter was on probation, and only after that time was a decision made as to his suitability. Once fully hired, the new porter was sent out on the road on his own, largely left alone to acclimate himself to the job.

The relationship between the Pullman conductor and the porters was similar to the old plantation relationship between the overseer and the slaves: A white man was a sole authority figure over a predominantly black crew. In fact, some white conductors openly referred to the porters as "their boys" and could be extremely possessive of and protective toward them when confronted by outsiders.²⁰

There were actually two conductors on most passenger trains: the railroad conductor and the Pullman conductor. The railroad conductor, the supreme authority on the train, controlled all train movements, oversaw ticket collecting in railroad-owned cars, and handled problems with passengers. Directly under him was the Pullman conductor, who was in charge of all Pullman employees and the passengers in the buffet, café, and sleeping cars. The Pullman conductor's jurisdiction was limited to Pullman-operated equipment. The Pullman conductor on his own had the power to bring the terminal superintendent into any disciplinary actions against Pullman employees. Such power over mostly black employees invited discrimination and trouble. Although the conductors were a benevolent lot as long as the black crews towed the line, the fact remained that authority was always white, resulting in many abuses of power.

For instance, "The trainman could say he didn't like who the porter was, and he would be called in about that," according to Jewel Brown. "The conductor said, 'I don't want him in my crew. He's a little darker than



the rest of 'em. I want another one a little lighter than him.' The superintendent's wife, I've known her to do such things as that. 'Why don't you get him out and put another one in there and make 'em all the same color?' Those were the types of things that were perpetrated on the employees because they had no redress.²¹

Inspectors and spotters were the other nemeses of all-black train crews. Arriving on trains unannounced, it was impossible to tell who they were unless a particular inspector was widely known to the train crews. The inspector was a company official who boarded the train at any point along the line to ensure that standards and rules were being observed. Inspectors had a great deal of power over employees, and like some conductors, some inspectors certainly used their position to vent personal prejudices. The spotters were paid civilians who spied on the train crew and reported on their behavior. Pullman Company spotters were allowed to set up situations to trap a porter. Many were of a sexual nature: Female spotters, for example, would attempt to lure unsuspecting porters into their drawing room. Other traps were designed to catch an employee suspected of stealing money or supplies.

Pullman porters were subject to a merit/demerit system, with marks going on their permanent record. Merits could be issued for passenger letters of praise, good manners, or cleanliness. Demerits were issued for acts as inconsequential as stepping on a seat cushion, to make an upper berth. Whether or not such violations were officially noted largely depended on the personality of the inspector.

This page: Members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters proudly display their banner at a 1955 ceremony celebrating the organization's 30th anniversary. Right top: Randolph at the head of the 1950 Convention March. Opposite: Cartoon from the Black Worker.

THE 1920s were banner years for the Pullman Company, and it was no coincidence that its black employees were tired of the tyrannical working environment and ready to organize. C. L. Dellums, a Pullman porter and fourth international vice president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, recalled that,

When I went to work for the Pullman Company in January 1924, they paid \$60 a month. If you worked all the calendar month, you might get \$60, but the odds were 10 to 1 that you'd never get \$60 while you were a young porter. Now, once you were there long enough to have enough seniority to hold a regular run, as long as you didn't miss a trip during that calendar month, you'd get your \$60. But the runs were not regulated. The company set up their runs the way they wanted to set them up. Let's say one porter might have a regular run from Oakland to Seattle. You'd total up the number of hours that he was actually on duty in an ordinary 30-day month, and he might work 300 hours. Then there might be another porter working right out of the same place, let's say running to Chicago, and he might work 350 hours. Both of them would get the same \$60.²²

Those porters without enough seniority to hold a regular run were on the "extra board": being on call at any time of the day or night to report for a run. The older men with years of service were at the top of the seniority roster and therefore commanded the best runs, with a few days off in between. But if the sign-out



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rival amounted to thousands of gratis hours received from porters each month.²³

Overtime pay was practically nonexistent. The porters were required to put in 400 hours or 11,000 miles each month, whichever occurred first, before overtime kicked in. Then a porter would be paid an additional 60¢ per 100 miles. The catch was that most porters spent the better part of the month trying to accumulate those 400 hours—leaving little time for days off, let alone overtime.²⁴

Porters were also frequently mistreated by district superintendents, who ran them on the road for long periods of time and doubled them back out with no time to clean up or rest. Reportedly, even office boys harassed porters. And conductors and platform agents were notorious for using their power to coerce porters. In a letter to C. L. Dellums dated 27 May 1941, Brotherhood first international vice president Milton P. Webster cited the case of a Pullman platform man who habitually accused porters of drinking on the job—even some individuals who did not drink. “It seems, so the story goes, that he comes into the car and makes some inquiry about the work, and if the porter says anything in defense of himself this fellow yells at him, ‘You must be drunk.’”²⁵ Similar stories are legion among porters. Certainly there were decent supervisors, but the overwhelming majority of white Pullman managers still regarded the Negro as his subordinate. By the early 1920s, the porters were fed up with such abuse.

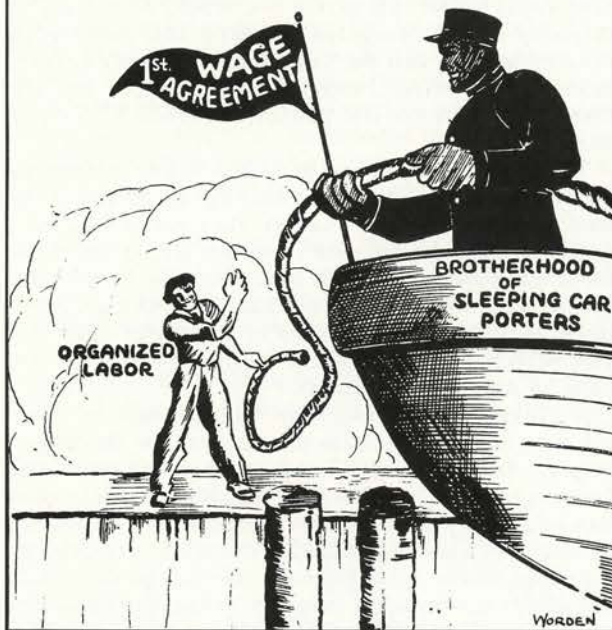
BLACK PORTERS had been trying to organize themselves since the early part of the century, but their political impotence and low social standing had undermined their efforts to unionize against the powerful Pullman Company.

