

# AMERICAN Educator

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
WINTER 2000-2001

Tuesday, March 31, 1936

19th day - 173 days follow

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ing was busy with the hoisting  
First Day of February  
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Soon...  
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waiting for the breakfast bell. I...

## Layle Lane: Rediscovering an AFT pioneer

Supreme Court of the United States

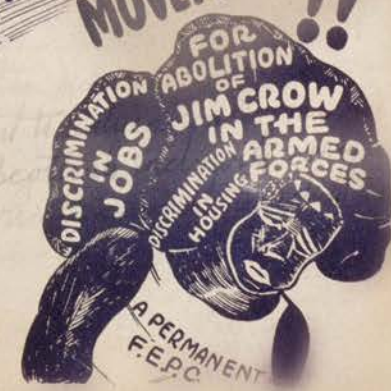
After breakfast I went my way  
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ed by several taxi drivers to walk...



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**SANDRA FELDMAN**  
President  
American Federation of Teachers  
**Elizabeth McPike**  
editor  
**Marcia Reecer**  
deputy editor/editor of this issue  
**Sandra Hendricks**  
production coordinator  
**Laura Baker**  
copy editor  
**Debbie Johnson**  
production support staff  
**Andrew Bornstein**  
design consultant

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**Peter Li, Inc.**  
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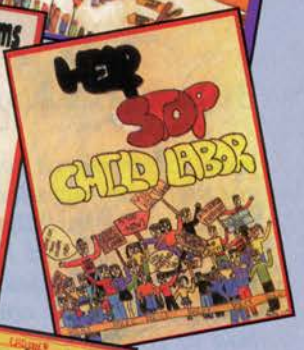
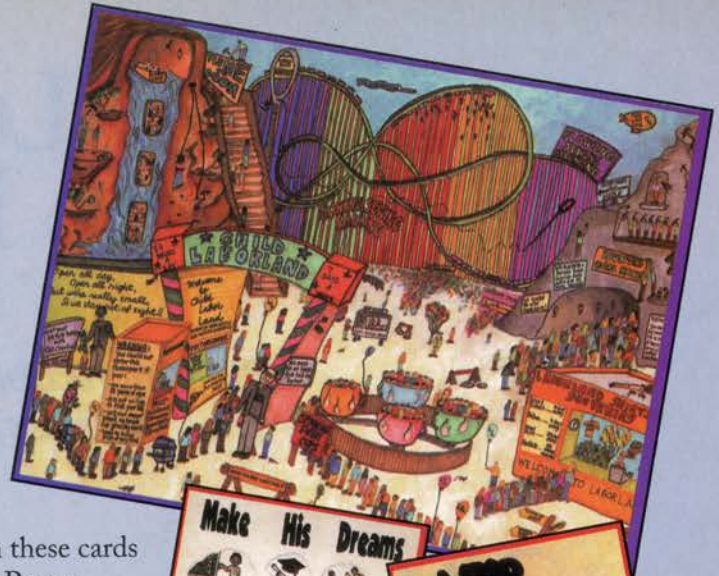
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# LOST AND FOUND

## *The Incredible Life and Times of (Miss) Layle Lane*

BY JACK SCHIERENBECK

*Jack Schierenbeck was surprised at the response he got when he included a paragraph about Layle Lane in one of the installments of "Class Struggles," his history of the United Federation of Teachers. Readers, who were fascinated by what they'd read, called and asked where they could find out more. Schierenbeck had to confess that he didn't know. All the information he had been able to find was included in the brief paragraph. Surprisingly, there were no books or articles about Lane, and her contemporaries, people who could have talked about her, were gone. The trail seemed to be cold.*

*But Dan Golodner, AFT archivist, was convinced that Lane would make a great subject for an American Educator article, and he suggested some sources in AFT's own archives and in the Layle Lane Collection at Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. Ultimately AE tracked down a man who had not only known Layle Lane well but had done extensive research on her life. Without Professor Leonard Bethel's 400-page manuscript, his taped interviews with many of Lane's friends and associates, and his own recollections, all of which he generously shared, the article that follows could never have been written.*

—Editor

HER GRAVE in Cuernavaca is marked only by a number. That's just how cruel time has been to the memory of Layle Lane. You can picture Mexican families celebrating the annual Day of the Dead and wondering, as they walk by her grave, what poor forgotten wretch lies buried there.

If only they knew.

By the time she died at 82, on Feb. 2, 1976, Miss Lane, as she liked to be called, had lived a life that defies neat summary or easy description. High school teacher, civil rights pioneer, teacher unionist, Socialist activist, political candidate, lifelong pacifist, adventurer, and humanitarian, she counted as friends and

*Jack Schierenbeck is a staff writer at the New York Teacher/City Edition.*

political comrades-in-arms the likes of A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Eleanor Roosevelt, Ralph Bunche, Pearl Buck, W. E. B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Margaret Mead.

Not that Layle Lane sought the limelight. The fact is, she never lost the common touch: finding time to run a summer camp for poor, inner-city kids on her Pennsylvania farm, and, in her retirement, helping Mexican street children. At the age of 60, she boarded a tiny freighter and traveled alone halfway around the world.

Still, it's a wonder that so little acknowledgment of what she accomplished remains in the public record—mainly fragments, like AFT convention photos of her and her committee (the one that was chiefly responsible for AFT's amicus curiae brief in *Brown vs. Board of Education*); her name on literature for the 1941 March on Washington; a newspaper photo of her smiling and holding the document that put an end to segregated locals in the AFT. Unlike Woody Allen's fictional hero Zelig, who is inserted into film footage showing the great events of his time, Layle Lane's picture is mysteriously missing from the great events in which she participated and helped to shape.

The story of her life might have been lost for all time were it not for Leonard Bethel, who was "one of her boys" at her summer camp. (See "Miss Lane, as we all called her . . .," page 10.) Now a Rutgers University professor in the Department of Africana Studies and an ordained Presbyterian minister, Bethel has made Layle Lane's life no small part of his life's work. He did the heavy digging, uncovering this incredible woman's legacy, and because of him, her accomplishments will not go unsung.

"I was in awe of her," says Maida Springer-Kemp, who at 90 recalls meeting Lane in the early 1930s on 125th Street in Harlem as the older woman was organizing a boycott of local merchants who engaged in discrimination. "I felt proud to be walking alongside her as she patiently explained to people that 'If anyone denies you your citizenship, you should deny them your hard-earned money.'"

By then Lane was already a political fixture on the



*A portrait of Layle Lane  
as a young woman,  
probably in the 1920s.*

Harlem scene, noted for her persistence and eloquence. "She was brilliant and so articulate," remembers Springer-Kemp. "She was such a lady, gentle but strong. She knew who she was."

Lane refused to be cowed by what the American system would have a black woman believe about herself. "She never bought into what America tried to force upon you, that you were a second-class citizen. That no matter how educated you were you were less of a person. Layle was small but we all thought she was 10-feet tall," says Springer-Kemp, who went on to become an aide to A. Philip Randolph and the director of education for a garment workers union.

"She was a remarkable woman, soft-spoken and with a quiet dignity about her," says Harry Fleishman, one-time national secretary of the Socialist Party, author of a biography of Norman Thomas, and at 86 one of the few people still alive who knew and worked with Lane. "Definitely, one of the smartest people around, absolutely brilliant and articulate. Layle had a full sense of her own worth and didn't want to be treated with kid gloves or as a token. Nor would she kowtow to anyone. Yet she was well-liked and would try to bring people together."

The granddaughter of free blacks, Layle Lane was born on Nov. 27, 1893, in Marietta, Ga., the fourth child of the Rev. Calvin and Alice Virginia Clark Lane, a former school teacher. The son of a North Carolina carpenter, Calvin Lane had gone north to Connecticut to attend the Hartford Seminary. His brother Wiley had been the first African American to graduate from Massachusetts' Amherst College—and one of the first to be elected to Phi Beta Kappa,—and he went on to teach Latin and Greek at Howard University. Calvin, who was ordained a Congregationalist minister, was sent to Marietta to build a church and school, which he did with his own hands.

Unfortunately, he wasn't as handy when it came to persuading the local people, most of whom were Baptists or Methodists, to join his church. Strong-willed and outspoken, the Rev. Lane would never have been mistaken for a charmer. Of course, it didn't help that he had picked up a New England accent at the seminary and was very light-skinned to boot. At any rate, although his school for girls—which daughter Layle attended for nine

years, learning to speak and write with ease and elegance—wasn't a complete failure, Calvin Lane never lived down the tag of "outsider."

A love of language and a facility with it were not all that young Layle learned from her father. From him she inherited a tight-laced personal morality and a strong belief in self-help, combined with a passion for social justice. Although Lane would sever her ties to the church—some even thought she was an atheist—many would later describe her as the "most Christian" woman they'd ever met, indeed "a saint." It's no surprise to hear her talk, in one of her journals, about how "abstract sermons are and only one solution—Christ—rather than the practice of Christ within."

Calvin Lane taught her that the life of a black freedman in the slave South had only been so free; how it was a crime "to teach colored children anything from books and also for colored people to have books in their homes." And he wrote down an account of one terrifying night, when white vigilantes searching for runaway slaves found books instead.

Her father also remembered how, in the years after the Civil War, missionaries came to town and taught the ex-slaves how to read. She learned how they banded together to protect those good samaritans from the violent and vengeful nightriders.

And he recalled hearing a Baptist preacher-turned-Klansman tell a public gathering that "God Almighty never intended a nigger to be the political equal of the white man."

"It was the Klan," he wrote, "who drenched our state with rivers of Negro blood because brave Black men dared to vote." (See "The Story of the Rev. Calvin Lane," opposite page.)

Layle Lane was spared the worst. Being a "preacher's kid"—what James Farmer, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) founder and fearless Freedom Rider, dismissively called a "PK"—Lane grew up in the security and relative comfort of the black middle class. Her hands never bled from picking cotton. She never had to stand all day at a textile loom or scrub some stranger's floors.

That said, growing up in the turn-of-the-century South, she surely knew the terror of having to live on the rim of the volcano.

"If it is necessary, every Negro in the state will be lynched...to main-



*Alice Virginia Clark Lane, Layle Lane's mother.*

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF LEONARD BETHEL



# The Story of the Rev. Calvin Lane

*Layle Lane's father lived through the time when African Americans gained their freedom and citizenship and then, in a few short years, lost most of the rights they had won. Calvin Lane apparently hoped to write a history of the Reconstruction, but this account of his early life and times seems to be all that remains of the project. Although Rev. Lane wrote this close to the end of his life, the experiences he recounts must have been part of the Lane family lore as Layle Lane was growing up, and it's easy to see her own sense of the preciousness of education, as well as her pride and dignity, in her father's story. "The Story of the Rev. Calvin Lane" is in Howard University's Layle Lane Collection, and it is printed here for the first time with the permission of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center.*



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF LEONARD BETHEL

*The Lane family, c. 1895, with Layle Lane sitting on her father's lap.*

—Editor

**M**Y PARENTS were free colored people. They were born around 100 years ago; to be exact, my father was born in 1828, my mother in 1834.

The forebears of my mother were thrifty people, and by hard work in odd hours had earned sufficient money to buy their freedom from slavery. It is but charitable to say that there were some humane slaveholders. The freedom of my father and his sister came in a different way. Like Paul of old, they were freeborn. In those years, the status of the mother determined that of her children. The mother of my father was of the white race, while his father was a slave. There were more than a few such children in the early years of the 19th century.

Our state was North Carolina; it was one Southern state that took

some account of such prospective citizens. A constitutional amendment provided that all children so born should be taken from their mothers at 5 years old and bound to a taskmaster until 21 years old. To safeguard the rights of these children, some stipulations in the binding papers were the following: They were to have a home, and to be taught to work. They were to have two years' schooling, education in the three R's, reading, writing, and arithmetic.... In the case of boys at the proper age, they were to learn a trade and at 21 be set free, given two suits of clothes, a horse, bridle, and saddle. Such was thought an adequate equipment for a young man to become a useful and helpful citizen of the state. This plan worked well.

Many of the taskmasters were humane men and lived up to their obligations. Others were not humane and often sold their charges to slave traders, and such children were not freed until the Emancipation Proclamation. I have heard the stories of not a few old people who had vivid recollections of how they were cruelly sold into slavery and made to serve hard and long in bitter bondage.

The taskmaster of my father was of the better sort. He did set his charges free when they were of age. However, my father never got his schooling nor anything else due him. When he was born, the feeling was already growing that free people among the slaves were a rather dangerous element. Something must be done about it. Some wise and good men who wanted right to prevail were puzzled to know what to do. One measure was the organization of the American Colonization Society that sent some to Africa.

**T**HESE COLORED children were no longer permitted to go to school with the whites. All their constitutional rights were thrown to the wind. Old people of 20 years ago in speaking of it would say, "the Constitution fell." That occurred in my state in 1835. Colored people charged that action against the Democratic Party, which was the party in power in the state. "The Constitution fell," and it became a misdemeanor for anyone to teach colored children anything from books and also for colored people to have books in

*(Continued on page 46)*

tain white supremacy” the governor of Mississippi declared in 1907. Indeed, an average of 100 blacks a year were lynched in the United States between 1898 and 1918. During the 1890s, the voting rights that African Americans had gained during Reconstruction had been systematically and in broad daylight stripped from them, so that by 1910 black citizens in every former Confederate state could no longer vote.

Courts were no refuge. By 1896, a few years after Layle Lane’s birth, the races were separated down to the smallest detail of life—drinking fountains, swimming pools, schools, even morgues and cemeteries—as the doctrine of “separate but equal” became the law of the land. Florida and Kentucky actually went so far as to make it a crime for a white to teach a black. And in a South Carolina textile factory, black and white workers were forbidden by law from using a door, stairway, or even window at the same time.

Who knows how big a role this poison played in Rev. Lane’s decision to leave Georgia and move to Knoxville, Tenn. But with the coming of age of his oldest son, it isn’t a stretch to think that the threat of violence and intimidation was becoming too close for comfort.

Knoxville, 200 miles north of Marietta, had been a stronghold of Union sympathizers who had opposed Tennessee’s secession in the Civil War. Although it was segregated, the more liberal and cosmopolitan Knoxville should have been an improvement. We’ll never know. What we do know is that a few years later Rev. Lane picked up the family and moved to Vineland, N.J. At Vineland High School, 13-year-old Layle had her first taste of integration. A good student, she was the school’s first black graduate.

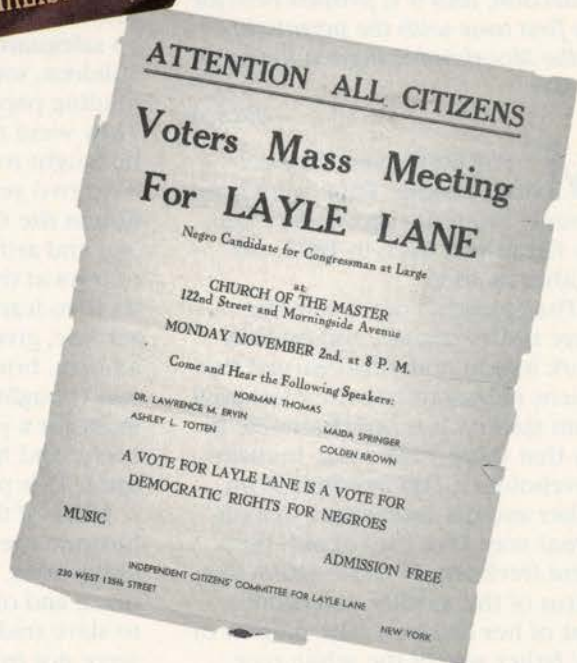
She then followed her father and another uncle to Washington, D.C.’s all-black Howard University. Founded in 1867, Howard, for most of its first century of existence, drew the cream of the American black middle class. Layle thrived, graduating in four years with a degree in history and English.

Next stop: Harlem. Arriving in 1916, she rented a small apartment in the hope of landing a teaching job in the city’s public schools. At a time when even a high school diploma was rare, you’d think employers would have been eager to hire the polished, well-spoken minister’s daughter with her degree from a prestigious college.

Think again. As one black minister put it at the time: “The young colored men and girls who are graduating from high schools, the normal schools [teaching academies], and the colleges don’t want to be



Campaign brochures for two of Layle Lane’s runs for office, both in the 1940s. (Top) For New York State senator. (Left) For New York City comptroller.



(Above) A poster announcing a rally in support of Layle Lane’s candidacy for New York State congressman-at-large. Norman Thomas, the most prominent American Socialist of his day and a friend of Layle Lane, is the featured speaker.

waiting maids and porters or elevator operators, and yet this is about the highest they can hope for in this country."

The degree from Howard wasn't enough. Turned down, Lane went back to school for a year—to Hunter College—earning a second undergraduate degree. Then, intent on teaching high school, she enrolled at Columbia for a master's degree.

We know very little about Lane's early years in New York. Still, the 24-year-old must have felt she'd finally made it home. In Harlem, Lane found herself in the right place at the right time: at the epicenter of an explosion of black intellectual and artistic creativity.

This tiny 2½-mile by half-mile strip would become the "mecca of the New Negro." By the hundreds, if not thousands, black America's best thinkers, writers, poets, artists, sculptors, and musicians flocked to Harlem. Artists like poets Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson, writers Claude McKay and Zora Neale Hurston, and musicians Eubie Blake and Fats Waller would create a new, more daring, self-aware, heady, sensuous, and radical black sensibility. They called the result the Harlem Renaissance.

But there were two Harlems—one bursting with promise, the other exploding with problems. Lane had followed the same road north as hundreds of thousands of ordinary black Americans in what became known as "the great migration."

The lure was jobs. A steep decline in European immigration, coupled with the drafting of 4 million men into uniform in 1917, had created an acute labor shortage.

So black people went north—to Chicago's meat-packing houses; to the coal mines of West Virginia and Pennsylvania, the automobile plants of Detroit, and Pittsburgh's steel mills; and to the waterfront, warehouses, and factories of New York.

Mind you, the doors weren't open all the way. More often than not, blacks got no higher than the bottom rung of the job ladder—but at least they were *on* the ladder. It was, as more than one observer put it, "Negro Heaven."

But by 1919, with white men returning from overseas and ready to reclaim their jobs and with war production shut down, the boom ended and with it the need for extra bodies. As the last hired, black workers became the first fired. Where they could, says historian Philip Foner, light-skinned blacks actually posed as Italians and Slavs, complete with foreign-sounding accents. By 1919, about the only work available to African Americans in the North was as strikebreakers, which many took, albeit reluctantly.

The sorriest chapter in the country's labor movement was its almost century-long callous mistreatment of black workers. With rare exceptions, labor unions and the American Federation of Labor were "whites-only" places. When a few blacks were allowed in, they were segregated into so-called Jim Crow locals. (Decades later in the 1950s, Layle Lane would play a key role, first in desegregating the AFT's Washington, D.C., locals and then in banning segregated locals from the AFT.)

Prominent labor leaders publically endorsed the idea of wholesale deportation of blacks "back to

Africa." AFL president Samuel Gompers even refused to take a stand against lynchings, lamely offering that it was a matter of the South's "internal affairs."