The first national attempt at organization was made in 1912, when the porters circulated petitions amounting to little more than a plea to the company for whatever they could get in the way of a raise. The Pullman Company obliged with a token \$2.50 per month raise, bringing the porters’ salary to \$27.50 per month.

Pullman did voluntarily double the porters’ salary in 1917 to \$45 per month, but solely to offset the keen wartime competition for manpower. Shortly thereafter, the Pullman Company was put under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Railroad Administration, and the \$45 per month salary was raised to \$47.50, the same rate paid to office boys. Subsequently, the monthly rate was raised again to \$60, but even that was a poor income for a long, tiring, back-breaking job. The Department of Labor announced in 1926 that \$2,000 per year was necessary to maintain the average American family “in a decent living.” With a base salary of \$720 a year (excluding tips), the Pullman porter was paid far below that sum.²⁷

Passenger tips provided the only real means by which a porter could earn a respectable living on the

BON VOYAGE...



man, who issued porters their assignments, didn’t like a particular porter, he could keep him doubling out for as long as he wished, with little or no time between.

The Pullman Company avoided paying additional hours to the extra-board porters by establishing the “P.M. time” rule: the company would not begin the porter’s pay on P.M. time. For example, a porter would normally have to report at least two to three hours ahead of his train’s scheduled departure to ready the car and receive passengers. If the train was to leave at midnight, no matter how many hours before midnight he had reported, his time card did not start until 12:01 A.M. Later the rule was modified somewhat so that time cards started when the train actually moved. But again, the hours of preparation before departure and after ar-

Pullman cars. Tipping was a time-honored tradition that served not only the porter's interests but his employers as well. The Pullman Company counted on the passenger to pay the balance of their porters' salary through tips. Without tips, a porter would never have been able to support a family. Naturally, with so much at stake, porters devised innumerable ways to get money out of passengers' pockets.

The art of soliciting generous tips, however, was a source of controversy. Referred to as "Uncle Tomming," kowtowing, hustling, and an assortment of other degrading terms, the tipping tradition was more than a matter of rewarding an employee for good service. Because the porter depended on tips for a living wage, he was forced to solicit gratuities any way he could—hence the reputation of the cunning, sly, sharp Pullman porter. In the eyes of many porters, they became beggars to their white clientele. Malcolm X, the black nationalist spokesman and dissident, worked briefly for the New Haven railroad as a dishwasher and later as a sandwich man, selling food in the coaches of the Yankee Clipper, which ran from Boston to New York. In his book *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, he speaks of the relationship between black train employees and white passengers: "We were in that world of Negroes who are both servants and psychologists, aware that white people are so obsessed with their own importance that they will pay liberally, even dearly, for the impression of being catered to and entertained."²⁸

Eventually, however, the additional money made in tips by African-American train employees was too great to overlook. When a Pullman porter revealed to the *Saturday Evening Post* how much he received in tips on his runs, the Internal Revenue Service immediately made all porters report their tip income and set a minimum that every porter had to claim on his return.

The year 1918, however, held considerable promise for what was thought to be a new era in freedom of speech for the Pullman porters. The War Labor Board mandate giving porters the right to engage in collective bargaining through representation of their own choosing boosted morale among the men.²⁹ In July 1919 two small groups of porters from New York and Chicago joined forces to form the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Protective Union.³⁰

The Pullman Company watched this development with keen interest. The company was uneasy about the numerous wildcat groups that had been springing up across the country; unchecked, these could have proved to be a great source of trouble for Pullman. Taking advantage of the confusion caused when too many organizations claimed to represent the porters, Pullman formed its own in-house union to satisfy the requirements of the War Labor Board's mandate and offset future organizing attempts. This new union was called the Pullman Plan of Employee Representation; its officers were handpicked for their loyalty to the company.³¹ The Pullman Porters Beneficial Association was a sister organization. Its function was to gain further control over the porters through crude sickness and death benefits while keeping the porters amused with extracurricular activities to distract them from pursuing more meaningful issues. Benefits were actually drawn from the porters' yearly dues. In effect, the

porters were paying out sick benefits to themselves.³²

The two organizations served Pullman well for a number of years until the porters recognized the subterfuge. They wanted a bona-fide labor union, separate from the company, through which they could effectively bargain. Pullman once again rose to the occasion by calling the Wage Conference of 1924.³³ It was the first joint conference held under the Pullman Plan of Employee Representation. The porters chose representatives from around the country who they felt would best convey their needs to the company. The major issues were paring down the 400-hour work month to 240 hours and restructuring overtime regulations. But the Pullman Company had been hard at work intimidating porters by threatening to dismiss anyone who voted for the 240-hour month. The majority of porters might have welcomed the idea, but few were willing to risk their jobs fighting for it.³⁴

Ashley Totten, secretary-treasurer of the Brotherhood and a Pullman porter before his dismissal on company-fabricated charges, reported that one porter-delegate told the convention: "I hope that these delegates who are asking for the 240-hour work month realize they are playing with fire. I am going to do what the management wants me to do, and I think if everyone would follow this advice, we would do well." The majority of the delegates followed this misguided porter's advice, and the conference amounted to no more than a well-orchestrated smoke screen by Pullman, which threw the porters another \$7.50 per month bone.³⁵

The dismal outcome of the 1924 Wage Conference was a turning point for the handful of porters who were trying to organize a union. They realized that the power to fight the Pullman Company would not come from the rank and file. A leader would have to be found, someone who was forceful, had strong convictions, and remained unmoved by threats of dismissal. The search led to a Harlem soapbox orator by the name of Asa Philip Randolph.

A. Philip Randolph had gained a reputation as a radical and a troublemaker. His newspaper, *The Messenger*, began publication in 1917 and lasted eleven years. *The Messenger*—and *The Black Worker*; its successor—was Randolph's pulpit from which he reached thousands of black workers and citizens throughout the country regarding all the controversial issues of the day.³⁶ Randolph was subsequently branded "one of the most dangerous Negroes in America" by then-acting U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer.³⁷

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was officially launched on 25 August 1925. Five hundred porters gathered together in New York City to hear Randolph lay the groundwork for the organization.³⁸ Response to the meeting was immediate: the next day more than two hundred porters applied for membership. Soon, New York City claimed a strong Brotherhood affiliation, but success there would have to be repeated throughout the country before the Brotherhood could make any attempt to claim official representation of the Pullman porters. In October, Randolph embarked on a national barnstorming tour to reach porters in every corner of the Pullman system. He later recalled: "Hundreds of meetings were held.

Porters were button-holed on streets, in barber shops, on the cars, in the yards—everywhere porters could be found by determined men in the service—and given the message of trade unionism.³⁹

But reaching thousands of porters in this manner was not without obstacles. The Pullman Company began spreading rumors that Randolph was a Communist and that his interest in the porters was purely financial. Milton Webster spoke about those early days at a meeting of the Brotherhood in Detroit in 1948: "Everybody told us that we were doing the wrong thing. They told us, 'If you don't watch your step you're going to lose your monopoly'. ... They said that Randolph was a crackpot, and that he had an insane idea if he had the slightest idea of trying to organize the Pullman porters."⁴⁰

African Americans had been struggling hard to gain equality within white America; many felt that white leaders would grant more concessions to complacent blacks than to demanding ones. A backlash ensued against Randolph and the Brotherhood, which many feared was too radical to benefit the Negro. "Opposition to the Brotherhood did not only come from the Pullman Company," explained Randolph in November 1936. "Opposition also came from the Negro church, press and leaders. ... From some churches the Brotherhood was barred; maligned and condemned, or damaged by left-handed praise by practically the entire Negro press, with even bishops joining the pack against our movement."⁴¹

From the inception of the Brotherhood, the Pullman Company put pressure on those porters who also acted as key officials within the Brotherhood. Employees were beaten, threatened, and intimidated in an effort to smash the union in major cities.⁴² In 1928 alone, Pullman dismissed forty-five men in Oakland and suspended forty-five others. The roster grew so thin that cars out of Oakland that were normally staffed with porters from that division had to be staffed from cities at the other end of the run. Such realignments created a need to quickly hire and train new porters. The quality of service aboard the affected trains took a dramatic nosedive.

The porters became so fearful for their jobs that all union activities had to be carried out clandestinely; company stool pigeons were reporting on their fellow Brothers. Randolph biographer Jervis Anderson stated, "In many cities the Brotherhood was forced to operate like a secret society ... and there were dues-paying members who crossed to the other side of the street to avoid being seen sharing the same sidewalk with Randolph or his organization."⁴³

The Pullman Company also attempted to play one ethnic group against another. As far back as 1925, Pullman had warned that as porters joined the Brotherhood, Filipino men would be hired to take over their jobs. "It is not because the company loves Filipinos any more than it does Negroes," wrote Randolph in a 1930 editorial, "but because it found it convenient to use the Filipinos as a whip of intimidation over the porters to scare them away from a bona fide organization."⁴⁴ A few Filipinos were put on the club cars in 1925; over time more were hired, specifically in food service capacities. But their numbers were few in comparison with the thousands of black porters on the roster. A group of Chinese attendants was hired in 1930

to operate cars in Union Pacific trains nos. 11 and 12 out of Portland, Oregon. Paid \$90 a month and granted working conditions more liberal than those of the black porters, they were soon withdrawn from service, owing chiefly to passenger complaints.

In 1926 the Railway Labor Act, apparently the long-awaited salvation for the Brotherhood, was passed. It allowed railway workers the right to organize and bargain collectively. Randolph immediately wrote to Pullman Company President E. G. Carry, informing him that under the conditions of the new bill the Brotherhood was now the officially recognized spokesman for the porters and requesting a conference with Pullman.

One of the major questions confronting the Brotherhood had been, who represented the Pullman porters at the bargaining table? The Pullman Company maintained that the porters' loyalty lay with them. The International Hotel and Restaurant Employees' Alliance and the International Bartenders' League both claimed representation of the Pullman porters. The Pullman Company was not too concerned with the Hotel Alliance or Bartenders' League because the porters held no clout within those organizations. The Brotherhood, however, was another matter.

Pullman did not reply to Randolph's letter. A lengthy dispute followed, with both sides claiming representation of the porters. In a vote taken among the porters, the Brotherhood received 53 percent. But Pullman ultimately pulled in 85 percent by waving a dismissal slip in the face of every porter who had voted for the Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood was at last able to break away from the Hotel Alliance when it was accepted into the powerful American Federation of Labor in 1928. Although the Brotherhood's weak financial situation and low membership disqualified it for an international charter, it was set up as thirteen locals governed by AFL President William Green and his council. This move was very important because it began to establish the porters as railroad workers; in the hotel unions they had been classified as restaurant employees. Indeed, this classification would be a key issue against Pullman a few years later.