"Whatever the tactics, the result is the same for the mass of white workingmen in America," wrote Lane's future friend and mentor, W. E. B. Du Bois for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1913. "Beat or starve the Negro out of his job if you can by keeping him out of the union; or, if you must admit him, do the same thing inside union lines."

Still, with the chance to escape mob violence, a caste system based on race, and a fast-disappearing rural economy of sharecropping and tenant farming, southern blacks kept coming. And coming.

And coming.

Tiny Harlem burst at the seams as the new arrivals crammed three and four families to a tenement apartment, when they could get one, at twice the going rate. Others took refuge wherever they could, in cellars, garages, even stables.

To the newcomers, most of whom had never been beyond their rural county line, every day in this new world was a survival course. On the teeming streets, black Harlemites faced a police force that was all white and all too often brutal. Its public hospital and private clinics were a scandal, as tuberculosis—the scourge of the city's poor—more often than not meant a death sentence. As for Harlem's public schools, they were among the city's oldest, most overcrowded, most dilapidated, some dating back to the Civil War.

Just what was running through the mind of this 5-foot-2 genteel minister's daughter who despised liquor and moral license, we'll never know. A quarter century later she would write of Harlem: "It would take a superhuman race not to be physically affected by poverty, discrimination, and all the social ills of an underprivileged area."

Twenty-four-year-old Lane certainly was "affected" and acted. Within weeks of arriving in New York, she joined 10,000 others in a "silent march" down Fifth Avenue to protest the cold-blooded murder of more than 100 blacks in East St. Louis, Mo., in July 1917.

It was just the first in a lifetime of protests. From foot soldier to field general, throughout the next half century Lane would play a role in all the epic battles for racial, social, and economic justice. Courageous and persistent, she managed to overcome the double whammy of race and gender and to leave a legacy so packed as to seemingly defy the basic laws of time and space.

Consider this partial roll call: Elected first black female AFT vice president... Led AFT's successful fight to rid the union of segregated locals in the South... Ran five times as Socialist Party candidate for political office, including three times for Congress... Organized citizen support for the all-black sleeping car porters union... Founded a Pennsylvania farm co-op during the Depression to grow food for Philadelphia's poor... Helped plan and organize the 1941 March on Washington to open up defense industry jobs to blacks... Urged teachers at the 1942 AFT national convention to study "Negro history" as a way to remove the "stone wall" separating them from black children... Helped orga-

# “Miss Lane, as we all called her...”

**I**T'S BEEN almost 50 years since a “summer romance” with a much older woman took hold of Leonard Bethel and never let go.

It was the summer of 1952. Just as she had for every year since 1929, Layle Lane would leave her Harlem home and open up her Pennsylvania farm—and her heart—to 25 or so city kids. For eight weeks these boys from the rough and tough streets of Harlem and North Philadelphia would learn another way of life.

For this was no dude ranch. Sure there would be swimming and hiking, reading and singing, and plenty of Miss Lane's homemade ice cream. But there would also be work—baking bread, picking the vegetables and fruit for their meals, even helping build a stone wall and road that snaked through the 30-acre property.

Lane believed in the dignity of work. But she was after more than growing food or building stone walls. “La Citadelle,” she hoped, would cultivate something far more important. She had named the farm to memorialize the Haitian slaves who had revolted from their French masters in the 1790s. La Citadelle was the name of the coastal fortress stronghold they built to preserve their independence from invaders who might once again try to enslave them.

In this summer school, “her boys” would be encouraged by word and deed, according to Bethel, “to speak proper English, read avidly, have a physically clean appearance, speak always in the interest of the little man, and live by value and principle rather than what was expedient and popular.”

For Bethel, it was a lasting impression. “Nothing affected my life more than the strength and character of Layle's program for educating youngsters on the farm,” he wrote in his unpublished 400-page manuscript about Lane.

In the summer of 1952, 14-year-old Leonard and his older

brother, Wayne, were counselors at Lane's camp, following in the footsteps of their mother, Anna, who had been a counselor some 20 years before.

In 1952, Layle Lane was 59 years old and nearing the end of her high school teaching career. But if she was slowing down or showing her age, you could have fooled young Leonard. Though only 5-foot, 2-inches tall, she cast a long shadow. This was a working farm and Lane's management style was decidedly hands-on—and she didn't mind getting her hands dirty. There she'd be, out in the broiling summer sun, wearing an ankle-length knitted skirt and a large straw hat, working in the field alongside the boys.

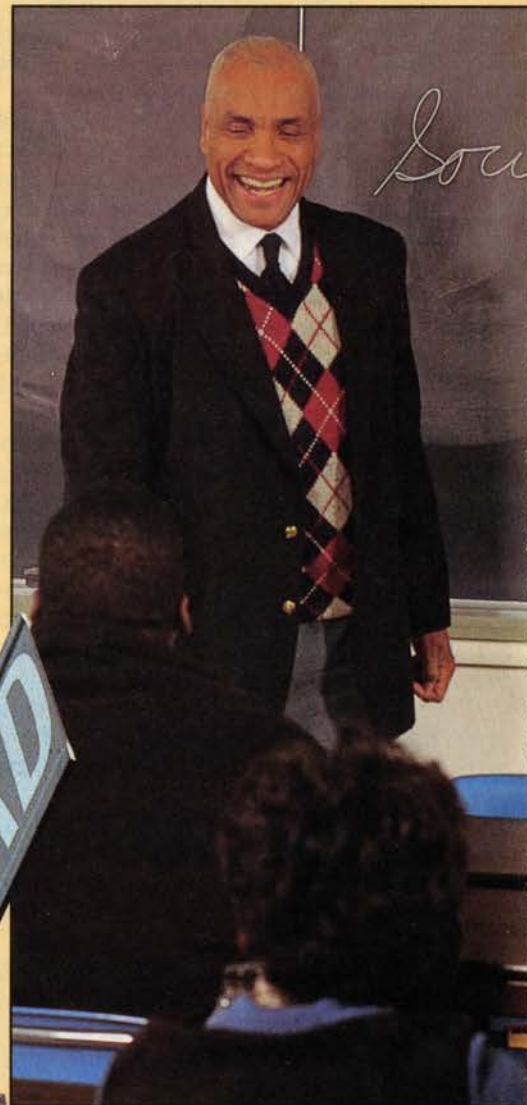
She was a great believer in the power of example, and she expected nothing less than exemplary conduct from Bethel and the other counselors. “Miss Lane would never stand for any sort of vulgarity. There would be no cussing, no four-letter words, and definitely no use of the N-word,” said Bethel in a recent interview.

He ought to

know since he found out the hard way. He tells the story of how Miss Lane overheard him calling one of the boys in his work detail who was slacking off a “nigger.” Lane called Leonard aside and delivered a tongue-lashing he's never forgotten.

“She said, ‘Never call a member of your race, or a member of any other race, an abusive racial slur! It is a sign of

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK ROMANENKO/TRIGERS UNIVERSITY



PHOTOGRAPH BY DON BOOKER

ignorance and weak character. You, as a counselor, are a leader. A leader must be an example of strength and strong moral character.”

To make sure Leonard got the message, she not only docked his pay but made him go without supper for the next two evenings. Instead, he would have to make a meal out of what what Southerners call “pot liquor”—the cooking liquid left from preparing greens like collard or kale.

“That’s your supper,” Bethel recalls her saying, setting down a tall glass of vile-tasting stuff. “I sat there for a couple of hours trying to get it down.”

Did any of the boys refuse to listen or take their medicine? “I never saw any of those boys buck her,” Bethel replies. “They’d never heard anybody speak like her, so elegant, so refined. Besides, Miss Lane wasn’t one of these go-sit-in-the-corner type of disciplinarians. She’d go eye-to-eye with those boys. And she’d win the argument every time.”

There would be other lessons. Like the time Miss Lane’s brother-

*(Top left) Leonard Bethel, today, in a classroom at Rutgers University where he teaches. (Left) A sign on the street named for Layle Lane in the suburban neighborhood near Doylestown, Pa., where La Citadelle was once located. (Below) Layle Lane with some of the children at her summer camp.*



in-law, Mr. Collins, a member of the Communist Party, showed up at the camp with a gun and asked Leonard and his brother if they wanted to learn how to shoot. Of course they said “yes,” and off they went. It wasn’t more than a few minutes when Leonard saw Miss Lane coming up the path with fire in her eyes.

She hauled off and slapped the much taller man right across the face. Stunned, Collins tried to explain, saying that he meant no harm but that the boys had to learn how to protect themselves. “There’s a revolution coming, and these young men need to know how to fight the white racists,” Bethel remembers him saying.

Miss Lane would have none of it. “I don’t want you teaching these boys any of that garbage. You leave now. Get off my property.” And Collins did.

Lane wasn’t always a pacifist, though. Bethel recalls the time she looked the other way when one of the boys needed some special attention. Her campers were all tough kids, but one boy in particular was trouble. Miss Lane had taken him on as a special project. But he was bullying the other boys, especially the younger ones. Leonard and the other counselors had tried talking some sense to the boy but nothing was getting through to him.

So Leonard came up with the idea of giving the tough guy a dose of his own medicine. He approached Miss Lane with the idea of challenging the boy to a boxing match. Normally she was opposed to any sort of violence, but this time she gave the idea her blessing, just as long as the other boys didn’t find out. She didn’t want to set the wrong example. “Beat the hell out of him, Leonard,” Lane said.

As it turned out, the boy was game. “I told him that if he wanted a piece of me to meet me at midnight at the wall. He was a big boy, over 6 feet, who had grown up on the streets of Harlem, and he gave me a good fight. But I beat him till he dropped. He didn’t give us any problems after that.” □

nize a nationwide protest by the Workers Defense League against the execution of a black sharecropper who had killed his white landlord in self-defense... Helped organize a solidarity network to oppose World War II internment of Japanese-Americans... Played a key role in the successful six-year fight to pressure Presidents Roosevelt and Truman to integrate the armed forces... Headed the AFT committee that rallied national support for the Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 school desegregation ruling....

“Layle Lane more than any other classroom teacher that we know of is responsible for the recent Supreme Court decision against ‘separate but equal’ education,” Fanny Simon, Teachers Guild and later New York City’s United Federation of Teachers mainstay, said on the occasion of a 1954 lunch in Lane’s honor. A friend of Lane’s since their college days at Columbia and a fellow teacher at James Monroe High School in the 1920s, she could have been allowed a bit of overstatement. But it was AFT’s Democratic Human Relations Committee, with Lane at its head, that was largely responsible for the “friend of the court” brief urging the Supreme Court to outlaw segregation in the public schools, in the now landmark *Brown vs. The Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*, case. A position taken by no other teacher union.

Throughout the 1950s, Lane was also a leader in the bitter and complicated battle to end “Jim Crow” teacher unionism, which still existed in AFT locals in the South, and, as head of the union’s Democratic Human Relations Committee, she wrote “Debits and Credits,” a monthly column about social justice for the *American Teacher*. But the column, a balance sheet of brief items illustrating advances along the road to equality for all citizens, as well as stumbles and retreats, made plain her strong belief that social justice must be colorblind.

Biographer Leonard Bethel says Lane was a fierce believer that education, especially language arts, was “the first step toward political, social, and economic power and independence.”

“Most oppressed are the least active in bringing about their own salvation, chiefly because they have al-

ways been deprived of the weapons needed to secure it," Lane wrote to a friend in 1934. And her prescription for helping the kids we would now call "at-risk" is as current today as it was when she wrote it in the 1940s:

Smaller classes are a "must" for all schools, but especially for those in the underprivileged areas. It is important that these smaller classes be in the first six grades, for then it will be possible to discover those physical and mental handicaps which set a child apart from his group and which later develop into antisocial behavior. Along with the smaller class, additional teachers will be needed to work individually with those who need particular attention.

Education, however would be but a "first step." For whatever her belief in the transforming power of education, Lane was not from the "education-conquers-all" school. Although a teacher and AFT vice president, she resisted the temptation to narrow the fight against poverty to improving access to education. For her, even the bloody fight for racial justice didn't address the deeper and more systemic injustices of class inequality. "Neither education nor race equality butter any bread or pay rent," Lane said. "Only an opportunity to work at decent wages will do that."

Like many on the left in the 1930s and '40s, she believed the Great Depression had proven that capitalism was programmed to self-destruct and that from its ashes some form of totalitarian nightmare would emerge. Only a "democratic socialism" could save the world from the "barbarism" of Stalin or Hitler.

"The misery and needless suffering caused by poverty made me a Socialist," Lane wrote in her diary many years later, "the kind of person many look upon as a wild-eyed radical or else one who wants to reduce everyone to the same level..."

"It is essential," she wrote in another diary entry, "to make people aware now not only of the real nature of Socialism but its fundamental difference with Communism.... It means a society of diversified ownership...with no extremes of rich and poor."

Lane's pragmatic brand of "democratic socialism" required that the government, in her words ensure "a planning of our eco-

nomie life to provide jobs for all able-bodied adults.... [O]nly when this is done will there be a basic attack on the problems, not only of Harlem but of all New York's underprivileged areas."

It is this faith in the redemptive power of good jobs that led Lane to throw heart and soul into what would be called the March on Washington Movement. In late 1940, President Roosevelt, much to the chagrin of isolationists in Congress and pro-Nazi sympathizers in the country at large, was rearming the nation for the inevitable war against Hitler. Rearmament meant jobs, lots of them—except for black workers, who even in the North couldn't crack the all-white defense industry. Brooklyn's defense contractors were typical. According to a 1941 survey conducted by the National Urban League, only 234 of 13,840 workers at 72 defense plants in Brooklyn were black.

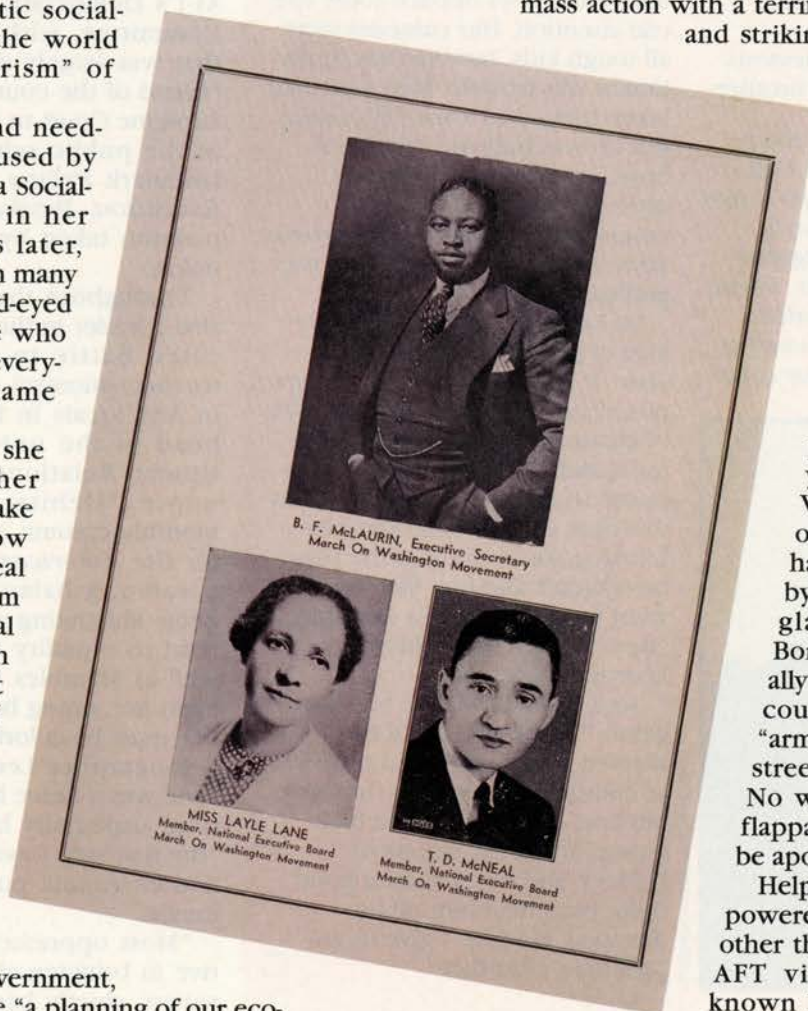
Leading the fight to force the federal government to open these jobs to blacks and desegregate the military altogether was A. Philip Randolph, head of the country's largest union of black workers, the 35,000-member Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. To force Roosevelt's hand, Randolph and a tiny inner circle of advisors had come up with a plan to have 10,000 blacks descend on the nation's capital and stay there until justice prevailed.

"We call upon you to fight for jobs in National Defense," proclaimed the organizing committee for the march. "Negroes can build a mammoth machine of mass action with a terrific and tremendous driving and striking power that can shatter

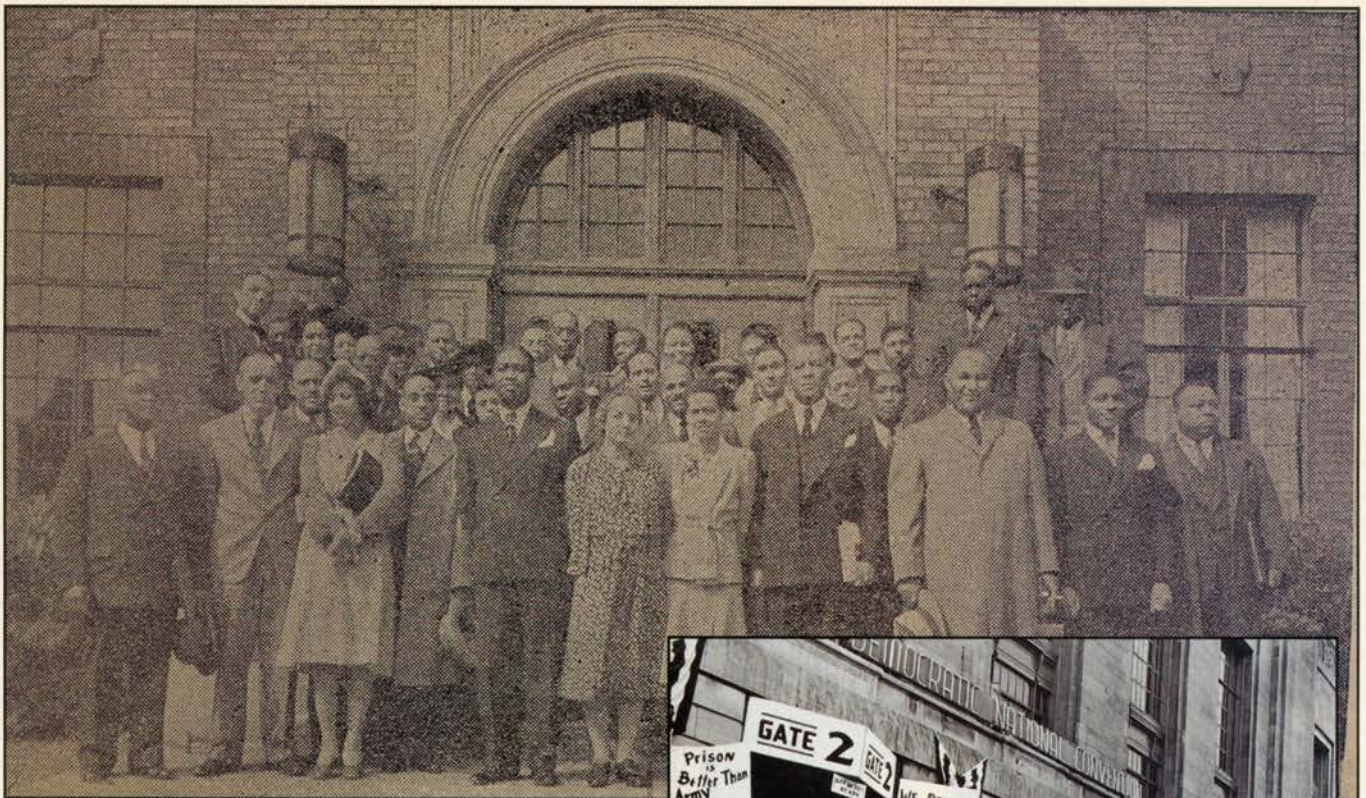
and crush the evil fortress of race prejudice and hate, if they will only resolve to do so and never stop until victory comes..."