The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt to the presidency in 1933 gave the Brotherhood new hope. Two amendments to the Railway Labor Act of 1926 were immediately passed into law and appeared to give the Brotherhood the legal power it needed to fight the Pullman Company. The National Industrial Recovery Act provided for the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively through their own representatives, and the Emergency Railroad Transportation Act outlawed company unions like the Pullman Plan of Employee Representation. The two bills gave the railway unions a strong position in labor negotiations. The Pullman Company, however, maintained that as a common carrier, not a railroad, Pullman and the porters were outside the jurisdiction of the new railway bills.

Randolph therefore began to lobby for another amendment to include the Pullman Company. After he wrote to FDR and other Brotherhood sympathizers, the Railway Labor Act and the Emergency Railroad Transportation Act were revised in 1934 to include sleeping car and express companies. Passage of the

amendment marked the beginning of the end of Pullman's domination of the porters. "As a result of this signal victory," Randolph would later write, "a very definite upturn of the movement began and the porters, heretofore hesitant, uncertain and afraid, took new courage and rallied to the Brotherhood, from coast-to-coast, by the thousands."⁴⁵

Pullman retaliated by laying off hundreds of porters. It also claimed once again that the Brotherhood did not legally represent the porters. This charge prompted the National Mediation Board to hold a national election between 27 May and 27 June 1935. The Brotherhood clinched the victory, 8,316 to 1,422. On 1 July the Mediation Board recognized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters as the official representative of the Pullman porters.

After the election victory, Randolph attempted to begin talks with Pullman, but the matter went into mediation almost immediately. Pullman was not willing to concede that it had lost a ten-year battle. The Railway Labor Act was also being challenged in the courts as unconstitutional. Pullman stalled for time.

In the meantime, the Brotherhood achieved an international charter within the AFL in June 1936. Full union status meant stronger support within the AFL. AFL President Green recognized the importance of the charger in an open letter to the porters: "The Pullman porters are the first group of Negro workers to battle their way to organization for the advancement of their interests and the assurance of their rights."⁴⁶

Finally, on 1 April 1937, just three days after the Railway Labor Act had been upheld in the courts, the Pullman Company begrudgingly agreed to sit down with the Brotherhood. Ironically, 25 August would mark the signing of an agreement between the Brotherhood and the Pullman Company. That date, 12 long years before, had marked the start of the Brotherhood in New York City.

The Pullman Company agreed to reduce the work month from 400 hours to 240 and granted a wage increase of \$12 per month, plus back pay for several months. Providing renewed job security were new grievance rules pertaining to issues such as doubling out without rest, P.M. time, and racial discrimination by supervisory personnel. The Brotherhood was especially pleased by the outlawing of spotters' reports as evidence to convict a porter of misconduct.

The Brotherhood negotiated further wage increases in increments of \$24 in 1941 and 1943, and \$44 in 1946. A. Philip Randolph continued to lead the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters until his retirement in 1968, although by that time the organization contained only 2,000 members; the Pullman company closed its doors the same year. Not even dwindling membership, however, could erase the Brotherhood's important place in American labor history. The Pullman porters' fight for industrial and social reform for the African American lent inspiration and set precedent for the civil rights activities of future generations. □

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THE POWER OF THE HUMANITIES

(Continued from page 7)

for a minute or two. Dr. Inclán and his research assistant, Patricia Vargas, administered the questionnaire he had devised to measure, as best he could, the role of force and the amount of reflection in the lives of the students. I explained that each class was going to be videotaped as another way of documenting the project. Then I gave out the first assignment: "In preparation for our next meeting, I would like you to read a brief selection from Plato's *Republic*: the Allegory of the Cave."

I tried to guess how many students would return for the first class. I hoped for twenty, expected fifteen, and feared ten. Sylvia, who had agreed to share the administrative tasks of the course, and I prepared coffee and cookies for twenty-five. We had a plastic container filled with subway tokens. Thanks to Starling Lawrence, we had thirty copies of Bernard Knox's *Norton Book of Classical Literature*, which contained all of the texts for the philosophy section except the *Republic* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

At six o'clock there were only ten students seated around the long table, but by six-fifteen the number had doubled, and a few minutes later two more straggled in out of the dusk. I had written a timeline on the blackboard, showing them the temporal progress of thinking—from the role of myth in Neolithic societies to *The Gilgamesh Epic* and forward to the Old Testament, Confucius, the Greeks, the New Testament, the Koran, the *Epic of Son-Jara*, and ending with Nahuatl and Maya poems, which took us up to the contact between Europe and America, where the history course began. The timeline served as context and geography as well as history: no race, no major culture was ignored. "Let's agree," I told them, "that we are all human, whatever our origins. And now let's go into Plato's cave."

I told them that there would be no lectures in the philosophy section of the course; we would use the Socratic method, which is called maieutic dialogue. "'Maieutic' comes from the Greek word for midwifery. I'll take the role of midwife in our dialogue. Now, what do I mean by that? What does a midwife do?"

It was the beginning of a love affair, the first moment of their infatuation with Socrates. Later, Abel Lomas would characterize that moment in his no-nonsense fashion, saying that it was the first time anyone had ever paid attention to their opinions.