Randolph knew very well that such a massive display—the number of prospective marchers had now exploded to 100,000—would be as unwelcome as it was unprecedented. Only nine years before, in 1932, World War I veterans—part of a so-called Bonus Army—had been violently roused by Army troops led by Douglas MacArthur. And the Bonus Army had been virtually all white. What would the country make of an all-black "army" camped out across the street from the White House? No wonder the ordinarily unflappable Roosevelt was said to be apoplectic.

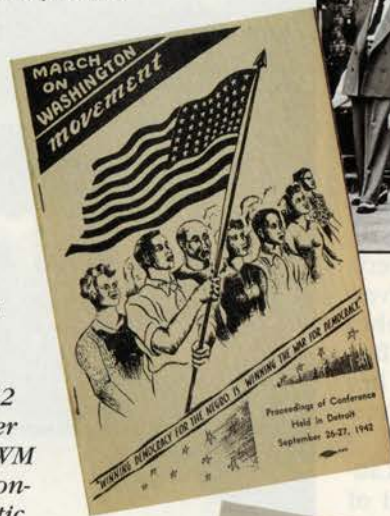
Helping mastermind this high-powered squeeze play was none other than Layle Lane, by then an AFT vice president. She had known Randolph since the mid-



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After President Roosevelt signed the 1941 executive order banning discrimination in federal defense factories, the March on Washington organizing committee continued, as the March on Washington Movement (MOWM), to fight for equal rights, with a focus on expanding fair employment and desegregating the armed forces. (Above) Layle Lane (front row, center), shown with other delegates to a MOWM conference in 1942. (Right) The cover illustration for the proceedings of the 1942 conference. (Bottom) The cover illustration for a piece of MOWM literature. (Above right) Demonstrators at the 1948 Democratic Convention calling for the desegregation of the armed forces. This goal of the MOWM was finally achieved in 1948. (Opposite) Layle Lane, with other MOWM officials, including Benjamin McLaurin, shown in the program for the "We Are Americans Too" Conference in 1943.



1920s, when she had organized a citizens' committee to support Randolph's drive to organize the all-black sleeping car porters against the rabidly anti-union Pullman Car Company.

Besides, they were neighbors at Harlem's Dunbar Apartments on 150th Street. Opened in 1928 at the apex of the Harlem Renaissance, Dunbar House, with its beautiful flower-filled courtyard designed to encourage mixing and mingling, drew the leading figures of the black intellectual and cultural elite, the likes of Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Walter White, Claude McKay, tap dancer extraordinaire Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, and the actor-singer-activist Paul Robeson.

Lane and Randolph saw a lot of one another. Both had fathers who were ministers. Both were Socialists. Both liked a good argument. In the early 1930s, Randolph attended a twice-monthly study group that Lane hosted; also present was a young Harlem minister and future congress-

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PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BROWN BROTHERS



COURTESY OF THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

sional powerhouse — Adam Clayton Powell Jr.

Were Lane and Randolph more than comrades in arms? Lane biographer Bethel doesn't think so. Randolph was devoted to his wife. And Lane, beautiful though never glamorous, did not want for gentlemen admirers: fellow Dunbarite W. E. B. Du Bois and Howard University Professor Ralph Bunche, the first black Nobel Peace Prize winner, were among the smitten. But Bethel maintains that the only room for a man in her life was already filled by her ailing father, who lived with her and her sister until his death in 1939.

"Her father became her life," said Benjamin McLaurin, good friend of Lane's who was also an official of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and close associate of A. Philip Randolph. "She sacrificed all her pleasures and social desires to support him and to look after him."

At any rate, by the spring of 1941 Lane was caught up in the feverish climate surrounding the looming summer March on Washington. She was 47, and her more than 20 years of teaching, writing, public speaking, and organizing made her an invaluable asset. Whether it was working behind the scenes or working the streets—the teetotaler even invaded Harlem's saloons with leaflets—or addressing a jam-packed rally of 18,000 in Madison Square Garden, the biggest civil rights rally up to that time, Lane's public star never shined brighter.

Just how bright can be seen in the fact that she was



DUNBAR APARTMENTS, THE MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, THE WURTS COLLECTION

(Top) The Dunbar Apartments in Harlem, where Layle Lane lived for many years and where she met and mingled with other figures of the Harlem Renaissance, such as poet James Weldon Johnson, civil rights activist Walter White, and singer Paul Robeson. (Above left) A. Philip Randolph, another tenant of the Dunbar Apartments, as he looked at about the time he and Layle Lane first met. (Above) An entrance to the interior garden courtyard of the Dunbar Apartments.

deputized to accompany Randolph and two other men to meet with Roosevelt in the White House in June 1941. Although, according to historian Philip Foner, they were faced with a lecture on why the march was "bad and unintelligent," and, Randolph later said, with a



"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

# The New York Times

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NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MAY 18, 1954

LATE CITY EDITION

Fair and cool today. Mostly sunny, occasional cool tomorrow.  
Temperature Today—Max. 69, Min. 42  
Tomorrow—Today—Max. 69, Min. 42  
Wed. 67, Thurs. 65, Fri. 61

FIVE CENTS

## HIGH COURT BANS SCHOOL SEGREGATION; 9-TO-0 DECISION GRANTS TIME TO COMPLY

IN THE  
Supreme Court of the United States  
October Term, A. D. 1953.

No. 1

OLIVER BROWN, ET AL., Appellants,

vs.

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF  
TOPEKA, KANSAS, etc., ET AL. Appellees.

APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE  
DISTRICT OF KANSAS.

ADDITIONAL BRIEF OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION  
OF TEACHERS AS AMICUS CURIAE.

JOHN LIGTENBERG,  
234 N. La Salle Street,  
Chicago 2, Illinois,  
Counsel for American Federation  
of Teachers, Amicus Curiae.

SILVA M. BOWCHARDY,  
Homer Building,  
Washington, D. C.,  
Of Counsel.

(Above) The New York Times headline announcing the Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. Board of Education. (Right) The cover of AFT's amicus curiae brief supporting school desegregation. (Below) Layle Lane (first row, center), chairman of the AFT Human Relations Committee, which was chiefly responsible for the amicus brief, with members of the committee.



COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

COURTESY OF THE MOORLAND-SPRINGARIN RESEARCH CENTER, HOWARD UNIVERSITY

COURTESY OF AMERICAN TEACHER



**SPEAKER AT THE** Human Relations Committee luncheon of the American Federation of Teachers convention, Tuesday noon was Dr. George S. Counts, left, professor of education at Columbia university. Shown with him is Layle Lane, chairman of the committee and a New York city teacher.—Star photo.

## Teachers Union Bans Segregation in Locals

*Layle Lane at the 1953 AFT convention with President George Counts. She is holding the amendment to the AFT constitution outlawing segregated locals.*

A constitutional amendment outlawing local unions whose members are segregated by race or color was adopted at the American Federation of Teachers national convention Tuesday afternoon in the Hotel Pere Marquette.

Passage of the amendment came on the heels of an address by Dr. George S. Counts, Columbia university professor, pleading for a more realistic approach to American ideals.

"The time has come to take our professions with utter sincerity," the educator said at the human relations luncheon.

Hearing committee reports in the afternoon business session, convention delegates turned down a recommendation by the executive committee to not adopt the civil rights amendment proposed by the Boston teachers union.

The committee reported that the amendment banning locals who segregate by race or color might do "more harm than good" at this time. Only one delegate from Georgia favored non-conference.

He said the amendment would eliminate his local which has been with the AFT for many years.

Several other delegates, however, strongly pleaded for its adoption stating that the time for the AFT to take positive action is now.

Witness the 28 months he spent in jail as a conscientious objector in World War II, a sentence to a chain gang for a Freedom Ride in 1947, and an openly gay lifestyle in days when that made someone a target for FBI blackmail.

All this is a mat-

display of FDR's legendary charm, Randolph was unmoved, telling Roosevelt, "I'm sorry, Mr. President, the march cannot be called off."

But because Lane and her colleagues had made their case in the Oval Office, the march never happened. Less than two weeks after the meeting, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 requiring that no defense contractor "discriminate against any worker because of race, creed, color or national origin." And with it the landmark Fair Employment Practices Committee was born.

More important was the role the planned march played as an inspiration for the emerging Civil Rights movement. In recent years, the words March on Washington have come to mean the 1963 event, especially Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. But there are many who think that the dream, indeed the modern civil rights era, can be directly traced to the march that never was.

Among Randolph's young lieutenants was a 29-year-old whose name would become synonymous with the civil rights struggle in the decades to come—Bayard Rustin.

Mentor and friend to at least two generations of civil rights and peace activists, including AFT presidents Al Shanker and Sandra Feldman, Rustin's career highlights include being the first field secretary of the Congress of Racial Equality, organizer of the 1955 Montgomery (Alabama) bus boycott and the 1963 March on Washington, and later director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute. His leading-man good looks and elegant manner hid an iron will and an absolutely indomitable spirit.

COURTESY OF THE MOORLAND-SPINGARN RESEARCH CENTER, HOWARD UNIVERSITY

ter of public record. What isn't known is the pivotal role Layle Lane played in Rustin's life—which has been missed by Rustin biographers. "Actually it was through Layle Lane that I met Mr. Randolph," Rustin said in a 1978 interview with Leonard Bethel. Rustin told of first meeting Lane in 1938 when he was assigned to Benjamin Franklin High School by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to teach evening classes of English to the foreign born, mostly new arrivals fleeing Nazi Germany.

"I had no real experience [teaching]," Rustin said. "I knew nothing about making a lesson plan. I knew nothing about [teaching] basic English."

To save his job, Rustin sought out Lane, the school's only black teacher. Although she had a reputation as a "disciplinarian," Rustin had been impressed that Lane "was always warmly greeted by the kids" and they "wanted to get into her classes."

For the next five to six months the two worked together. "Several evenings a week she used to help me draw up lesson plans," Rustin recalled. "She taught me essentially how to use a blackboard and how to involve people in the learning process."

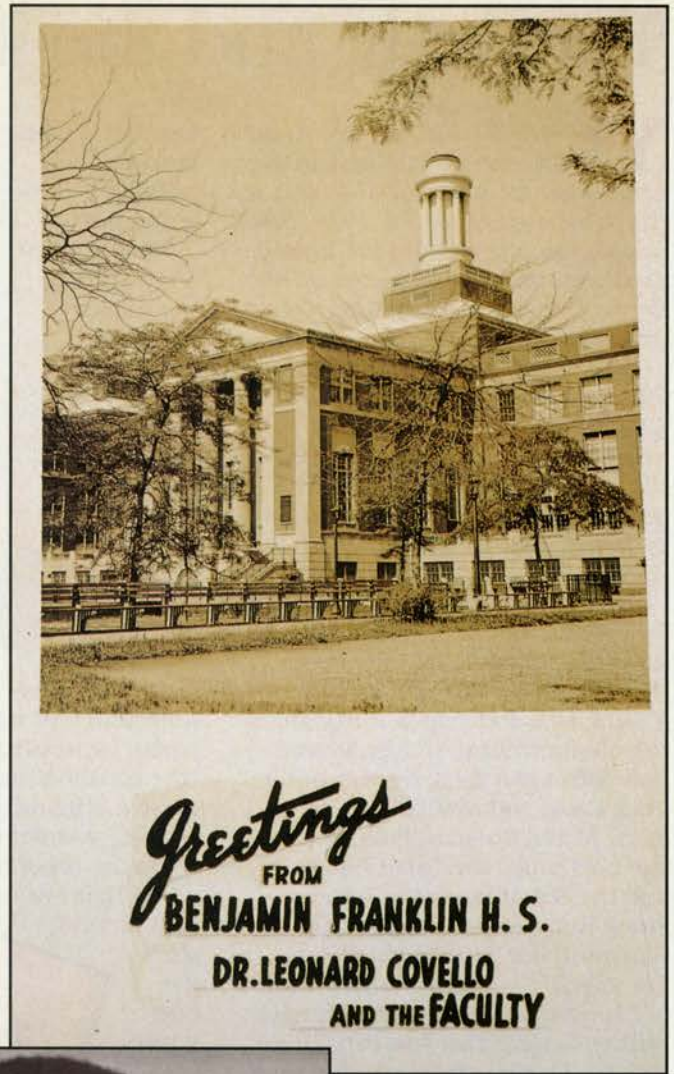
Rustin's lessons, though, weren't limited to the finer points of pedagogy. "She would tell me about what was going on in the Civil Rights movement, none of which I knew," Rustin said. "She was deeply involved in it. Anything that had to do with the Civil Rights movement, the human rights movement, the fight against anti-Semitism, the plight of the sharecroppers...."

"She looked upon me as a youngster who needed some guidance, and she was very helpful to me." Part of that help was ditching Communism. "I was a member of the Young Communist League and that distressed her to no end.... She wanted me to meet Mr. Randolph." It would be two years before Rustin got around to that. "When I told him I had worked with Layle Lane, he was delighted."

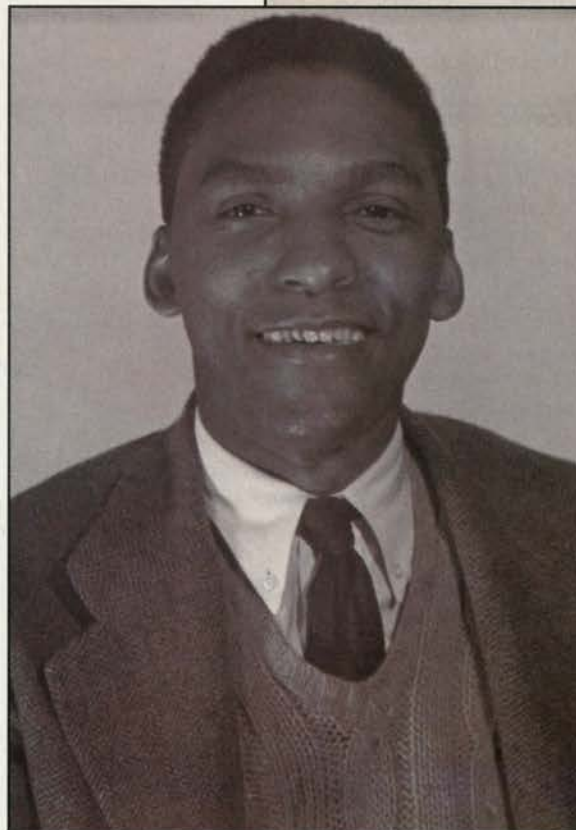
As for Lane, Rustin said: "Layle was totally devoid of any racial, religious, or ethnic prejudice... she had a great faith in people's ability to change."

"I never knew anyone other than Mr. Randolph who I respected more than Layle Lane."

Sadly, Bayard Rustin's snapshot is all that remains on record about Lane the classroom teacher. We know she taught history at James Monroe High School in the East Bronx, beginning in 1925 and that she moved to Benjamin Franklin High School, a newly formed school in East Harlem in 1934. She was the first African-American teacher to be hired by Leonard Covello, who went on, during the years Lane taught at Benjamin Franklin, to create a flourishing multiracial and multiethnic school,



*Greetings*  
FROM  
**BENJAMIN FRANKLIN H. S.**  
**DR. LEONARD COVELLO**  
AND THE **FACULTY**



*(Above) Benjamin Franklin High School (now Manhattan Center for Science and Math Careers), where Layle Lane taught from 1934 until she retired. (Left) Bayard Rustin, c. 1940, at about the time he and Layle Lane met.*

COURTESY OF THE MACORLAND-SPINGARN RESEARCH CENTER, HOWARD UNIVERSITY

COURTESY OF THE BAYARD RUSTIN ESTATE

# The Lady and the Tramp Steamer

**Y**OU HAVE to give Layle Lane credit—she certainly had flair, not to mention curiosity and a thirst for adventure. In 1953, few people her age would have considered traveling halfway around the world by ship on anything other than an ocean liner.

But she was one of a kind. Instead of booking passage on the *Queen Elizabeth* or any of the other floating palaces of the day, the 60-year-old, recently retired school teacher climbed aboard the cargo freighter, the SS *Flying Arrow*.

The tiny tramp steamer would be Lane's home for the next four months as it made its way across the Atlantic to Lisbon, Genoa, Casablanca, and Tripoli, through the Mediterranean to Alexandria and Beirut and then, by way of the Suez Canal and Arabian Sea, to Karachi and Bombay. From there the boat sailed the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan to Canton, Hong Kong, and Yokohama before it crossed the vast Pacific to San Francisco.

Lane kept a daily journal. It goes without saying that you can tell a lot about people from reading their diaries. Everything from their basic humanity and petty vanities to what foods agree with them. Lane eats the same meals as the crew, and she asks little in the way of creature comforts, except for clean restrooms. That turns out to be her biggest complaint—she declares one Third-World john “most disagreeable.”

She writes of passing the time—and, oh, there was time to pass—crocheting, taking pictures, studying Spanish. But what jumps off the pages is this woman's huge appetite for life. She's just voracious to learn, to explore, to try almost anything once.