Grace Glueck began the art history class in a darkened room lit with slides of the Lascaux caves and next turned the students' attention to Egypt, arranging for them to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see the Temple of Dendur and the Egyptian Galleries. They arrived at the museum on a Friday evening. Darlene Codd brought her two-year-old son. Pearl Lau was late, as usual. One of the students, who had told me how much he was looking forward to the museum visit, didn't show up, which surprised me. Later I learned that he had been arrested for jumping a turnstile in a subway station on his way to the museum and was being held in a prison cell under the Brooklyn criminal courthouse. In the Tem-

ple of Dendur, Samantha Smoot asked questions of Felicia Blum, a museum lecturer. Samantha was the student who had burst out with the news, in one of the first sessions of the course, that people in her neighborhood believed it "wasn't no use goin' to school, because the white man wouldn't let you up no matter what." But in a hall where the statuary was of half-human, half-animal female figures, it was Samantha who asked what the glyphs meant, encouraging Felicia Blum to read them aloud, to translate them into English. Toward the end of the evening, Grace led the students out of the halls of antiquities into the Rockefeller Wing, where she told them of the connections of culture and art in Mali, Benin, and the Pacific Islands. When the students had collected their coats and stood together near the entrance to the museum, preparing to leave, Samantha stood apart, a tall, slim young woman, dressed in a deer-stalker cap and a dark blue peacoat. She made an exaggerated farewell wave at us and returned to Egypt—her ancient mirror.

Charles Simmons began the poetry class with poems as puzzles and laughs. His plan was to surprise the class, and he did. At first he read the poems aloud to them, interrupting himself with footnotes to bring them along. He showed them poems of love and of seduction, and satiric commentaries on those poems by later poets. "Let us read," the students demanded, but Charles refused. He tantalized them with the opportunity to read poems aloud. A tug-of-war began between him and the students, and the standoff was ended not by Charles directly but by Hector Anderson. When Charles asked if anyone in the class wrote poetry, Hector raised his hand.

"Can you recite one of your poems for us?" Charles said.

Until that moment, Hector had never volunteered a comment, though he had spoken well and intelligently when asked. He preferred to slouch in his chair, dressed in full camouflage gear, wearing a nylon stocking over his hair and eating slices of fresh cantaloupe or honeydew melon.

In response to Charles's question, Hector slid up to a sitting position. "If you turn that camera off," he said. "I don't want anybody using my lyrics." When he was sure the red light of the video camera was off, Hector stood and recited verse after verse of a poem that belonged somewhere in the triangle formed by Ginsberg's *Howl*, the Book of Lamentations, and hip-hop. When Charles and the students finished applauding, they asked Hector to say the poem again, and he did. Later Charles told me, "That kid is the real thing." Hector's discomfort with Sylvia and me turned to ease. He came to our house for a small Christmas party and at other times. We talked on the telephone about a scholarship program and about what steps he should take next in his education. I came to know his parents. As a student, he began quietly, almost secretly, to surpass many of his classmates.

Timothy Koranda was the most professorial of the professors. He arrived precisely on time, wearing a hat of many styles—part fedora, part Borsalino, part Stetson, and at least one-half World War I campaign hat. He taught logic during class hours, filling the black-

board from floor to ceiling, wall to wall, drawing the intersections of sets here and truth tables there and a great square of oppositions in the middle of it all. After class, he walked with students to the subway, chatting about Zen or logic or Heisenberg.

On one of the coldest nights of the winter, he introduced the students to logic problems stated in ordinary language that they could solve by reducing the phrases to symbols. He passed out copies of a problem, two pages long, then wrote out some of the key phrases on the blackboard. "Take this home with you," he said, "and at our next meeting we shall see who has solved it. I shall also attempt to find the answer."

By the time he finished writing out the key phrases, however, David Iskhakov raised his hand. Although they listened attentively, neither David nor his sister Susana spoke often in class. She was shy, and he was embarrassed at his inability to speak perfect English.

"May I go to blackboard?" David said. "And will see if I have found correct answer to *zis* problem."

Together Tim and David erased the blackboard, then David began covering it with signs and symbols. "If first man is earning this money, the second man is closer to this town..." he said, carefully laying out the conditions. After five minutes or so, he said, "And the answer is: B will get first to Cleveland!"

Samantha Smoot shouted, "That's not the answer. The mistake you made is in the first part there, where it says who earns more money."

Tim folded his arms across his chest, happy. "I shall let you all take the problem home," he said.

When Sylvia and I left the Clemente Center that night, a knot of students was gathered outside, huddled against the wind. Snow had begun to fall, a slippery powder on the gray ice that covered all but a narrow space down the center of the sidewalk. Samantha and David stood in the middle of the group, still arguing over the answer to the problem. I leaned in for a moment to catch the character of the argument. It was even more polite than it had been in the classroom, because now they governed themselves.

ONE SATURDAY morning in January, David Howell telephone me at home. "Mr. Shores," he said, Anglicizing my name, as many of the students did.

"Mr. Howell," I responded, recognizing his voice.

"How you doin', Mr. Shores?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"I had a little problem at work."

Uh-oh, I thought, bad news was coming. David is a big man, generally good-humored but with a quick temper. According to his mother, he had a history of violent behavior. In the classroom he had been one of the best students, a steady man, twenty-four years old, who always did the reading assignments and who often made interesting connections between the humanities and daily life. "What happened?"

"Mr. Shores, there's a woman at my job, she said some things to me and I said some things to her. And she told my supervisor I had said things to her, and he called me in about it. She's forty years old and she don't have no social life, and I have a good social life, and she's jealous of me."

"And then what happened?" The tone of his voice

and the timing of the call did not portend good news.

"Mr. Shores, she made me so mad, I wanted to smack her up against the wall. I tried to talk to some friends to calm myself down a little, but nobody was around."

"And what did you do?" I asked, fearing this was his one telephone call from the city jail.

"Mr. Shores, I asked myself, 'What would Socrates do?'"

David Howell had reasoned that his co-worker's envy was not his problem after all, and he had dropped his rage.

One evening, in the American history section, I was telling the students about Gordon Wood's ideas in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. We were talking about the revolt by some intellectuals against classical learning at the turn of the eighteenth century, including Benjamin Franklin's late-life change of heart, when Henry Jones raised his hand.

"If the Founders loved the humanities so much, how come they treated the natives so badly?"