Nothing escapes her gaze, including the variety of techniques dock gangs use in loading and unloading cargo—she is particularly annoyed at a group of Sudanese workers for showing so little pride in their work. Yet she's the first to worry about the safety and com-

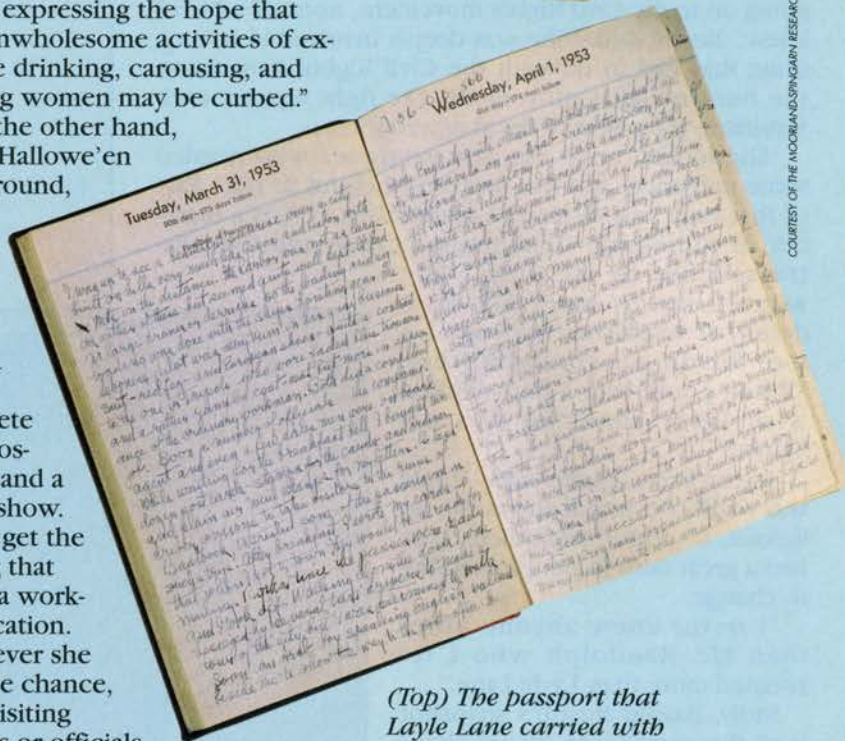
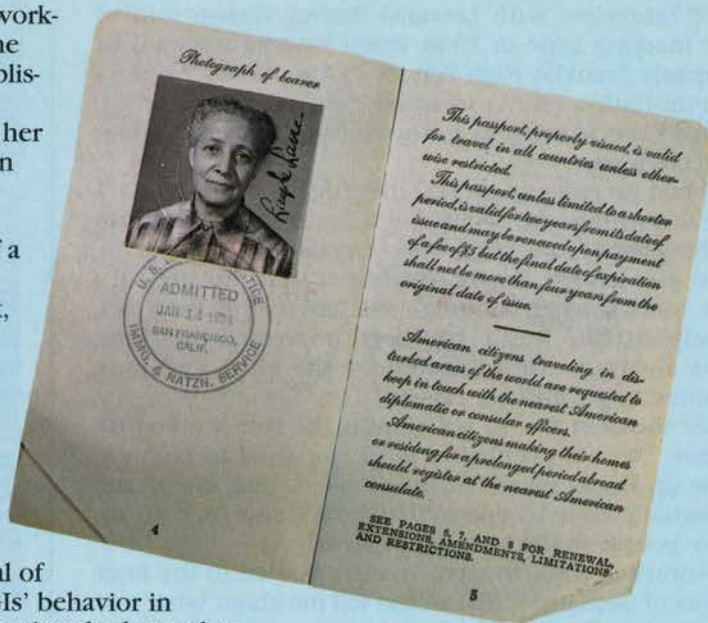
fort of the workers when the weather is blistering hot.

She's got her warts. When she thinks she's been done out of a \$10 traveler's check, she stewes for days. Proper to the point of being puritanical, she is especially critical of American GIs' behavior in Japan, expressing the hope that “the unwholesome activities of excessive drinking, carousing, and abusing women may be curbed.”

On the other hand, when Hallowe'en rolls around, she's the one who organizes a party, complete with costumes and a talent show.

You get the feeling that this is a working vacation. Whenever she gets the chance, she's visiting schools or officials or attending prearranged meetings with other Socialists. On one of these occasions, she gets into an argument with a Saudi who is convinced that the Jews control the world. Lane sets him straight, pointing to the Morgans and Rockefellers as proof that his theory just doesn't hold up.

All in all, you come away with the impression that Layle Lane was a serious traveler. Very serious. □



(Top) The passport that Layle Lane carried with her on her voyage.

(Above) A couple of pages from her travel journal.

COURTESY OF THE MORLAND-SPRINGARN RESEARCH CENTER, HOWARD UNIVERSITY

famous for its outreach to the surrounding community. We know, too, that she and Covello were friends as well as colleagues, but the rest of the picture—a career spanning more than 30 years as a high school educator—is either lost for good or buried waiting to be unearthed. Piecing together the fragments of Layle Lane's life, you see, is very much a work in progress.

Her formal teaching career drew to a close in 1953. The years of non-stop, almost frenetic obligation had caught up with her. Forget about the teaching, the politics, the rallies, the conferences, the articles to write—at the same time, she was responsible for keeping the summer camp going and overseeing the operation of a working farm. It was time to lighten the load. First, she would do what she had never found time for: take a trip around the world—or at least half way around. (See “The Lady and the Tramp Steamer” on the facing page.) Then she would retire to Mexico.

She had visited there in early 1954 and found the climate and the lush tropical vegetation agreed with her. Besides, as she later told a friend, “it was cheaper”—a teacher's pension in those years didn't buy much in the way of extras.

In letters to friends, she wrote about wanting to be free of so much responsibility, to look after her health, and finally have some peace of mind. But old habits die hard. No sooner was Lane settled in Mexico City and later in nearby Cuernavaca that she began to write the script for her final chapter.

It didn't take long for the sight of ragged and malnourished children, begging and rifling through heaps of garbage for something to eat, to bring out the old organizer in her. With what little savings and pension money she had, Lane took not only to feeding the children but to teaching them “proper” Spanish.

And Alice Marsh, friend and fellow teacher, saw the Layle Lane she had always known when she visited Lane in Mexico in 1958:

I remember how we chanced to meet a Mexican woman. She rushed up to Layle and kissed her, then turned to me and said, “She is a saint.” I felt the same way about Layle. She lived what she believed and quietly and consistently did whatever she could to enhance the lives of those with whom she came in contact.

When Layle Lane took her first trip to Mexico in 1954, at the age of 61, she knew no Spanish. By 1963, after taking courses at the National University and studying on her own, she was writing letters and articles in Spanish—as well as teaching the children on the street. She even wrote a widely distributed pamphlet advising workers of their rights under the Mexican Constitution, while also champi-

(Right) “Mexican Workers, Here Is Your Magna Carta,” the cover page of a Spanish-language pamphlet Layle Lane wrote after her retirement to Mexico.

## Recommended Reading

Anderson, Jervis, *A Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Bayard Rustin: The Troubles I've Seen*, 1997.

DuBois, W. E. B., *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903.

Foner, Philip S., *Organized Labor and the Black Worker (1619-1973)*, 1974.

Fredrickson, George M., *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa*, 1995.

Morris, Aldon D., *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, 1984.

oning the cause of prisoners' rights. At the time of her final illness, she was working on a history of Mexican slavery.

A prolific letter writer—often penning as many as 15 a day—she kept after friends to send her newspaper clippings and was forever commenting about U.S. and world politics, education, race relations, and everything else under the sun.

Why didn't she write a memoir in which she reflected on her own life and times? In a 1975 letter to the director of the Howard University archives, apparently answering a request for something like that, she demurred. No more inclined than ever to put herself in the limelight, she said her preference would be to write about her father and her Uncle Wiley. That would give students to come a chance to “learn that the struggle for full and complete citizenship started long before their time and they are just a link—tho' an important one—to achieve a fuller life.”

Besides, by 1975 her health was rapidly failing—so much so that she was apologizing in her letters for making mistakes: “I'm forgetting how to spell very simple words.”

In January of 1976 Lane suffered a stroke, her second. Just days later, in a letter to her sister, Teresa, she wrote:

I'm almost helpless, as I can't walk without help or do the simplest things.... Pray that my death may come soon. Hope all is well with you—as ever Layle.

Five days later she was gone.

Her last letter—like all her correspondence for many years—carried the following lines by a long-forgotten author: “If we have moved up at all out of the darkness, it is because the few dared to walk in the sun.”

Few were more daring. □



COURTESY OF THE MOORLAND-SPINGARN RESEARCH CENTER, HOWARD UNIVERSITY

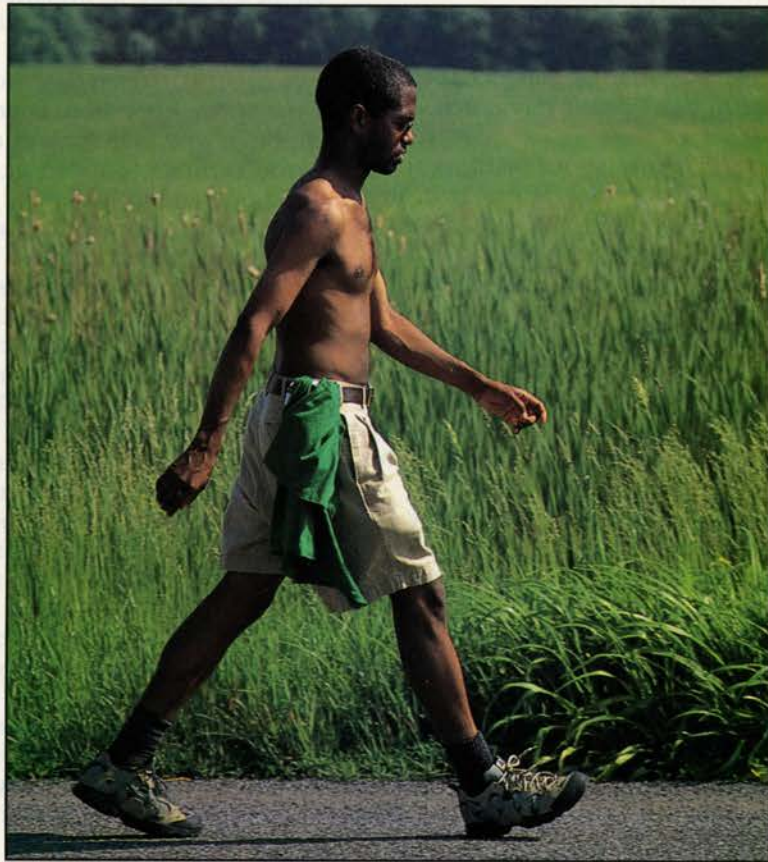
# A WALK ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

BY ANTHONY COHEN

**I**FIRST HEARD about the Underground Railroad when I was an impressionable 10-year-old. My fourth-grade social studies teacher told our class about Harriet Tubman, the fugitive slave from Maryland, who used its “underground rails” to guide hundreds of other slaves to freedom. I didn’t understand, at the time, that the railroad was a metaphor, and I envisioned a subway train transporting slaves hundreds of miles to Canada. I later realized that my teacher had not been talking about a literal rail system, but as I grew older (and more concerned with my future than with the distant past), the Underground Railroad, and all the other tales that belonged to my childhood, faded from memory.

But in 1994, while studying history at American University in Washington, D.C., I again stumbled onto the

*Anthony Cohen is president of the Menare Foundation in Washington, D.C., a nonprofit organization working to restore Underground Railroad safe-houses. The full story of his walk will be chronicled in his forthcoming book, *The Underground Railroad: A Personal Journey*, to be released in Fall 2001. For additional information on the Menare Foundation, visit its Web site at [www.ugrr.org](http://www.ugrr.org).*



PHOTOGRAPH BY WAYNE SORCE

(Above) Anthony Cohen on his way north, tracing the routes of runaway slaves.

Underground Railroad, this time as the subject for a research paper. My task was to document some aspect of history that had gone largely unrecorded, and the Underground Railroad seemed as elusive a topic as one could find.

After all, it was the staple of ghost stories and children’s books, part fact, part fiction, and part inspiring legend. An informal travel network stretching from the plantation South to the free states of

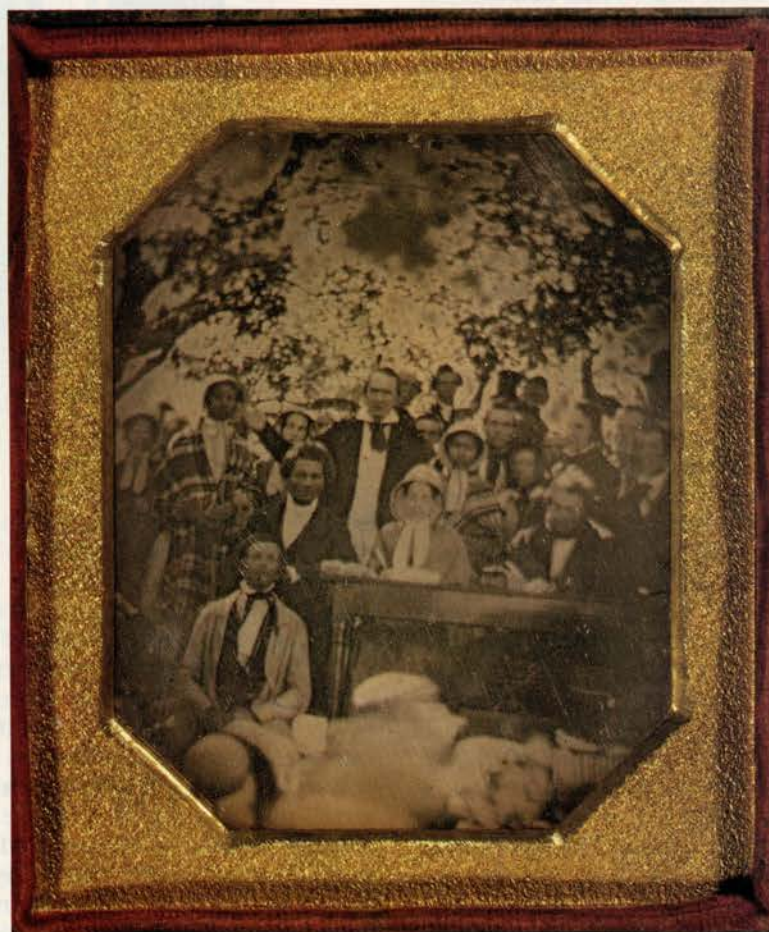
the North and ultimately to Canada, the Underground Railroad was not a single path but many. It used the terminology of the railroad, which was then nearly as high tech as the Information Superhighway is today. Those involved in helping runaway slaves spoke of escape “routes” and “terminals” and secret “station houses” where “passengers” (runaways) were fed and sheltered by “stationmasters” (abolitionists) and from which they might be led to a new station by “conductors” (guides).

It’s impossible to establish the precise number of runaways guided to freedom by this network, and there is considerable disagreement over the probable

number. Only the bravest and most highly motivated slaves attempted to flee. Many runaways never left the vicinity of the places where they were enslaved, and many were recaptured. However, my research shows that during the years of the Underground Railroad's heyday—from roughly 1830 to 1865—as many as 100,000 slaves took advantage of this network to reach free soil in Canada, Mexico, the Bahamas, Europe, and Africa.

I began my own search for the Underground Railroad in my hometown of Rockville, Md., and its vicinity by searching for clues in archives, museums, libraries, and historical societies.

When I examined 19th-century newspapers, I found numerous notices for runaway slaves, often vivid descriptions placed by masters offering rewards for the capture of their slaves. The ads sometimes mentioned possible escape routes and accomplices as well as disguises the slaves might have assumed and supplies they took with them. Courthouse records revealed names of local citizens who were



(Above) An abolitionist meeting with Frederick Douglass (to the left of the table) and Mary and Emily Edmondson (in plaid with light-colored bonnets), all three of whom had escaped from slavery. Black abolitionist William Still tells the story of the Edmondson sisters' difficult escape in his book, *The Underground Railroad*.

tried and convicted of harboring slaves. And slave narratives—autobiographies written by escaped slaves themselves—frequently gave details of their passage north as well as naming the towns they stopped at on the way.

In addition to the documents I found, I conducted interviews with descendants of free blacks, abolitionists, and fugitive slaves. My informants, most of them 80 or 90 years old, had, as children in the early 20th century, learned stories firsthand from the people who had been directly involved in these escapes. Others I met had diaries and letters written by relatives who had worked on the Underground Railroad. After three

months of research, I had documented five routes of escape through the region and identified dozens of local landmarks connected with the Underground Railroad. And, I had plenty of material for my research paper.

A year later, intrigued by the possibility of finding more of this kind of information, I got the idea of retracing one of the routes formerly traveled by fugitive

COURTESY OF THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

slaves. I planned to use their means of transportation—foot, boat, and rail—to make my own journey. I would also stop in each town along the way to ask local people about information they might have on the Underground Railroad. I hoped that some would know of safehouses, roads, and hiding places that tradition said had been used by runaways, or perhaps direct me to the descendants of those families that had harbored the fleeing slaves. I planned also to seek out historical societies and libraries in each town in hopes of finding clues in their collections of artifacts, diaries, and manuscripts.

So in May 1996 I struck out from the Friends Meeting House in Sandy Spring, Md., on the long trail north, trudging six and a half weeks through five states and over 800 miles to Canada. I carried with me a backpack holding three changes of clothing, research notes, and just a few provisions since I had determined to beg my daily rations from people I'd meet along the way. This would allow me to travel lightly—and compel me to depend on the kindness of strangers as runaway slaves had done a century and a half earlier.

Despite my attempts at authenticity, I had some major conveniences that were not available to slaves: comfortable shoes, a cell phone in case of an emergency, and a *Walk to Canada* Web site on which to log progress reports. The Web site enabled people to trace my location, e-mail me questions, and offer clues as to which roads I should take and who on the trail might have knowledge of the Underground Railroad. Along with numerous leads and tips, I received daily invitations from people who lived in towns I was passing through and offers to host me for the night. Throughout the weeks, as I walked through Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York, the new Information Superhighway helped me uncover the old network for runaway slaves. I couldn't help but contrast my circumstances with those of the fugitives 150 years ago. Instead of being hunted, I was the hunter—and my quest was turning out to be very fruitful.

The path I followed revealed traces of the Underground Railroad in a number of towns. In Baltimore, I visited the Orchard Street Church in the Druid Hill section of the city, which according to legend, was a sanctuary for slaves traveling on the Underground Railroad. In Wilmington, Del., I found the Old Town Hall on Market Street with its dungeon-like prison where fugitive slaves who had been captured were held while waiting to be reclaimed or sold again. In Pottstown, Pa., another stop on the railroad, I visited the Pine Forge Academy, a private school on the site of an 18th-century iron furnace. In the cellar of the headmaster's house were the remnants of subterranean tunnels used to shelter the building's first occupants from Indian attacks. I was told that when the home was owned by abolitionists in the 19th century, slaves were harbored in these tunnels during their harrowing exodus north.

With many of these stories, I faced the problem—common for historians—of confirming the oral record as history. But they all offered valuable leads that I hoped to follow up later with additional research.

When I reached Philadelphia, I decided to stop for a



COURTESY OF THE MENAHE FOUNDATION

rest. By then, having walked as much as 25 miles each day, I had discovered firsthand a little about the physical strains of traveling on the Underground Railroad. And for the first time, I began to see my journey from a human perspective instead of from a primarily historical one. Above and beyond the clues that slaves had left behind as to their escape routes and hiding places, I now longed to know about their feelings as they escaped and found themselves in a great unknown.

But exploring the minds and hearts of runaway slaves posed a problem. None of them were alive to describe their experiences, and despite the miles I had walked on an escape trail many of them had used, no slave-catchers or bloodhounds were hunting me down. Nevertheless, I soon discovered a way to come closer to experiencing the act of escape.

I had been asked, on my second day in Philadelphia, to speak at a local school and tell a fifth-grade history class the story of my journey thus far. In addition to questions about the supplies I'd carried and the number of miles I'd walked, I got one from a student who asked what I considered the Underground Railroad's greatest escape story. I told him about the flight of Henry "Box" Brown, a slave from Richmond, Va., who in March of 1849 was boxed up and shipped express to Philadelphia. He traveled for 26 hours by boat and train. After his box was turned upside down, he spent several agonizing hours on his head before being set free. Suddenly, I had my answer.





(Top) Henry "Box" Brown emerges from the box in which, traveling express, he successfully fled slavery. The print is from *The Underground Railroad* by William Still. (Right) Two newspaper notices advertising runaway slaves. The story of Ann Maria Weems (bottom) appears in Still's book.

**\$100 Reward.**  
 RAN AWAY from the subscriber's plantation, near Upper Marlborough, Prince George's County, Md. on Wednesday, the 16th instant, Negro Man FREDERICK, who calls himself **Frederick Thomas.**  
 He is about 50 or 55 years of age, feet 8 or 9 inches high, black complexion; answers quick when spoken to; suffering from hernia, and wears a belt around his waist, under his clothing. He has relatives residing in Montgomery County, near Rockville. He had on when he went away a suit of country cloth (of Fawcett's manufacture) and a black overcoat, and wears a pair of heavy boots. His hair is not full, and is a little grey about his locks. He carried with him a large bay horse, with a wagon saddle and a wagon whip. The horse is about ten or twelve years old, with a small tail, and has one or two shoes off. No further marks recollected. The horse was bought by the subscriber just a few days ago, and is a pretty fast trotter.  
 I will give the above reward for the man and horse, no matter where taken provided they are brought home or secured so that I can get them again.  
 WILLIAM Z. BEALL,  
 Near Upper Marlboro'.  
 19-tf

**\$500 REWARD.**  
 RAN away on Sunday night, the 23d instant, before 12 o'clock, from the subscriber, residing in Rockville, Montgomery county, Md., my NEGRO GIRL "Ann Maria Weems," about 15 years of age; a bright mullatto; some small freckles on her face; slender person, thick suit of hair, inclined to be sandy. Her parents are free, and reside in Washington, D. C. It is evident she was taken away by some one in a carriage, probably by a white man, by whom she may be carried beyond the limits of the State of Maryland.  
 I will give the above reward for her apprehension and detention so that I get her again.  
 CHAS. M. PRICE.  
 sep 29—3t

Why not get myself boxed up and smuggled onto an Amtrak train in Philadelphia, I thought. Although I would not run the same risk as a fugitive slave if my presence were discovered, I would suffer from the same kind of physical danger and sense of fear. So with the aid of three friends, I constructed a wooden crate and arranged to have myself shipped to New York City. What follows is a step-by-step account of how I made my "escape" and what my 20th-century experience revealed about the flight of a fugitive slave.

**May 17**  
 Tonight we began the work of building the crate. It is a sturdy pine box measuring 24 by 28 by 30 inches. This will allow me just enough room to sit in a fetal position. The box has heavy-duty castor wheels and thick rope handles so it can be pulled along. Quarter-size vents drilled into three walls will give me fresh air to breathe, and if an emergency comes up, I'll be able to escape through the fourth wall, which doubles as a trap door. I call Amtrak and learn there is an 11:50 train the next

COURTESY OF THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

morning from Philly to New York. The ride will take a little more than two hours.

### May 18

11 a.m.: I've had only a cookie and juice for breakfast so I won't need to go to the bathroom while I'm in the box. I plan to take with me my driver's license, a 12-ounce bottle of water, a quilt to sit on, a Swiss army knife, and my trusty cell phone in the event of an emergency. I crawl in, listen rather nervously as the trap door closes, and feel the thud as the crate is loaded in the back of our van. The weather is unseasonably warm so the temperature reaches 89 degrees before noon, and I soon break into a furious sweat. When we reach the station and the box is rolled inside, my friends discover it must go through check-in, be weighed, paid for, and inspected. With minutes remaining until the 11:50 departure, they opt for a later train. That will put our arrival in New York City—and my liberation from the box—at sometime after 6 p.m.

1 p.m.: I feel myself being rolled to the scales. As I later find out, the crate, with me inside it, weighs 210 lbs. and costs \$55 to ship one way from Philadelphia to New York. The whole process goes smoothly—the box is neither x-rayed nor scanned—and the ease with which I pass through security rejuvenates my

confidence. As the box is rolled into an elevator and lowered to the platform level, it becomes very hot inside the crate. I remove layers of clothing, stripping down to my boxer shorts, but this does little to cool me off. Beads of moisture start condensing on the screw plates and drip from the ceiling—as though the box itself were sweating.

1:45 p.m.: I hear a thump on the lid and feel the crate tipped from side to side as it is secured with ropes to a wooden pallet. Shortly thereafter a forklift scoops me up and carries me to the spot where the train arrives. At 3:45 it barrels into the station, and my box is carried on board. Once the train leaves the station, the boxcar fills with light, and I can see the walls of the crate. Wondering where the light could be coming from, I look through a crack in the crate and discover, to my horror, that the boxcar door has rolled open, and my crate is only a few feet from the edge. My instincts tell me to get out and close the door, but I remain closed in the box until the train stops at the next station.

4:30 p.m.: While the train is stopped, two baggage handlers climb into the car with additional luggage. As the train pulls away with the men still aboard, one comes over and sits on the crate. The men discuss the contents, and I worry that they will somehow dis-

## Arrival from Washington, D.C.: Harrison

The following story of Harrison Cary's decision to leave Richmond, Va., and slavery, is recounted by the African-American abolitionist William Still in his classic *The Underground Railroad*.

Still was a member, and for a number of years director, of the General Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia, which is said to have assisted some 9,000 runaway slaves between 1830 and 1860. Born to free parents—Still's father had bought his way out of slavery, and his mother was a runaway slave—Still went to work for the Vigilance Committee in 1844. He apparently started recording former slaves' stories of their escape when he discovered that one of the fugitives was his own brother, Peter Still, who had remained in slavery after his mother had escaped many years earlier.

Many of the stories in Still's book focus on the extraordinary difficulties runaway slaves faced and their daring improvisations—like Henry "Box" Brown's

decision to be sent by express, or Harriet Shephard's to commandeer two of her master's coaches and ride to freedom with her five children and five friends. In Harrison Cary's story, we have, instead, the reflections of an Underground Railroad passenger who has completed the first leg of his journey and, having arrived safely in Philadelphia, describes his life as a slave to a sympathetic Still.

The Underground Railroad, a compilation of these accounts, was first published in 1872.

—Editor

THE PASSENGER bearing the name of Harrison Cary who applied to the Vigilance Committee for assistance was a mulatto of medium size, with a prepossessing countenance, and a very smart talker. Seeking, as usual, to learn his history, the subjoined questions and answers were the result of the interview:

Q. "How old are you?"

A. "Twenty-eight years of age this coming March."

Q. "To whom did you belong?"

A. "Mrs. Jane E. Ashley."

Q. "What kind of a woman was she?"

A. "She was a very clever woman; never said anything out of the way."

Q. "How many servants had she?"

A. "She had no other servants."

Q. "Did you live with her?"

A. "No. I hired my time for \$22 a month."\*

Q. "How could you make so much money?"

A. "I was a bricklayer by trade, and ranked among the first in the city."

As Harrison talked so intelligently, the member of the Committee who was examining him, was anxious to know how he

\* Slaves who had special skills were sometimes hired out by their masters and permitted to retain some of the money they earned. However, from what he says later in the interview, Harrison Cary was obliged to "meet his monthly hire"—that is, earn enough to pay his owner a specified sum every month.

cover I am inside. One of them starts pounding out rhythms on the lid of the crate, and I have to suppress a wild urge to pound back—and give the man a real scare. At the next station stop the men disembark, and I'm alone again.

5:35 p.m.: Exhausted from heat and with my water bottle empty, I contemplate leaving the crate. But then the train slows to mark the descent from New Jersey to the tunnels beneath Manhattan, and soon the train pulls into the station. After fewer hours entombed than Box Brown—but more than enough for me—I eagerly await release from the box. And wait and wait. I later find out that my box, which had been mislabeled, was about to go on to Boston when one of my friends demanded a search of the freight cars and found me just in time.

6:15 p.m.: The crate lands on the streets of Manhattan just outside Penn Station. My friend taps on the lid and says, "Tony, you can come out now, you are a free man!" I open the trap door and rise from the box, thrusting my fists to the sky and turning my face to the sun. I think of Henry stepping from his crate onto free soil and finding himself no longer a slave. And for the first time ever, I think I understand what being free actually means.

\* \* \*

Once free of the box, I continued my journey for 400 more miles through New York state. I finally crossed the Niagara River into Canada near Buffalo on Father's Day 1996 and continued on to Amherstburg, Ontario, my last stop on the Underground Railroad. □

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## Cary

came to be so knowing, the fact that he could read being very evident.

Harrison proceeded to explain how he was led to acquire the art both of reading and writing:

"Slaves caught out of an evening without passes from their master or mistress, were invariably arrested, and if they were unable to raise money to buy themselves off, they were taken and locked up in a place known as the 'cage,' and in the morning the owner was notified, and after paying the fine the unfortunate prisoner had to go meet his fate at the hands of his owner."

Often he or she found himself or herself sentenced to take 39 or more lashes before atonement could be made for the violated law, and the fine sustained by the enraged owner.

Harrison having strong aversion to both of the "wholesome regulations" of the peculiar institution above alluded to, saw that the only remedy that he could avail himself of was to learn to write his own passes. In possess-

ing himself of this prize, he knew that the law against slaves being taught would have to be broken, nevertheless he was so anxious to succeed that he was determined to run the risk. Consequently he grasped the boon with but very little difficulty or assistance. Valuing his prize highly, he improved more and more until he could write his own passes satisfactorily. The "cage" he denounced as a perfect "hog hole," and added, "it was more than I could bear."

He spoke with equal warmth on the pass custom, "the idea of working hard all day and then being obliged to have a pass," etc.,—his feelings sternly revolted against. Yet he uttered not a disrespectful word against the individual to whom he belonged. Once, he had been sold, but for what was not noted on the record book.

His mother had been sold several times. His brother, William Henry Cary, escaped from Washington, D.C., when quite a youth. What became of him it was not for Harrison to tell, but he supposed that he had made his way to a free state, or Canada, and he hoped to find

him. He had no knowledge of any other relatives.

In further conversation with him, relative to his being a single man, he said that he had resolved not to entangle himself with a family until he had obtained his freedom.

He found it pretty hard to meet his monthly hire, consequently he was on the look-out to better his condition as soon as a favorable opportunity might offer. Harrison's mistress had a son named John James Ashley, who was then a minor. On arriving at majority, according to the will of the lad's father, he was to have possession of Harrison as his portion. Harrison had no idea of having to work for his support—he thought that if John could not take care of himself when he grew up to be a man, there was a place for all such in the poor-house.

Harrison was also moved by another consideration. His mistress' sister had been trying to influence the mistress to sell him; thus considering himself in danger, he made up his mind that the time had come for him to change his habitation, so he resolved to try his fortune on the Underground Railroad. □

# VERBICIDE

BY DAVID W. ORR

HE ENTERED my office for advice as a freshman advisee sporting nearly perfect SAT scores and an impeccable academic record—by all accounts a young man of considerable promise. During a 20-minute conversation about his academic future, however, he displayed a vocabulary that consisted mostly of two words: “cool” and “really.” Almost 800 SAT points hitched to each word. He could use them interchangeably, as in “really cool” or “cool...really!” He could also use them singly. When he was a student in a subsequent class, I later confirmed that my first impression of the young scholar was largely accurate and that his vocabulary, and presumably his mind, consisted predominantly of words and images derived from overexposure to television and the new jargon of computerspeak. He is no aberration but an example of a larger problem, not of illiteracy but of diminished literacy in a culture that often sees little reason to use words carefully, however abundantly. Increasingly, papers from otherwise good students have whole paragraphs that sound like advertising copy. Whether students are talking or writing, a growing number have a tenuous grasp on a declining vocabulary. Excise “uh...like...uh” from most teenage conversations, and the effect is like sticking a pin into a balloon.

In the past 50 years, by one reckoning, the working vocabulary of the average 14-year-old has declined from some 25,000 words to 10,000 words.<sup>1</sup> This is not merely a decline in numbers of words but in the capacity to think. It also signifies a steep decline in the number of things an adolescent needs to know and to name in order to get by in an increasingly homogenized and urbanized consumer society. This is a national tragedy that goes virtually unnoticed in the media. It is no coincidence that in roughly the same half century the aver-

*David W. Orr is director of the Department of Environmental Studies at Oberlin College and editor of Conservation Biology, where this article first appeared.*

age person has come to recognize over 1,000 corporate logos but can now recognize fewer than 10 plants and animals native to his or her locality.<sup>2</sup> That fact says a great deal about why the decline in working vocabulary has gone unnoticed: Few are paying attention. The decline is surely not consistent across the full range of language but concentrates in those areas having to do with large issues such as philosophy, religion, public policy, and nature. On the other hand, vocabulary has probably increased in areas having to do with sex, violence, recreation, and consumption. As a result we are losing the capacity to say what we really mean and ultimately to think about what we mean. “That sucks,” for example, is a common way for budding young scholars to announce their displeasure about any number of things that range across the spectrum of human experience. But it can also be used to indicate a general displeasure with the entire cosmos. Whatever the target, it is the linguistic equivalent of duct tape, useful for holding disparate thoughts in rough and temporary proximity to some vague emotion of dislike.

THE PROBLEM is not confined to teenagers or young adults. It is part of a national epidemic of incoherence evident in our public discourse, street talk, movies, television, and music. We have all heard popular music lyrics that consisted mostly of pre-Neanderthal grunts. We have witnessed “conversation” on TV talk shows that would embarrass intelligent 4-year-olds. We have listened to politicians of national reputation proudly mangle logic and language in less than a paragraph, although they can do it on a larger scale as well. However manifested, our linguistic decline is aided and abetted by academics, including whole departments specializing in various forms of postmodernism and the deconstruction of one thing or another. They have propounded the idea that everything is relative, hence largely inconsequential, and that the use of language is primarily an exercise in power, hence to be devalued. They have taught, in other words, a pseudo-



feels good to at last

and this

think clearly.

at the front

limit my thoughts

and I notice

my mr

utterly worked

harder to think clearly.

I say

I think we're actually

I think we're actually

intellectual contempt for clarity, careful argument, and felicitous expression. Being scholars of their word they also write without clarity, argument, and felicity. Remove the arcane constructions from any number of academic papers written in the past 10 years, and the argument—such as it is—evaporates. But the situation is not much better elsewhere in the academy, where thought is often fenced in by disciplinary jargon. The fact is that educators have all too often been indifferent trustees of language. This explains, I think, why the academy has been a lame critic of what ails the world, from the preoccupation with self to technology run amuck. We have been unable to speak out against the barbarism engulfing the larger culture because we are part of the barbarizing process that begins with the devaluation of language.

The decline of language, noted by commentators such as H.L. Mencken, George Orwell, William Safire, and Edwin R. Newman, is nothing new. Language is always coming undone. Why? First, it is always under assault by those who intend to control others by first subverting the words and metaphors that people would otherwise use to describe their world. The goal is to give partisan aims the appearance of inevitability by diminishing the sense of larger possibilities. In our time, language is under assault by those whose purpose it is to sell one kind of quackery or another: economic, political, religious, or technological. It is under attack because the clarity and felicity of language, as distinct from its quantity, are devalued in an industrial-technological society. The clear and artful use of language is, in fact, threatening to that society. But language also comes undone because of our own slovenliness. As a result we have highly distorted and atrophied conversations about ultimate meanings, ethics, public purposes, or the means by which we live. Because we cannot expect to cope with problems that we cannot name, one result of our misuse of language is a growing agenda of unsolved problems that cannot be adequately described in words and metaphors derived from our own creations such as machines and computers. The words and metaphors derived from our own creations, in other words, are inadequate to describe the major flaws in these same creations.

**L**ANGUAGE IS also in decline because it is being Balkanized around the specialized vocabularies characteristic of an increasingly specialized society. The highly technical language of the expert is, of course, both bane and blessing. It is useful for describing fragments of the world but not for describing how these fit into a coherent whole. But things work as whole systems whether we can describe them or not, whether we perceive that coherence or not. And more than anything else, it is coherence our culture lacks, not specialized knowledge. Genetic engineering, for example, can be described as technical manipulation in the language of molecular biology. But saying what the act of rearranging the genetic fabric of Earth means requires an altogether different language and a mindset that seeks to discover larger patterns. Similarly, the specialized language of economics does not begin to describe the state of our well-being, whatever it reveals about how much stuff we may buy. Over and

over again the simplistic and seductive language of the specialist displaces that of the generalist—the specialist in whole things. A result is that the capacity to think carefully about ends, as distinct from means, has all but disappeared from our public and private conversations.

Language reflects the range and depth of our experience; and our experience of the world is being impoverished to the extent that it is rendered artificial and prepackaged. Most of us no longer have the experience of skilled physical work on farms or in forests. Consequently, as our reality becomes increasingly artificial, words and metaphors based on intimate knowledge of soils, plants, trees, animals, landscapes, rivers, and oceans have declined. “Cut off from this source,” Wendell Berry writes, “language becomes a paltry work of conscious purpose, at the service and the mercy of expedient aims.”<sup>3</sup> We’ve become a nation of television watchers and Internet browsers, and it shows in the way we talk and what we talk about. More and more we speak as if we are spectators of life, not active participants, moral agents, or engaged citizens.

Nor are we held together, as we once were, by the reading of a common literature or by listening to great stories, and so we cannot draw on a common set of metaphors and images as we once did. Allusions to the Bible and other great books no longer resonate because they are simply unfamiliar to a growing number of people. This is so in part because the consensus about what is worth reading has disappeared. But the debate about a worthy canon is hardly the whole story. The ability to read serious things in a serious way is diminished by overstimulation by television and computers, with their rapidly changing images that mock concentration. The desire to read is jeopardized by the same forces that threaten to make us a violent, shallow, hedonistic, and materialistic people. As a nation we risk coming undone because our language is coming undone, and our language is coming undone because one by one we are being undone.

Because we cannot think clearly about what we cannot say clearly, the first casualty of linguistic incoherence is our ability to think well about many things. This is a reciprocal process. Language, George Orwell wrote, in “Politics and the English Language,” “becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.”<sup>4</sup> In our time, the words and metaphors of the consumer economy are often a product of foolish thoughts as well as evidence of bad language. Under the onslaught of commercialization and technology we are losing the sense of wholeness and time that is essential to a decent civilization. We are losing, in short, the capacity to articulate what ought to be most important to us. And the new class of corporate chiefs, global managers, genetic engineers, and money speculators has no words with which to describe the fullness and beauty of life or to announce their role in the larger moral ecology. They have no way to say how we fit together in the community of life, indeed no idea beyond that of self-interest about why we ought to protect it. They have, in short, no language that will help humankind, including them-

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When language is devalued, misused, or corrupted, so too are those who speak it and those who hear it.

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selves, navigate through the most dangerous epoch in its history. Evil begins not only with words used with malice but also with words that diminish people, land, and life to some fragment that is less than whole and less than holy. The prospects for evil, I believe, will grow as those for language decline.