I didn't know how to answer this question. There were confounding explanations to offer about changing attitudes toward Native Americans, vaguely useful references to views of Rousseau and James Fenimore Cooper. For a moment I wondered if I should tell them about Heidegger's Nazi past. Then I saw Abel Lomas's raised hand at the far end of the table. "Mr. Lomas," I said.

Abel said, "That's what Aristotle means by incontinence, when you know what's morally right but you don't do it, because you're overcome by your passions."

The other students nodded. They were all inheritors of wounds caused by the incontinence of educated men; now they had an ally in Aristotle, who had given them a way to analyze the actions of their antagonists.

THOSE WHO appreciate ancient history understand the radical character of the humanities. They know that politics did not begin in a perfect world but in a society even more flawed than ours: one that embraced slavery, denied the rights of women, practiced a form of homosexuality that verged on pedophilia, and endured the intrigues and corruption of its leaders. The genius of that society originated in man's recreation of himself through the recognition of his humanness as expressed in art, literature, rhetoric, philosophy, and the unique notion of freedom. At that moment, the isolation of the private life ended and politics began.

The winners in the game of modern society, and even those whose fortune falls in the middle, have other means to power: they are included at birth. They know this. And they know exactly what to do to protect their place in the economic and social hierarchy. As Allan Bloom, author of the nationally best-selling tract in defense of elitism, *The Closing of the American Mind*, put it, they direct the study of the humanities exclusively at those young people who "have been raised in comfort and with the expectation of ever increasing comfort."

In the last meeting before graduation, the Clemente students answered the same set of questions they'd an-



***“And what did you do?” I asked,
fearing this was his one telephone
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would Socrates do?’”***

answered at orientation. Between October and May, students had fallen to AIDS, pregnancy, job opportunities, pernicious anemia, clinical depression, a schizophrenic child, and other forces, but of the thirty students admitted to the course, sixteen had completed it, and fourteen had earned credit from Bard College. Dr. Inclán found that the student's self-esteem and their abilities to divine and solve problems had signifi-

cantly increased; their use of verbal aggression as a tactic for resolving conflicts had significantly decreased. And they all had notably more appreciation for the concepts of benevolence, spirituality, universalism, and collectivism.

It cost about \$2,000 for a student to attend the Clemente Course. Compared with unemployment, welfare, or prison, the humanities are a bargain. But coming into possession of the faculty of reflection and the skills of politics leads to a choice for the poor—and whatever they choose, they will be dangerous: they may use politics to get along in a society based on the game, to escape from the surround of force into a gentler life, to behave as citizens, and nothing more; or they may choose to oppose the game itself. No one can predict the effect of politics, although we all would like to think that wisdom goes our way. That is why the poor are so often mobilized and so rarely politicized. The possibility that they will adopt a moral view other than that of their mentors can never be discounted. And who wants to run that risk?

ON THE night of the first Clemente Course graduation, the students and their families filled the eighty-five chairs we crammed into the conference room where classes had been held. Robert Martin, associate dean of Bard College, read the graduates' names. David Dinkins, the former mayor of New York City, handed out the diplomas. There were speeches and presentations. The students gave me a plaque on which they had misspelled my name. I offered a few words about each student, congratulated them, and said finally, “This is what I wish for you: May you never be more active than when you are doing nothing . . .” I saw their smiles of recognition at the words of Cato, which I had written on the blackboard early in the course. They could recall again too the moment when we had come to the denouement of Aristotle's brilliantly constructed thriller, the *Nicomachean Ethics*—the idea that in the contemplative life man was most like God. One or two, perhaps more of the students, closed their eyes. In the momentary stillness of the room it was possible to think.

The Clemente Course in the Humanities ended a second year in June 1997. Twenty-eight new students had enrolled; fourteen graduated. Another version of the course will begin this fall in Yucatán, Mexico, using classical Maya literature in Maya.

On May 14, 1997, Viniece Walker came up for parole for the second time. She had served more than ten years of her sentence, and she had been the best of prisoners. In a version of the Clemente Course held at the prison, she had been my teaching assistant. After a brief hearing, her request for parole was denied. She will serve two more years before the parole board will reconsider her case.

A year after graduation, ten of the first sixteen Clemente Course graduates were attending four-year colleges or going to nursing school; four of them had received full scholarships to Bard College. The other graduates were attending community college or working full-time. Except for one: she had been fired from her job in a fast-food restaurant for trying to start a union. □

MISSIONARIES FOR LEARNING

(Continued from page 11)

the usual subjects of discussion, but the meaning of an establishment of religion. But those two hours with the new book had not helped her very much. While informed enough about the meaning of an establishment, Ms. Gonzalez could not yet explain its historical complexities—the eighteenth-century position of the Church of England in the colonies, the existence of multiple establishments (“How could there have been lots of established churches in a single state?” one student pressed her. “If that was so, why were the Framers so worried?”), and so on. She left school that day dissatisfied with herself.

She decided to turn her frustration (and, she admitted to herself, her embarrassment) into a shared effort; she and her students would study together so that she, as well as they, could get the answers she sought. So she devised a paper assignment in which each original state had its own single student historian; the Bill of Rights got three students and the Church of England one; and she decided to take James Madison for herself. For the next month, she frequently joined her students in the school and town libraries, studied Madison’s “Memorial and Remonstrance,” and steeped herself in his writings about the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom and the Bill of Rights. When her students’ papers were due, she had her own paper ready for them to read, just as they read each other’s and she all of theirs. Of course, her students were somewhat uneasy about reading hers—especially when she asked them to comment on it and give her a grade. (An A, they decided, even though she had misspelled the name of Madison’s birthplace.)