We have an affinity for language, and that capacity makes us human. When language is devalued, misused, or corrupted, so too are those who speak it and those who hear it. On the other hand, we are never better than when we use words clearly, eloquently, and civilly. Language can elevate thought and ennoble our behavior. Abraham Lincoln's words at Gettysburg in 1863, for example, gave meaning to the terrible sacrifices of the Civil War. Similarly, Winston Churchill's words moved an entire nation to do its duty in the dark hours of 1940. If we intend to protect and enhance our humanity, we must first decide to protect and enhance language and fight everything that undermines and cheapens it.

**W**HAT DOES this mean in practical terms? How do we design the right use of language back into the culture? My first suggestion is to restore the habit of talking directly to each other, whatever the loss of economic efficiency. To that end I propose that we begin by smashing every automated answering machine. Messages like "Your call is important to us..." or "For more options, please press five," or "If you would like to talk to a real person, please stay on the line," are the death rattle of a coherent culture.

Second, the proper use of language is a slowly acquired art that is easily corrupted by technological contrivances that increase the volume and velocity of communication. Whatever the gains in speed and convenience provided by the Internet, I seldom receive any e-mail message that could pass a sixth-grade composition exam. We cannot disinvent the Internet as a

tool for communication, but for our sanity we can and should limit the use we make of it.

My third suggestion is to restore the habit of public reading. One of my most distinctive childhood memories is attending a public reading of Shakespeare by the British actor Charles Laughton. With no prop other than a book, he read with energy and passion for two hours and kept a large audience enthralled, including at least one 8-year-old boy. No movie has ever been as memorable to me. Further, I propose that adults should turn off the television, disconnect the cable, undo the computer, and once again read good books aloud to their children. I know of no better or more pleasurable way to stimulate thinking, encourage a love of language, and facilitate a child's ability to form images.

Fourth, those who corrupt language ought to be held accountable for what they do—beginning with the advertising industry. In 1997, it spent an estimated \$187 billion to sell us an unconscionable amount of stuff, much of it useless, environmentally destructive, and deleterious to our health. Often using only seductive imagery, advertising fuels the fires of consumerism that are consuming the Earth and our children's future. Advertisers regard the public with utter contempt—as little more than sheep to be manipulated to buy whatever at the highest possible cost and at any consequence. Dante would have consigned them to the lowest level of Hell, only because there was no worse place to put them. We should too. If we lack the gumption to do that, we ought to require by law full disclosure of the damage consumer products do to other people, to the environment, and to the buyer.

Fifth, language, I believe, grows from the outside in, from the periphery to center. It is renewed in the vernacular by the everyday acts of living, doing, and speaking. It is renewed in the streets, shops, farms, and rural places where human life is most authentic. It is, by the same logic, corrupted by contrivance, pretense, and fakery. The center, where power and wealth work by contrivance, pretense, and fakery, does not create language so much as exploit it. To facilitate control, the powerful would make our language as uniform and dull as the interstate highway system. To preserve the places where language grows, we must protect the independence of local newspapers and local radio stations by forbidding non-local ownership. We need to support regional publishing houses and small, independent bookstores. We need to protect local culture and local dialects from highbrow ridicule. We need to teach the young to honor difference in speech and dialect. And we must protect those parts of our culture where memory, tradition, and devotion to place still exist, because it is there that language is often most vibrant.

Finally, because language is the only currency wherever men and women pursue truth, there should be no higher priority for schools, colleges, and universities than to defend the integrity and clarity of language in every way possible. We must instill in our students an appreciation for language, literature, and words well crafted and used to good ends. As teachers we should insist on good writing. We should assign books

*(Continued on page 48)*

# ENLIGHTENMENT FOR CHILDREN

## *Community Schools in South India*

BY STEPHANIE FISCHER

**I**N A COUNTRY that has one-third as many teachers per capita as North America and a serious scarcity of schools, especially in rural areas and urban slums, poor children are often left behind when it comes to education. But Sarat Babu Vasireddy, an educator and advocate for children's rights, who has founded a system of community-run schools in the slums of Hyderabad, is proving that poor communities do not have to wait—

*Stephanie Fischer is an associate director at Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, a nonprofit organization that invests in social entrepreneurs around the world. Sarat Babu Vasireddy is an Ashoka fellow. His e-mail address is saratbv@pol.net.in. Those interested in more information about Ashoka can visit the organization's Web site ([www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org)) and subscribe to its quarterly magazine, Changemakers, (\$6 per year) by calling 703/527-8300.*

and hope—for the government to provide schools for their children.

Besides making education accessible to a previously unserved group of children, Sarat Babu has succeeded, with his Baljyothi (Enlightenment for Children) schools, in placing school governance in the hands of students, parents, teachers, and communities. Although some private schools for the privileged in India have already experimented with this model of school governance, Sarat Babu has applied it to a very different population—slum residents, who, until he came on the scene, had neither the means nor the awareness to help their children get an education.

The program started in 1996 in Hyderabad, a city of nearly 5 million people and the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh, with three schools and 7,000 students. It now comprises 200 schools and serves 21,000 students between the ages of 5 and 14, none of

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF SARAT BABU VASIREDDY



*(Right) Second- and third-grade students share a classroom in the Bhagat Singh Colony school.*



whom have previously attended school. For 5-year-olds, the standard age for beginning school in India, classes run from 8:45 a.m. to 3 p.m., 200 days a year. "Bridge Schools," offering 10-hour sessions, 260 days a year, help children who are beginning school between ages 7 and 10 to catch up on what they have missed. Still older children can attend a special yearlong residential camp to bring them up to speed. (The need for Bridge Schools and residential camps is diminishing as more and more children in the areas served by the Baljyothi schools start school at the standard age.)

Student-teacher ratios vary between one teacher for 20 students in Bridge Schools to one for 40 in the regular Baljyothi schools—in contrast to the 70-student class size that is common in government schools. The program is very successful in retaining the children it enrolls—only 5 percent drop out. As a result, it also serves as the scholastic preparation for youngsters who want to enter mainstream government schools

when they finish elementary school. Already, 10,000 children who have completed the program in one of the Baljyothi schools are continuing their education in government schools.

The per-pupil cost in a Baljyothi school is \$16 a year; and it costs \$1,500 a year to run a school. The schools are funded mainly from various government sources. However, Sarat Babu has also encouraged the community to invest in the schools—financially and otherwise—reflecting his conviction that if the schools are firmly grounded in the community, they are much more likely to succeed.

### Motivating Parents

Sarat Babu Vasireddy has had a long familiarity with the group of people served by Baljyothi schools. Although he studied engineering in college, he joined the civil liberties movement while still in school and later went to work for a children's rights organization



*(Left) An extension to the BJR Nagar school built by members of the community when the original school became too crowded. (Above) A free play period at the BJR Nagar school.*



*Another combined-grade class in one of Sarat Babu Vasireddy's Baljyothi schools. In a government-run school, a class might be twice as large as this one.*

called the M.V. Foundation. His work for M.V. involved getting children who lived on the streets into classrooms. This experience, as well as his work as a champion for child laborers, tribal people, and handloom weavers, convinced him that poverty and child labor are not the decisive factors in keeping children from attending school. The obstacle, he decided, is twofold. Parents often do not understand the importance of sending their children to school. And as people who have not gone to school themselves, they may be intimidated and uncomfortable at the very idea. But access is an even bigger problem. Schools, where they exist, are likely to be overcrowded and lacking basic necessities—like books and teachers who can be relied on to show up every day.

Sarat Babu sees his principal task as creating a demand that his schools can supply: “motivating parents to send their children to school, continuing the persuasion until the parents get into the habit of sending the children regularly, and demystifying education through community involvement and governance.” In the case of working children, other voluntary organizations have sometimes assisted families in making up the loss of income so they do not withdraw the youngsters from school. For example, Bamma, mother of 9-year-old Velu, was given a sewing machine with which she could more than make up the income lost as a re-

sult of her son’s going to school. However, Sarat Babu does not believe in offering incentives as bribes to parents. “If we do that,” he says, “they will send their children to school for the incentives rather than the education. We need to teach parents the importance of investing in their children’s futures.”

In fact, the demand for education seems to be growing. When Sarat Babu’s organization recently conducted a study in 800 of Hyderabad’s 1,000 slums, an overwhelming 95 percent of those questioned were in favor of education. But, as Sarat Babu says, if you want to get at parents’ real attitudes toward education, you have to pose the right questions. If a questioner asks parents’ opinions about the state education system, they are likely to give a vote of no-confidence, but when asked if they want their children to be part of the new educated generation, they answer in the affirmative. In fact, Sarat Babu notes that in places where a good school is available, even in rural areas, fewer children work.

The speed with which the Baljyothi schools have spread provides ample evidence of parents’ willingness to embrace the idea of education for their children in community-run schools. When people in the slums surrounding the three original schools saw for themselves what had been achieved, they came to Sarat Babu and requested schools for their community. He did not have to sell his idea; it sold itself.

## Community Control

The fruitful cooperation between the school and the community that Sarat Babu Vasireddy has brought about contrasts sharply with the relationship between India's government schools for the poor and the communities they serve. In Sarat Babu's model, parents select the school governing board yearly, and teachers are responsible for running the school, whereas state schools are run from a distance by state or federal government employees. The government controls the selection of teachers, curriculum, and administrators. It assigns certified teachers to posts in various cities and villages, where the teachers have no connections or loyalty. It's not uncommon for teachers' salaries to be held up for two or three months—or for teachers to stop attending classes without even notifying education officials. Central control saps local initiative and prevents teachers from developing ties to the community and a feeling of accountability to students and parents. While India does have a number of private schools that offer superior education, these are strictly for the privileged.

The running of the Baljyothi schools is in the hands of parents and teachers, who form management com-

mittees. While teachers maintain primary responsibility for managing the schools, mothers' committees recommend teachers and act as watchdogs to ensure the smooth functioning of schools. And management and mothers' committees meet regularly to solve day-to-day problems. For example, the single biggest challenge that the schools encountered was absenteeism of students from single-parent families. In cases where this was a problem, the committee approached the parents and provided counseling about the importance of regular attendance. The nearly nonexistent absentee rate is evidence of the strategy's success.

There is nothing fancy about most of the school facilities, as Sarat Babu admits. Half of the schools are located in houses; some are in community halls; and a large number are rented. In many slums, Sarat Babu says, it is hard even to find land on which to build a school. But the involvement of parents is such that some communities have schools that parents have built themselves. Sarat Babu calls them his "fortunate schools."

## In the Classroom

Students of all ages study together in the classrooms of

# Education in India

The constitution of India says that the government is responsible for providing primary and elementary schooling, free of charge, to all citizens. In fact, the reality often falls short of this principle.

Primary and elementary education (roughly up through our eighth grade) takes place, for the most part, in schools run by state governments or local organizations. These schools do not charge tuition. But schools run by non-profit organizations, including religious groups, can receive grants from the government. These are known as government-aided schools. Sarat Babu's schools are in this category. There are also private schools, which compete for pupils with the government schools.

In rural India, 68 percent of school-going children attend government schools; 22 percent, government-aided schools; and 10 percent, privately managed schools. Twelve percent more children attend school in urban areas than in the countryside.

In the lower primary grades (grades 1-4), all teaching is done in one of India's numerous "mother

tongues," depending on the state where the school is located. (In Hyderabad, the language is Telegu.) The standard subjects are reading, writing, elementary math, environmental studies, hygiene, crafts, and physical education. At the higher primary level (grades 5-8), children study at least two languages—the mother tongue and the national language or English. Other subjects include math (e.g., algebra), some standard sciences—physics, soil science, zoology, chemistry—history, geography, civics, moral science, art, and crafts.

But the syllabus does not necessarily reflect the quality of education students get at government schools. Because the schools pay poorly—and often irregularly—teaching is usually a job of last resort for educated Indians. This means there is a shortage of teachers, and teaching can be of poor quality.

Facilities are also a problem. It is not uncommon for a school to have ill-equipped laboratories (where they exist at all), a scarcity of teaching aids (including textbooks), and no toilets. And such

as they are, schools are often scarce. Schools—and this includes government schools—are not usually to be found in slum areas. In rural areas, children may have to walk four or five miles to get to a school.

School may also be too expensive, especially for the rural poor, either because they can't afford to pay for uniforms, books and stationery, as well as the cost of transportation to and from school, or because their children must work to help support the family. In some cases, parents simply don't see the value of an education, especially for girls, who, they say, are just going to get married.

Given all these problems, it is no surprise that at least half of the adult population of India is illiterate (two-thirds of the women). However, there is a growing trend in favor of education—especially in Andhra Pradesh, where Sarat Babu lives and works. Even the poorest parents there are increasingly willing to send their children to school and are ready to take on extra work to see that their kids can attend school—a trend that is undoubtedly reflected in the spectacular growth of Sarat Babu's schools. □

the community schools. They work from the same textbooks as students in government schools, but the material is modified to reflect the interests and needs of poor children who come from a background where education is unknown. Some of the curriculum is devoted to issues that are particularly relevant to the community, such as sanitation, health, pollution, and communal harmony. Teachers rarely assign homework because most students do not live in conditions that are conducive to doing schoolwork at home. However, as already noted, Baljyothi schools are giving many children the skills and confidence to continue their education in government schools along with relatively more privileged children.

Sarat Babu recruits teachers from the local community. He first conducts workshops with young, unemployed adults from the slums, which are aimed at getting them to rethink the options for their lives and to visualize themselves as possible community leaders. From these groups, he identifies young women with the potential for becoming teachers; in this selection, Sarat Babu relies heavily on the recommendations of the mothers' committees.

All teachers are required to have finished high school (which in India is 10th grade). Sarat Babu selects only women because, he says, they "have more tact than men." This choice represents a challenge to traditional values. Because the place of women is considered to be in the home, girls in India are often not given access to education—much less the opportunity to participate in the education of others. Baljyothi teachers earn more than they would in any other job,

and often receive better training than government teachers. In addition to pedagogical training, their orientation includes a 15-day program that teaches them how to interact with the community on educational issues. Because the teachers are young and from the same community as their pupils, there is a certain informality and closeness between the students and teachers. And in addition to learning subject matter, children learn that education can be part of the life of people like them—even a profession they might aspire to.

## Local and National Support

Baljyothi schools have been successful because they are based on an idea that has a strong intrinsic appeal. As Sarat Babu puts it, "First we want to develop children's confidence and feelings of social equality. Second, they should acquire minimum standards of education for their age and have the enthusiasm and perseverance to continue with their studies." Because Baljyothi schools are community-based, they have built a powerful support network of diverse groups—policy advocacy groups, informal labor groups, youth clubs, voluntary organizations (like UNICEF), and government agencies. Fifty of the schools have been adopted by local citizen organizations.

The state government has been supportive through departments beyond the Ministry of Education. The National Child Labor Program, the Adult Education Program, and the Women and Child Welfare Department, all provide financial assistance to Sarat Babu's work. "I firmly believe," he says, "that going to school is the right of a child. And the child cannot be deprived of that right by anybody, whether it be a parent, society, or government." But he does not believe that the current education system can make this right a reality: "Ultimately, decentralization of schools must become standard policy."

Sarat Babu's success with the Baljyothi schools shows some of the ramifications of this vision. Putting administrative control of the schools in the hands of the slum residents has encouraged them to make decisions for themselves, and it has generated a powerful energy directed toward social ends. Furthermore, shifting a majority of children from being wage-earners to students has also helped to transform the culture of the communities where schools have been founded.

The schools are an immeasurable gift to the children in these communities. The children who had been laborers were helped to regain their lost childhood. Yadaiah, a teacher in one of the Baljyothi schools "where most of the students were daily wage earners" talks about how it raised their spirits and their view of themselves "when they were addressed and treated as students and not laborers." And for every child, the schools make possible a future that they formerly would not have been able to imagine.

But the benefit goes beyond the here and now in the slums of Hyderabad. That is what Sarat Babu is talking about when he says, "I've never seen educated parents who didn't want education for their children." The seeds that are being planted today in Hyderabad will continue to bear fruit in the next generation and beyond. □

## A Postscript

In late August 2000, Hyderabad was devastated by flash floods that followed three days of continuous rain. The floods left 45 people dead and nearly 40,000 homeless. Poor people, many living in flimsy huts built along Hyderabad's waterways, suffered the most serious losses. Seventy of the city's 1,000 slum areas were simply washed away.

In Sarat Babu Vasireddy's district of Khairatabad, more than 1,000 dwellings collapsed under the impact of the flood waters, and 5,000 families lost their homes and all of their possessions, including clothing, food, and cooking utensils.

But the very day this happened, Sarat Babu and his team of school teachers went into action. They opened community kitchens funded by the government, and distributed clean water in Khairatabad and Mushirabad, another nearby district of Hyderabad. They also set up medical camps where people who were sick or injured could receive treatment. The community organization that Sarat Babu had created for his schools paid additional dividends in this emergency by helping to prevent malnutrition and the outbreaks of waterborne diseases like dysentery that are such a big risk during times of flood.—*Editor*

# BURNED AT THE HIGH STAKES

*A Somewhat Pseudo  
Self-Test About Testing*



ILLUSTRATED BY BLAIR THORNEY

BY W. JAMES POPHAM

**T**ODAY, A BLAZE of test-talk is sweeping the country. To illustrate, most newspapers now routinely rank local schools on the basis of students' standardized test scores. Such rankings, whether high or low, invariably trigger test-talk on the part of parents, teachers, and members of school boards. Some newspaper editors, in recognition of the competitive virtues of test-based comparisons, have even considered publish-

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*W. James Popham, a UCLA emeritus professor, has written extensively about educational assessment including two recently published books, *Modern Educational Measurement: Practical Guidelines for Educational Leaders* and *Testing! Testing! What Every Parent Should Know About School Tests*, both published in 1999 by Allyn and Bacon.*

ing school-by-school rankings in their sports section. Although people love to applaud a winner, they find it truly gratifying to look down on a loser.

Yet, though test-talk is common these days, not many people speak the language of assessment with unbridled confidence. This is true even for teachers, few of whom actually took a formal course in testing. And, although some might have endured a brush with testing during a course in educational psychology or instructional methods, most have been forced to pick up their insights about assessment as a consequence of on-the-job experience. That's why the following somewhat pseudo self-test is included in this issue of the *American Educator*. You can quickly find out how muddle-free your own test-talk really is. Or you can even try it out on colleagues or unsuspecting friends.

# THE SELF-TEST

*Directions:* Below you will find 17 items containing assessment-related words or phrases presented in boldface type, each of which will be followed by two definitions. Your task is to decide which of the two definitions accurately represents the item's boldfaced word or phrase. At the end of the self-test, an italicized answer key has been provided. The correct answers, incidentally, actually are correct.

## 1. Affective Assessment

A. A test of someone's *affection*, that is, the degree of amorousness one person feels toward another person. These tests, usually self-report inventories, have recently been employed, with notable economic success, by computer-based singles agencies.

B. Measurement devices intended to assess the attitudes, interests, and values of individuals. In school settings, because of the imprecision of affective assessment instruments, educators should only employ self-report affective inventories to arrive at inferences about the status of a group of students. Self-report affective inventories should not be used to make an inference about the affective status of an individual student.

## 2. Authentic Assessment

A. A classroom test that has, as a consequence of a teacher's officially notarized affidavit, been formally designated as a genuine classroom test instead of a lesson plan, grocery list, or situation-comedy TV script.

B. Any form of assessment calling for students to supply responses to tasks that are more "real-world" than "academic" in nature. This label for more reality-rooted assessment has fallen out of favor in recent years because its converse, namely, *inauthentic* assessment, seems inane.

## 3. Cognitive Assessment

A. A measure of a person's intellectual capabilities or potentials. Cognitive *achievement* tests assess a student's knowledge and/or skills. Cognitive *aptitude* tests predict a student's future behavior, for example, in a subsequent academic setting.

B. A totally mental form of testing in which, without any spoken words whatsoever, teachers "think" the questions they wish to ask a class while students "think" their responses to those questions. The Sierra Club has applauded this form of paper-free assessment because of its environmental sensitivity.

## 4. Criterion-Referenced Test

A. Based on the Greek term *krinein* which means "to separate," a criterion-referenced test is given to married couples who, contemplating a possible dissolution of their marriage, can determine from numerical test scores, complete with decimals, whether a marital breakup appears to be warranted.

B. An assessment of a student's status with respect to defined criterion behaviors such as a body of knowledge or a skill. The student's test performance is *referenced* back to the criterion behaviors when the teacher says, for example, "Your score, Sally, indicates you have mastered 85 percent of 500 Kurdish vocabulary terms represented by yesterday's 20-item vocabulary quiz."



### 5. Embedded Assessment

- A. A teacher-made test that, either because of security precautions or the test's emotional significance to the teacher who created it, is typically taken to bed by the teacher each night.
- B. A classroom assessment administered during regular instruction so that students regard the test as little more than part of the teacher's routine instructional activities.

### 6. Grade-Equivalent Score

- A. Expressed in terms of grade levels and months of the school year, one way of describing a student's performance on a standardized achievement test. A grade-equivalent score of 6.4 indicates that the student's test score is approximately equal to how a sixth-grader would typically score in the fourth month of the school year. Because of questionable assessment assumptions, grade-equivalents are used less frequently these days.
- B. A special kind of award given to students by teachers on the basis of students' extraordinary in-class effort. This award, used much like a "Get-Out-of-Jail-Free" card in Monopoly, can be employed at any time by a student as a grade-equivalent for an assignment or test chosen by the student.

### 7. Norm-Referenced Test

- A. An approach to assessment based on the carefully documented test performances of Norman Nutley, a Midwest student whom university anthropologists were able to observe and assess for 13 years in grades kindergarten through 12 during the 1930s. Students' scores on tests taken today are referenced back to Norm's original performances on a comparable test.
- B. A comparative approach to educational assessment in which a student's performance on a test is compared with the performances of other students who have already taken the same test. The most common norm-referenced assessment occurs when students' scores on nationally normed standardized tests are reported as percentiles, that is, are interpreted relatively according to the performance of the norm group.

### 8. Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE)

- A. An indication of where a student's test score would have been located on the baseline of a test-score distribution if the test scores had been arrayed, at least approximately, in the form of a normal curve.
- B. A distribution of test scores posing as a normal curve but actually arrayed in a decisively non-normal fashion, for example, skewed or leptokurtic. A normal curve equivalent (NCE) is sometimes referred to as an "ersatz normal curve," hence can also be designated as an ENC.

### 9. Performance Test

- A. An assessment of students' skills or knowledge requiring responses to tasks designed to elicit fairly substantial products or behaviors. Examples of performance-test tasks would include a directive that a student write an original essay or a requirement for a student to deliver a 10-minute extemporaneous speech.
- B. Tests that are submitted for the annual "performance awards" of the National Council on Measurement in Education. Teachers who submit each year's award-winning classroom tests receive perma-plaques of their test, suitably framed for wall-mounting.

### 10. Portfolio Assessment

- A. The systematic appraisal of a student's collected work samples. A chief purpose of this form of assessment is to nurture, via portfolio-based conferences between a student and a teacher, students' skills in evaluating their own performances.
- B. In certain charter schools, portfolio-assessed students are allowed to place their worst test performances in a portfolio, and those tests are not used in grading the student. At the end of the school year, all portfolios are burned in a symbolic celebration, often referred to as a school's Assessment-Free Festival.



### 11. Psychomotor Assessment

- A. A type of psychological measurement calling for students to repair an absolutely unrepairable electric motor. The nature of the student's response to this impossible task allows counselors to classify a student as a neurotic, a psychotic, or a potential educational administrator.
- B. The measurement of a student's ability to perform such small-muscle skills as handwriting, keyboarding, and weaving or such large-muscle skills as pole vaulting, long-distance running, and gymnastics.

### 12. Quartile

- A. A mathematics performance test in which the student is given one quart of plastic tiles, then must arrange those tiles in pre-specified geometric patterns during exceedingly brief time periods. Often used with children who are being considered for talented and gifted programs, quartile tests have also been employed in recent years to predict whether school-site administrators can arrange class schedules without major duplications or omissions.
- B. A point in a set of test scores that divides the scores into 25-percent segments. The first quartile is equivalent to the 25th percentile; the second quartile is equivalent to the 50th percentile; and the third quartile is equivalent to the 75th percentile. This term is frequently misused by educators who incorrectly regard a quartile as a *quarter*, that is, one-fourth of a set of scores. It would be incorrect to say, "John scored in the first quartile." But it would be correct to say, "John scored in the lowest quarter of the score-distribution."

### 13. Reliability

- A. A test's inherent dependability, that is, the degree to which the test's results will support teachers if their grade assignments are formally challenged by parents or administrators. Though not widely known, the U.S. Marine Corps motto, *semper fidelis*, was first applied to marine drill sergeants' boot-camp tests thought to be so remarkably reliable that they were regarded as "always faithful."
- B. The consistency with which an educational test measures whatever it is measuring. There are, however, three related but *different* kinds of test consistency, namely, (1) *stability* reliability, that is, the consistency of results between two time-separated testing occurrences, (2) *alternate-form* reliability, that is, consistency of results on two different forms of the same test, and (3) *internal consistency* reliability, that is, the degree to which a test's items are functioning in a consistent manner.

### 14. Rubric

- A. A scoring guide containing the evaluative criteria by which the quality of students' constructed responses to tests can be judged. *If* properly conceptualized, a rubric can be a potent instructional tool to help teachers and students alike.
- B. A geometric, hand-held cubic puzzle designed to assess a student's spatial-visualization skills. Remarkably popular among laypersons, "Rubric's Cube" has also been used by many teachers for class-management purposes. Because it is a relatively insoluble task, the puzzle has proven useful in keeping hyperactive students occupied.

### 15. Stanine

- A. A distinctive variety of sea anemone, typically used as a wrong-answer option when biology teachers create multiple-choice exams for their students (often called *urchins*).
- B. A nine-category reporting system, developed by U.S. military measurement specialists, intended to describe examinees' test performances rather generally. In this system, a stanine number nine represents the best student performance while a stanine number one represents the worst student performance. The grossness of this score-reporting approach accurately reflects the inherent imprecision of most educational measurement.





### 16. Test Bias

A. This occurs when an assessment instrument contains items that offend or unfairly penalize a student on the basis of the student's personal characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, geographic locale, or socioeconomic status.

B. A projective self-report test that presents incomplete fictitious stories to examinees, then uses the responses to those stories to classify any biased examinees into such discrete categories as Male-Chauvinist Bigot, Flaming-Feminist Fanatic, or Klan-Caliber Racist.

### 17. Validity

A. The extent to which a rationale for the use of a test is fundamentally well founded. If, for example, a principal informs teachers that they must administer a standardized test or lose their jobs, the test is said to possess sufficient validity.

B. The degree of accuracy reflected in the score-based inferences that educators make about students. Although tests are often described as being valid or invalid, validity technically refers to the accuracy of a score-based inference rather than to the test itself.

## SELF-TEST ANSWER KEY, PERFORMANCE LEVELS, AND ACTION IMPLICATIONS

### Correct Answers

1: B; 2: B; 3: A; 4: B; 5: B; 6: A; 7: B; 8: A; 9: A; 10: A; 11: B; 12: B; 13: B; 14: A; 15: B; 16: A; 17: B.

### Performance Levels and Action Implications

#### Advanced Assessment Literacy = 17 Correct

You should consider taking up after-school moonlighting as a measurement consultant, or you might begin writing assessment-related articles such as this (unless you guessed at most items).

#### Superior Assessment Literacy = 16-13 Correct

You should identify the terms whose correct definitions you failed to identify, write those definitions on a 3x5-inch index card, and commit such definitions to memory via sub-vocal practice during faculty meetings.

#### Barely Adequate Assessment Literacy = 12-9 Correct

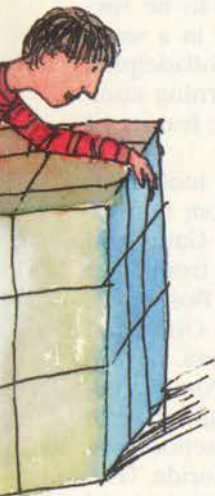
You should immediately acquire a copy of an enthralling 1999 book, Classroom Assessment: What Teachers Need to Know, written by an amiable UCLA emeritus professor and published by Allyn and Bacon, a firm that regularly pays royalties to its authors ([www.abacon.com/education](http://www.abacon.com/education)). Read it nightly!

#### Borderline Assessment Illiteracy = 8-5 Correct

You should get a copy of the book cited above, but get a friend to read it aloud to you, very slowly.

#### Full-Blown Assessment Illiteracy = 4-0 Correct

There is the likelihood that your illiteracy extends well beyond the realm of assessment. Keep these results out of the hands of colleagues and superiors. And for purposes of your own self-esteem, avoid taking self-tests such as this in the future.



# SMALLER SCHOOLS

## *How Much More Than a Fad?*

BY EDWARD MUIR

FORTY YEARS ago, James Bryant Conant, Harvard president and student of education policy, presented what he saw as the educational and economic advantages of larger high schools. In an influential book entitled *The American High School Today*, he argued that, with more students using the facilities and with administrative functions centralized, larger schools would be more cost effective.<sup>1</sup> As for the educational advantages, Conant believed that larger high schools allowed students to take a wider variety of courses, thus giving them a greater opportunity to learn. Although Conant was talking about schools of at least 400 students, his logic—and the desire of school districts to consolidate schools for financial reasons—has created a world where much larger high schools than he contemplated are now commonplace. The trend to larger schools is not just a high school phenomenon: South Gate Middle School in South Gate, Calif., for example, had an enrollment of more than 3,800 students in 1998, making it perhaps the largest middle school in the nation. However, the concentration of students in larger and larger schools is most often seen at the high school level.

The largest high school in America in 1998, was Belmont Senior High School in Los Angeles, with 5,160 students.<sup>2</sup> In that year, there were 274 high schools in America that had more than 2,750 students. The combined enrollment of these schools was more than 900,000 students. (see Table 1, page 42, for a list of the 25 largest high schools, and Table 2, page 42, for a look at which states have the greatest numbers of large high schools).

When it comes to educational policy and practice, today's silver bullet is often tomorrow's discredited fad, and slowly, during the last decade, reformers at

*Edward Muir is a senior associate in the AFT Research and Information Services Department.*

the local level have been working to swing the pendulum back toward smaller schools. These efforts have proven popular with teachers, parents, and students in districts such as Boston, Chicago, New York City, and Philadelphia. A lead teacher in a small Chicago school, for example, told evaluators from Bank Street College that "The smallness has created a sense of commitment and camaraderie that you would not find in a large school."<sup>3</sup> Among the positive features cited by teachers in Chicago's small schools were greater opportunities to plan collaboratively, better communication, and a higher level of trust between teachers and administrators. Teachers in Chicago's small schools also took pleasure in their students' greater engagement in the school community. Ellalinda Rustique-Forrester, a teacher with varied experience in New York City's small schools, while cautioning that these schools require different practices in order to be successful, titled her essay on being a teacher in a small school "Why Wasn't I Taught This Way?"<sup>4</sup> Philadelphia teachers ranked the creation of smaller learning communities within schools as the most positive feature of the district's recent reform efforts.

So "small" is in—as anyone can see from looking at the support the idea is currently getting from foundations and government. Microsoft chief Bill Gates and his wife, Melinda, are investing \$56 million from their foundation to create smaller high schools in Boston; St. Paul, Minn.; Cincinnati and West Clermont, Ohio; and Providence and Coventry, R.I., among others. Across the country, legislators and governors are considering programs to limit the size of schools. The legislature in California passed a pilot program for small schools, although Gov. Gray Davis did not sign it. In Florida, Gov. Jeb Bush did sign a bill mandating that new school buildings be designed to serve smaller numbers of students, with the largest high schools having a maximum of 900 students. The U.S. Department of Education



now administers a grant program to help create smaller high-school units across the country. Sometimes, as in Florida, these efforts involve opening new, smaller school buildings. Other times, reformers focus on redesigning larger schools into a series of mini schools or schools-within-schools. In this arrangement, a number of separate learning programs, each with its own staff and students, share space within the same larger building. Such efforts are designed to gain the advantages of small schools, while making use of existing physical plants.

But as policymakers consider adopting these reforms on a broader scale, we should be asking about the hard evidence that small schools lead to more suc-

cessful students. In fact, the research shows that smaller is better but that it is not a panacea. Experience in implementing small-schools programs also raises questions about how and where to implement these programs that teachers and policymakers need to consider.

First of all, it has to be acknowledged that we can't speak about small schools as though researchers and reformers have agreed on a certain definition. "Small" depends on who is doing the talking. Moreover, smallness may be defined by more than enrollment, as some believe that small schools necessarily involve different practices and cultures (see sidebar, page 44). Much of the quantitative research defines "large" and "small" in terms of a range, drawing conclusions about larger and smaller schools, rather than focusing on a particular class of "small schools." Although researchers may define small schools differently, it is still possible to draw some conclusions from what is a growing body of research.

**Table 1:  
The 25 Largest High Schools  
In America, 1998**

School Name	Location	1998 Enrollment
Belmont Senior High	Los Angeles, Calif.	5,160
G. Holmes Braddock Sr. High	Miami, Fla.	5,015
Theodore Roosevelt Senior High	Los Angeles, Calif.	5,013
John F. Kennedy High School	Bronx, N.Y.	4,982
James A. Garfield Senior High	Los Angeles, Calif.	4,691
Hastings High School	Houston, Texas	4,545
Bell Senior High	Bell, Calif.	4,540
Newtown High School	Elmhurst, N.Y.	4,536
Elsik High School	Alief, Texas	4,535
Brooklyn Tech	Brooklyn, N.Y.	4,519
Elizabeth High School	Elizabeth, N.J.	4,510
San Fernando Senior High	San Fernando, Calif.	4,434
John Marshall Senior High	Los Angeles, Calif.	4,419
John C. Fremont Senior High	Los Angeles, Calif.	4,409
Polytechnic High	Long Beach, Calif.	4,391
South Gate Senior High	South Gate, Calif.	4,337
De Witt Clinton High School	Bronx, N.Y.	4,337
Fontana High	Fontana, Calif.	4,287
James Logan High	Union City, Calif.	4,267
William C. Bryant High School	Long Island City, N.Y.	4,238
Independence High	San Jose, Calif.	4,226
Lane Technical High School	Chicago, Ill.	4,217
Huntington Park Senior High	Huntington Park, Calif.	4,204
Sachem High School	Lake Ronkonkoma, N.Y.	4,160
Miami Sunset Senior High School	Miami, Fla.	4,146

NB: Some schools may have school-within-school arrangements

**Table 2:  
States With More Than One  
of the 275 Largest High Schools in  
America in 1998**

State	Number of schools with more than 2,750 students
California	100
New York	41
Texas	40
Florida	37
Illinois	12
Pennsylvania	9
Arizona	7
Nevada	5
Indiana	4
Massachusetts	4
Virginia	4
Colorado	2
Minnesota	2

### Student Achievement: The Glass Is Half Full

Florida's law cites a number of reasons for creating smaller schools. It notes that smaller schools *may* raise achievement and certainly do not harm it. This is faint praise at best, but it is consistent with what research tells us. In an examination of the research on small schools for the Northwest Regional Education Lab, Kathleen Cotton cites 23 studies examining student achievement in small schools. While nine found an improvement in smaller schools, 14 found no effect.<sup>5</sup>

Subsequent studies have yielded similarly mixed results. The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a prestigious research firm, recently completed a 10-year analysis of the experiences of 1,700 students in career academies—smaller school-within-school high school programs that focus on a particular career theme—in California, Florida, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Texas, and the District of Columbia.<sup>6</sup> The small size of the school and the focus of the program are supposed to increase students' involvement in learning. MDRC, while finding much to praise in the schools, did not find evidence of better student achievement.

The Bank Street study's findings about Chicago's smaller schools showed an improvement in student achievement, but only in certain cases. Students in schools-within-schools performed better on tests than the students in the larger schools that housed them. However, the test scores for all of these students lagged behind students in Chicago's public schools in general. Although the results for outcomes other than testing were quite encouraging, the evaluators concluded that small schools were not "a silver bullet." The authors suggest that the small schools, many of which were created after 1995, need time to turn the other benefits they create into improved test scores. They also suggest that since one of the benefits of small schools is a lower dropout rate, students who might be poor performers wouldn't show up in the testing pool at all unless they were in a small school.

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## Larger schools are disproportionately harmful to students from poor and minority backgrounds.

benefit from being small and why low performers were not able to use smaller size to get similar results.

Another important factor in looking at the relationship between school size and student achievement is the nature of the student population. Kathleen Cotton's review found consistently positive outcomes in research examining the effect of small schools on achievement of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. She cites 11 studies that find small schools have better compensatory outcomes than larger schools. Two of the studies Cotton cites are by Craig Howley. He calls his research in this area the "Matthew Project," after the words of Jesus reported in the Book of Matthew: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, but whoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."<sup>8</sup> Howley's conclusion is that schooling done on a large scale causes disproportionate harm to disadvantaged students. Conversely, in their most recent work, Howley and Robert Bickel find that schooling on a larger scale may be moderately beneficial to students of more privileged backgrounds.<sup>9</sup>

The most comprehensive research linking school size, achievement, and student characteristics, *High School Size: Which Works Best and for Whom?* was conducted by Valerie Lee and Julia Smith in 1997. Using a large data set of individual student scores from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS), Lee and Smith evaluated reading and math scores for high school students across the nation.<sup>10</sup> Their results indicate that the optimal high school size is between 600 and 900 students. Particularly large high schools, those having more than 2,100 students, are substantially less effective for all students. But Lee and Smith's most important finding is that larger schools are disproportionately harmful to students from poor and minority backgrounds. It is in this area that the research is the strongest.