The class got so involved in the subject that some of its members decided to enter the state’s National History Day competition. Spending afternoons with them, Ms. Gonzalez helped them plan and design a display that, after competing for the contest, could travel to libraries throughout the country. When the project won, she took the whole class out for ice cream. When the project competed in the national competition, it won first place there, too. She was so proud of her students that she decided that they needed more than ice cream this time; she wanted recognition for them.

Usually, the large display board in front of the high school carried only sports news, like “Cavaliers 8-0 for Season. Conference Champs.” She wanted a change.

The principal was reluctant: “What will the community think? It’s only interested in the teams.”

“Well,” she replied, “Let’s try to change its ways. Let’s recognize the students who achieve by learning.”

For the rest of the year, all those who rode by could read “Cavaliers Win National History Day Championship. School Has Five Merit Scholarship Finalists.”

Spurred by the success of her assignment on religious establishments and by her students’ success in their National History Day contests, Ms. Gonzalez tried something she had long contemplated but, fearing parental objections, had never dared. She wished to get away from the brief and denatured treatment of religion in the required textbook and transform it so that

her students could learn in greater depth about this central engine of American history. Moreover, she hoped to have her students study religion throughout the course, not just when studying disestablishment or the great revivals of the nineteenth century.

So seeing her opportunity in the group of students she chanced to have this year, she seized it. Her desire to continue treating religion as integral to American history, to include the subject throughout the advanced placement syllabus in future courses, however, would demand much of her—more study, more preparations—and all on her own, for the summer institute on American religions that she had applied for was not scheduled for six months. Yet she was determined to teach what she wanted most to learn about; and she was determined to do so in a way that taught about religion while avoiding any hint of indoctrination.

When she dug in, she discovered that the self-imposed task was almost too much for her. Her family found her devoting more time than usual to reading and studying in what free time she had. Nevertheless, she was determined to add the study of religion, a subject she had long thought missing, to her course. To help divide the labor, she assigned separate religions to each student—Free Will Baptism to a Jew, Judaism to a Catholic, Mormonism to an African-American Muslim, Pentecostalism to an atheist, and so on, so as to expose each to new perspectives and to broaden the knowledge of each. Lacking an appropriate text that she could assign, she had to undertake much more lecturing than she liked. But if she did not become the authority and provide guidance, who else would? To questions from colleagues about the danger of proselytizing, she had a ready answer: “I won’t tolerate it. Yet this course is not going to be about religious appreciation—everyone learning a little bit about lots of creeds. Each student is going to learn about one religion in some depth. The students can’t understand the nation’s history without understanding its people’s religious faiths and the elements of them that permeate all our culture.”

Ms. Gonzalez’s curiosity inspired her students to become curious, too. By the end of the course, a couple of her Jewish students knew more about their own faith for having studied the struggles of German and Irish Catholics to protect their immigrant religions in a predominantly Protestant nation. One self-styled atheist had become deeply knowledgeable about Jehovah’s Witnesses. The last day of class, her very best student expressed admiration for how much Ms. Gonzalez knew about American history.

“Well,” she replied obliquely, “we’ve all had to work hard, haven’t we?”

“We sure have,” the student replied. “And some of us have been wondering what your own religious faith is.”

“I didn’t want you to know while we were considering religion in general and the many religious faiths represented in the United States,” she said. “But there’s no harm in your knowing now. I’m a Methodist. But in the classroom, I’ve tried to express another faith—the faith that we can all learn a lot together. I hope that I’ve done so, and I hope that you’re converted to that faith.” □

LEARNING TO LISTEN

(Continued from page 25)

ant, relaxing reverie of past time; or toward the freedom of unlimited speculation and dreams that the future provides.

The classroom is the place to learn, and the classroom is the place to learn to listen. One of the most complimentary comments a teacher can make about you is, "Always attentive in class." It carries with it many connotations: good classroom manner (posture, responsiveness, determined approach, etc.), a will to accomplish the job of learning, a desire to contribute your part, and, above all, an awareness that the classroom is an important place for you. If you can train yourself to listen, all these things become a natural part of you.

Learning to listen is learning to follow a leader. The student who listens is the student who learns, because listening, above everything else, makes the task of acquiring knowledge easier. The wise student listens with both eyes and ears, hearing what the teacher is saying, and, at the same time, watching closely when the teacher is writing on the board or pointing on the map. When directions are given they are written down quickly, and one is never insulting to the teacher by asking, "Should we write these down?" Again, when the teacher says: "This is important"—"It is essential that you know this"—"You will need this later," the wise student hears such words as a signal that introduces material that will be needed for further understanding of the course, for tests later, or for the examination at the end of the course.

Poor listening is worse than none. A student put it correctly when he said, "There are only two kinds of listening, (1) good listening and (2) not listening at all." The student who half-listens not only misses a lot, but distorts what is heard, mixes truth with error, and makes the mistake of learning mistakes. Gradually, the student develops the bad habit of closing one's ears and eyes until proper listening could not be accomplished even if desired. Then the student wonders why he or she works so hard and makes such little progress.

Now is the time to learn to listen. Next year and the next you will be given more and more in class that you must remember. In college more than half your knowledge is acquired through listening; in life, in the rapid tempo of the age in which we live, perhaps more than half your knowledge will be acquired by listening.

Listening takes will power; and it requires actions that will train the mind to behave itself. To that end the following suggestions are offered to help you become a good listener in class and in the lecture hall.

Suggestions for Better Listening in Class

1. Get ready to listen as soon as the bell has rung. Usually important information is given at the beginning and at the end of class. If you practice listening attentively the first ten minutes of the period, you will develop the power to listen to the entire period.
2. Watch the teacher closely. Listen to every word he

says, turn a deaf ear to all other sounds, and keep your eyes glued upon the teacher. Practice listening around the subject. Listen to other students when they speak. Hear what they say, note the good points, spot the errors, and be ready to supply information they lack.

3. Have your ear tuned for directions. Your work can be lightened greatly by following the teacher's directions; the teacher is working for you and is trying to help you. But if you do not listen and do ten problems rather than the tenth problem, you haven't saved much of what is most precious of all in school—time.

4. Adapt yourself to each teacher's methods. Some teachers unconsciously bury valuable information under a mass of accessory detail. Here you must overcome their difficulty; you must listen so attentively that you will be able to find the important parts of information. Sometimes a clue can be found in repeated phrases, such as: "The important point," "we must remember," etc. Other teachers almost blueprint the information for you. They enumerate: One, two, three, etc., they outline or diagram on the blackboard as they talk. Never affront them by asking, "Do you want us to remember this?" You can be sure that they are making the information clear for just that reason.

5. Check every tendency toward mind-wandering. The brain, the ear, the eye must be working together if you are to hear what is being said. How many times have you asked a question in class, only to be humiliated by finding that the teacher had just finished an explanation of the same? Mind-wandering can be checked by taking notes. Writing is one of the best ways to train yourself to listen. In order to write, you force yourself to listen.

6. Listen critically, thoughtfully, and understandingly. Test each statement as you hear it. If you do not understand a point, ask for an explanation then or after the class.

Suggestions for Better Listening in the Lecture Hall

1. Don't enter the hall and slouch in a back seat. How would you feel if you were the speaker? By that act you are insulting the speaker—the very act says for you, "I am here. I will listen half-heartedly, if at all; just try to teach me anything." Always fill the lecture room from the front; take the front seat if possible.

2. Put yourself in the speaker's place. Perhaps for every minute the speaker talks, he has spent three hours in preparation. Would you like to see such effort on your part wasted?

3. Respect is essential. Do nothing to distract the speaker. Leave your knitting at home and dispose of your chewing gum outside the door.

4. Save your questions until the end of the lecture, unless the speaker asks you to speak up if you wish a point made clear.

5. Remember that you can always learn. Never approach a classroom with the feeling that the speaker cannot teach you. □

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

(Continued from page 27)

ways to get to where we want to go and that when we do choose to include one, we think carefully about what it is we hope to accomplish.

Below are three questions we as teachers should ask ourselves when planning an activity.

What is it that I want students to know?

If the purpose of the lesson is to learn more about the Cherokee Indians, then make sure your activity deals with the Cherokees, not with a newspaper about classroom events. That would be a fine project for a journalism class, but not for a history class. And what is it about the Cherokees that you want students to know? The activity should relate directly to the standard or objective for the lesson. In fact, the standard should drive the direction of the activity. Clearly explaining what you want students to know provides added benefits when talking with parents, policy-makers, and the public as well.

It is also essential that the students understand how the activity relates to the goal. Will the lesson help them answer the "So what?" question they often have in their minds? Sometimes you may decide to answer this question at the top of the lesson, or you may discuss it in the debriefing of the activity—another important part of the lesson to bring the students' learning to some closure. It helps to ask students to summarize, to reflect, to synthesize, and then communicate connected understandings. Making connections with previous lessons and units, and foreshadowing what will be coming up in near-future lessons pays off in deeper learning.

Does the activity touch only superficial aspects of the topic?

The mass media has so conditioned kids to having everything presented as entertainment, we sometimes fear that our students will only find subjects interesting if we make them "fun." But "interesting" is not the same as fun, and when given the opportunity, students often find that serious subject matter is the most engaging of all. In the fall 1994 issue of this magazine, the historian and educator Paul Gagnon gave an example of just such an engaging and serious activity—this one as part of a high school history lesson exploring the causes and responsibilities for World War I:

Starting with the "spark" that sets off great explosions, and then looking back at the longer build up of explosives, is more dramatic than memorizing lists of causes. In small-group projects, students (as "foreign correspondents," each with an assignment) will explore, and then put together in class, the haunting story of Franz Ferdinand's assassination on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo: who, why, how, the plans, the errors, the role of chance, accident, coincidence, the passions and obsessions on all sides.

But did one man's murder have to push all Europe into war? Again in small teams, students will follow the day-by-day crisis of July. Each team will focus upon its chosen European political or military leader, his background and character, his actions during the fatal month, and ask:

How were his reactions and choices shaped by that familiar list of *long-range* forces? For examples, the alliance system or his military plans? Or by *short-term* pressures on him from family, friends, the press, public opinion? By his own country's inner problems? By his character and temperament? By accident or misinformation? Or by any other factors the students can think of?

This exercise should present the class with a tangle of forces that cut down the number of acceptable options open to the actors and that tied the hands of even those statesmen most devoted to peace. Do students think other kinds of leaders might have done better in the "fog of crisis"? Would they themselves have done better? On the other hand, are they ready to let everybody off the hook of responsibility?

Is this the best use of our limited classroom time?

Making a mobile or diorama to illustrate the main concept of a passage is certainly very hands on, but it may be a very inefficient means to an end. Likewise, a shoebox made to resemble the interior of a Japanese home may consume more valuable time than we can afford—time that could be more productively used to explore the fascinating topic of Japanese architecture and design.

None of my comments should be interpreted to discourage variety or spice in lesson planning. In my own field of history, for example, activities such as role playing, debates, the creation of timelines and maps, visits from local experts, well-planned field trips, the generous use of original documents, letters, photographs, and biographies, and a rich array of other options can each make its unique contribution. No activity, however, should be an end in and of itself, but a path or a tool in the labor of genuine learning. □

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The Learning Line is a toll-free telephone service offering a pre-recorded message and learning activities for children. Callers learn about a variety of subjects: language arts, history, mathematics, geography, science, and arts and crafts. Each Learning Line message is designed to be interesting enough for a twelve-year-old and easy enough for an eight-year-old.

The message changes weekly.

The Learning Line is available 24 hours a day, every day.