### There's More to Small Schools than Test Scores

Although the conclusions on student achievement are still tentative, there are strong indications that smaller schools can result in other positive outcomes. Reformers who support the creation of small schools argue that their intimacy will help foster community networks among students, parents, and teachers. The sum of these networks and the trust they create among participants are sometimes called "social capital." It was sociologist James Coleman who took the lead in identifying social capital as one of the principal factors in learning.<sup>11</sup> More recently, in *Bowling Alone*, a powerful and much discussed book, Robert Putnam presents evidence that social capital is on the decline in America and that this decline has grave implications for society.<sup>12</sup> These vary from lower electoral participation to fewer persons donating blood to potentially higher crime rates. Comprehensive longitudinal research is needed to see whether small schools boost social capital in the long run, and such research is scarce. One study, by David Bensman, has examined the later life outcomes for 117 graduates of East Harlem's Central Park East Elementary School. Finding not only higher

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But before we accept the inconclusive findings about the effect of smaller schools on student achievement, a better understanding of the mechanisms that might cause small schools to be successful is in order.

Many researchers note that the more intimate settings of smaller schools foster greater engagement—teachers and staff know all students, and all students know each other. And in the long run, this engagement may lead to improved student achievement. This possibility has yet to be investigated systematically. Other researchers suspect that the administrative processes in smaller schools may be more efficient, allowing good leaders to have a greater effect. For example, instructional leaders working with fewer teachers, according to this theory, should have better results in much the same way that teachers working with smaller classes can be more effective. In other words, we might find that better administration is also a factor in improving student achievement.

Researchers Kenneth Meier and John Bohte, who have studied the pass rates for Texas schools on the state's TAAS test, have come up with what seems to be the optimal school size for promoting student achievement.<sup>7</sup> The magic number, according to their data, is 650 students, with achievement lagging as schools got bigger or smaller. The statistical model they used focused on the relationship between achievement and factors such as student characteristics, school size, class size, and teacher experience. Meier and Bohte were also able to refine their model to focus on schools that did particularly well on TAAS. Their findings suggest that high-performing schools are more likely to benefit from smaller size than the others. The researchers suspect that leadership and better management explain why these schools are able to get more

graduation and college attendance rates, but evidence that students are living rich lives, the research is a hopeful start.<sup>13</sup> However, it should be remembered that Central Park East is not a typical small school.

We already know from research that students in smaller schools have some short-term outcomes that are consistent with the building of social capital. In fact, the research on non-test-score outcomes indicates that students in smaller schools have consistently better experiences than their counterparts in larger schools. For example, Cotton cites seven studies showing that students in smaller schools have higher attendance rates than students in larger schools. And five additional studies suggest that moving from a large school to a smaller school will increase a student's attendance rate. In more recent studies, both the MDRC report and the Bank Street evaluation found similar results.

Similarly, smaller high schools have lower dropout rates than larger high schools. Nine of the 10 studies reviewed by Cotton that focused on the issue found

this result. One of the best of these studies, which examines outcomes in 744 high schools, links the lower dropout rate with the development of social capital in the intimate settings of these smaller schools.<sup>14</sup> The research also firmly indicates that while larger high schools can offer a greater variety of extracurricular activities, the participation rate in extracurricular activities is higher in smaller schools. This is another way in which more intimate settings can promote the formation of social capital.

The late AFT president Albert Shanker first testified on safe schools before a congressional committee chaired by Indiana's Sen. Birch Bayh almost 25 years ago. Since then, as public opinion research has repeatedly shown, school safety has become a top concern for parents and other members of the community.<sup>15</sup> In a 1993 *American Educator* article, Jackson Toby linked making schools smaller with making them safer. We need, Toby said, to "break through the anonymous, impersonal atmosphere of jumbo high schools and junior highs by creating smaller communities of learning within larger structures, where teachers and students can come to know each other well."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, there are some who believe that tragedies like Columbine would not have happened if all high schools were smaller, and there is research indicating that small schools can be a major part of the solution to school violence.<sup>17</sup>

Overcrowded schools consistently have greater levels of violence, and the research indicates that larger schools generally do as well.<sup>18</sup> Cotton's review found seven studies indicating that smaller schools had better patterns of student behavior. Although principals often hesitate to report discipline problems in their schools, the latest U.S. Department of Education survey research reveals that 38 percent of principals in large schools reported some serious discipline problems in 1996, compared with 15 percent of principals in medium-sized schools and 10 percent of principals in small schools.<sup>19</sup> In the Bank Street evaluation, students in Chicago school-within-school programs reported that they fought less than students in the larger program because they knew one another. Surveys indicate that these students feel better able to resolve conflicts and work cooperatively than students in Chicago public schools generally.

On the other hand, there are concerns that small schools have social costs as well as benefits. Some civil rights activists in Florida objected to the state's new smaller schools law on the grounds that these schools would draw from smaller geographic areas, leading to a more homogeneous student population. The fear was that this would result in the resegregation of schools. The Florida legislation seeks to head off this problem with language that limits the application of the law in districts that are under desegregation court orders. However, to the extent that there is a tradeoff between specific social benefits for students and greater homogeneity, it certainly undermines one of the chief benefits of small size.

## What Size Is a "Small" School Anyhow?

One of the disputes within small-schools research is definitional. How small is small? When does a school become too big to be considered small? And what is the ideal size? According to a *PPhi Delta Kappan* poll, 58 percent of parents want their children to be in schools with fewer than 1,000 students, 28 percent said they favored schools between 1,000 and 1,500 students, and only 2 percent of parents said they favored a school with more than 2,000 students for their child. The National Association of Secondary School Principals recommends a maximum of 600 students in secondary schools.\* Activists like Theodore Sizer of the Coalition of Essential Schools often favor much smaller schools—with fewer than 400 students being seen as ideal.

As for the research, Kathleen Cotton's review of the literature shows that some studies do not even address this issue. In the 27 studies that do, a large school can be defined as having as few as 300 students or as many as 5,000, depending on the study. Cotton finds a cluster of researchers who believe that 400 is the appropriate upper limit for a secondary school, but she herself opts for 800. The research reviewed here seems to go along with Cotton's view. Kenneth Meier and John Bohte's research indicates that 650 is the optimal size. Valerie Lee and Julia Smith find that the ideal high school size is between 600 and 900 students. The question of how small is a "small" school is one of the nagging research issues that remains to be addressed. □

\* Maine State Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities and National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution*, Reston, Va.: Author, 1996.

## Costs of Small Schools

One reason for the popularity of larger schools is the belief that they are less expensive to operate. Theoretically,

cally, as Conant indicated, this efficiency is a natural result of larger scale. In particular, spending on facilities, especially common spaces such as cafeterias, auditoriums, and gymnasiums, as well as certain administrative operations, can be spread over larger numbers of students, thus lowering the per-pupil cost.

And, recent research on charter schools tends to confirm the principle that smaller is more expensive. Studies from Michigan show that charter schools spend more per pupil on administration than do traditional schools.<sup>20</sup> This is because small charter schools, on their own, are often trying to replicate many of the administrative functions of a larger school or even an entire school district. Therefore, more of the per-pupil dollars must go to administration.

Newer research into New York City schools complicates this picture. It has found that although smaller academic high schools cost more per pupil than larger high schools, they are more efficient on a per-graduate basis—up to a point. It cost the city \$51,000 per graduating student in high schools of under 600 students. The city spent \$65,000 per graduate in academic high schools serving between 600 and 2,000 students and \$50,000 per graduate in high schools serving more than 2,000 students. The efficiency in the large high schools was due to size; in the smaller schools, it was a result of higher graduation rates.<sup>21</sup>

### Is It More Than Just Size?

As I've already indicated, many of the reformers working to create smaller schools believe these schools cannot be defined by size alone (making the name "small school" somewhat misleading). One of the nation's leading advocates for small schools is Deborah Meier, who was principal of Central Park East in New York City and is now principal of Mission Hill, a pilot school in Boston. Pilot schools are small public schools with a great deal of independence that have been created by an agreement between the district and the Boston Teachers Union. Meier, who defines small schools by their focus as well as by their size, argues that parental choice is an important component in creating proper school communities.<sup>22</sup> The New Visions program in New York and the pilot schools in Boston are experiments not just in smallness but in decentralization and school-based decision-making, and research indicates that the different processes in these schools lead to different outcomes.

Similarly, charter schools are sometimes defined as small schools, and that is often the case. As a major experiment in school-based financing, deregulation, and governance, they are also many things besides small. Recent research comparing the experiences of charter schools to pilot schools and district schools with site-based management in Boston underlines how these other factors can affect outcomes and potentially amplify or mask the effects of size. The study, "Sometimes Bureaucracy Has Its Charms," found that pilot schools had institutional advantages over charter schools, including stable expectations regarding salaries, but they did have more freedom than schools using site-based management.<sup>23</sup> This research highlights the need to control for factors that may mask the effect of size

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Overcrowded schools consistently have greater levels of violence, and larger schools generally do as well.

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when studying outcomes in smaller schools. For example, if a small school is a school of choice, then researchers have to control for the possibility that better informed and more involved parents are creating better outcomes, as opposed to mere size. Similarly, if a smaller school is serving a particularly at-risk population, as is the case in some alternative schools, then that needs to be accounted for in assessing school results.

Taken together, the findings of researchers and experience of practitioners indicate that size may be a catalyst that helps staff to work effectively at increasing achievement, but that size alone is not enough. If so, then perhaps smaller schools are a lens that better focuses curriculum implementation, professional development, collaborative planning, or other factors in student achievement. Without carefully considering variables that are affected by "smallness"—and examining the relationships between smallness, these variables, and student learning—we may not be able to develop a complete picture of small schools. Governance and design issues play a part in this question as well. For example, do small school-within-school programs have different outcomes from stand-alone schools? What role does theme-based education, of the sort found in career academies, play? The next question for small-school research to answer will be why some small schools do better than others.

### Conclusion: Some Mysteries Remain

"Smaller" is in for a reason. While we don't have a complete answer on the relationship between smaller schools and student achievement, there is good evidence that smaller schools have some positive com-

pensatory effects for at-risk students. However, we still do not know why this is so.

As for the social benefits of small schools, more research should be done on the long-term effects of these benefits. For example, if students who attend smaller schools are more likely to vote or be employed and less likely to be in jail 20 years later, then small schools will be seen as an engine that improves social capital across the board. Having schools that are safer and graduate more students may be good enough. □

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Conant, James Bryant, *The American High School Today*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959.
- <sup>2</sup> All specific school size information cited here is from the National Center for Education Statistics' "Common Core of Data, Public School Universe 1997-98."
- <sup>3</sup> Wasley, Patricia, et al., *Small Schools, Great Strides: A Study of New Small Schools in Chicago*. New York: Bank Street College of Education, 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> Rustique-Forrester, Ellalinda, "Why Wasn't I Taught This Way?" in *Creating New Schools: How Small Schools Are Changing American Education*, ed. Evans Clinchy, New York: Teachers College Press, 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> Cotton, Kathleen, "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance," Northwest Regional Education Laboratory Close Up #20, 1996.
- <sup>6</sup> Kemple, James and Jason Snipes, *Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School*, New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2000.
- <sup>7</sup> Meier, Kenneth and John Bohte, "Ode to Luther Gulick: Span of Control and Organizational Performance," *Administration and Society*, 32:115-137.
- <sup>8</sup> Matthew 13:12 as quoted in Craig Howley's "The Matthew Principle: A West Virginia Replication?" in *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 3:18.
- <sup>9</sup> Howley, Craig and Robert Bickel, *The Matthew Project: National Report, Rural School and Community Trust*, 1999.
- <sup>10</sup> Lee, Valerie and Julia Smith, "High School Size: Which Works Best and for Whom?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 19:3, 205-228, 1997.

- <sup>11</sup> Coleman, James, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94 Supplement S95-120, 1988.
- <sup>12</sup> Putnam, Robert, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Bensman, David, "Lives of the Graduates of Central Park East Elementary School," 1994 and *Central Park East and Its Graduates: Learning by Heart*. New York: Teachers College Press: 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> Pittman, Robert and Perri Houghwout, "Influence of High School Size on Dropout Rate," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9: 337-343, 1987.
- <sup>15</sup> For example, a 1999 *Washington Post* poll found that 76 percent of Americans were at least somewhat concerned that children were not safe in schools. Another 1999 survey, by National Public Radio, found that a similar percentage favored increased spending to make schools safer. These and other polling results can be found on the Public Agenda Web site at [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org).
- <sup>16</sup> Toby, Jackson, "Everyday School Violence: How Disorder Fuels It," *American Educator*, Winter 1993-94, 4-9, 44-48.
- <sup>17</sup> Raywid, Mary Anne (with Libby Oshiyama), "Musings in the Wake of Columbine: What Can Schools Do?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2000, p. 444, 1993.
- <sup>18</sup> Walker, D., "Preventing Violence in Schools," *Research Roundup*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1995.
- <sup>19</sup> NCES, *Violence and Discipline Problems in U.S. Public Schools: 1996-97*, 1998.
- <sup>20</sup> Prince, Henry, "Follow the Money: An Initial View of Elementary Charter School Spending in Michigan," *Journal of Education Finance* 24:175-194, 1999.
- <sup>21</sup> Steifel, Leanna, et al., "High School Size: Effects on Budgets and Performance in New York City," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 22:27-40, 2000.
- <sup>22</sup> Meier, Deborah, "Can the Odds Be Changed?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, 75:358-360.
- <sup>23</sup> Johnson, Susan Moore and Jonathan Landman, "Sometimes Bureaucracy Has Its Charms: The Working Conditions of Teachers in Deregulated Schools," *Teachers College Record*, 2000, [www.tcrecord.org/default.asp](http://www.tcrecord.org/default.asp).

## THE STORY OF THE REV. CALVIN LANE

(Continued from page 7)

their homes. Several years before the Civil War, such free colored people had no rights that were respected by anybody, and they themselves were not at all surprised by the Dred Scott decision.

Such were conditions when my parents set up their home shortly after the middle of the last century. They both felt keenly the wrong of not being allowed to learn from books. They determined that they would have books, and that so far as was in their power their children should attend school if it ever became possible in their state. About 1857, they secured through a druggist of our town a spelling book, a hymn book, and a Bible. It was my mother's burning desire that her children learn at least to read hymns and the Bible. The books were zealously guarded under lock and key in the most sacred place in our home.

**B**EFORE MY father took to himself a wife, he purchased an acre of ground and built his own house, for when he reached his majority he apprenticed himself and became a leading contractor and builder in his community. Our home, like most homes of that day, had heavy blinds outside and darkened curtains inside. It was not easy to see a light from the outside.

One night, my parents brought out the books, and my father and two older brothers were trying to learn the English alphabet from the standard spelling book of that day. Suddenly there was a loud rap on our front door. My parents knew at once who was there. Quickly my mother gathered the books and put them in their accustomed place while my father opened the door and gave a hearty welcome to his most unwelcome visitors.

In walked seven white men, all well known. They said, "We've come to search this house." Nobody dared to say, "You shall not do it." Silence was golden under the circumstances, for each of the intruding men had a long rifle. The fact was our home was a station on the Underground Railroad. My parents had shielded at night a few colored



They walked back to the open fire, threw the spelling book and hymn book into it, and stood guard while the books burned.

people who were making their way to Canada and to freedom.

**F**OUR OF the men went to other rooms in the house to make sure that only the family was in the home. The others proceeded to find anything of value not in sight. My father had made a small chest in which to keep valuable papers. They ordered him to unlock this box. The papers in it were thrown out; a three-cent coin was found. My mother asked them, please, not to take that as some friend had given it to her first baby; it was thrown back into the box. Then they walked into the bedroom. A small trunk was there. They commanded Mother to unlock this trunk. It was done. The clothing was thrown out piece by piece. At the bottom, they found the books.

After further search of the house, they walked back to the open fire, threw the spelling book and hymn book into it, and stood guard while they burned. The Bible was carried off, for they were too deeply religious to burn it. As they were leaving, they threatened violence to our home if ever books were found there again. I recall now how my mother used to choke and shed fountains of tears when she used to relate the story of this cruel treatment at the hands of those marauders.

In a year or so after such treatment, the Civil War began. Everybody knows its outcome. In about two years after this war ended, missionary teachers came to our town. I am not sure that the American Missionary Association sent them. The colored people, however, received them with open arms and grateful hearts. Those were dark days for those sacrificing teachers

of Negroes. About 100 of the colored women and men banded themselves together in squads of 10 and took turns many a night in safeguarding those teachers in their homes. These Negro guards gave threatening night riders to understand that their dead bodies had to be trampled over before harm could come to those teachers.

**E**VERYBODY COULD have books who could buy them, and all the colored people were determined to send their children to school not with the idea, as some have cruelly charged, that these parents wanted to educate their children above work. That sort of charge never had any basis in fact. Neither was there ever any maudlin sentiment on the part of the early friends of Negro education about raising Negroes above any and every sort of honorable labor. Such a charge as that has only been made when it was desired to placate some Southern opposers of Negro education, that education to the Negro which makes of him an upstanding contender of every national right freely accorded to every white citizen. As time went on, my brothers who stood by and saw their first spelling book burned but were too young to understand why, finally graduated at Howard University. One of them took two years' postgraduate work at Amherst College, became a teacher and finally professor of Greek at Howard University. His unbounded ambition for scholarly attainments and determination to serve his fellows in helpful ways broke him down early in life, ere he reached two score years.

Well do I recall that when our town's paper announced my

brother's graduation from Amherst, the poor and almost illiterate person who carried off the Bible on the occasion of the night's outrage on our home sent my father word that if he would come out to his house, three miles into the country, he might have that Bible. Word went back at once that more books, especially Bibles, were in our home than were wisely used, that one was not needed, and my parents were glad to let him keep that one as his waybill to Heaven. In a few months after that, the same poor fellow on a snowy night was prowling in a most untoward place, stumbled, fell into a little ditch and died. Snow covered his dead body, and almost a week passed before it was found.

**O**UT OF such marauders as searched our home and burnt our books, grew the Ku Klux Klan of our state during the Reconstruction period. There was a Baptist preacher in our state named Dixon, "the father of the more famous Tom Dixon who wrote 'Leopard Spots.'" "Elder" Dixon left his pastorate, and henceforth gave himself to the beneficent (?) work of the Klan. He became a fanatic because of the 14th and 15th Amendments.... When I was a small boy, this Negro hater came to our town, and I heard him in a public address say, "God Almighty never intended a N- to be the political equal of a white man." So far as this writer believes, Dixon was the organizer of the Klan. I do know that under his leadership, with the above slogan, the Klan drenched our state with rivers of Negro blood because brave black men dared vote at elections. □

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## VERBICIDE

(Continued from page 29)

and readings that are well written. We should restore rhetoric—the ability to speak clearly and well—to the liberal arts curriculum. Our own speaking and writing ought to demonstrate clarity and truthfulness. And we too should be held accountable for what we say.

In terms of the sheer volume of words and data of all kinds, this is surely an information age. But in terms of understanding, wisdom, spiritual clarity, and civility we have entered a darker time. We are drowning in a sea of words with nary a drop to drink. We are in the process of committing what C.S. Lewis once called “verbiage.”<sup>5</sup> The volume of words in our time is inversely related to our capacity to use them well and to think clearly about what they mean. It is no wonder that, in a century of gulags, genocide, global wars, and horrible weapons, our use of language has been increasingly dominated by propaganda and advertising and controlled by language technicians. “We have a sense of evil,” Susan Sontag has said, but we no longer have “the religious or philosophical language to talk intelligently about evil.”<sup>6</sup> If that is so for the 20th century, what will be said at the end of the 21st century, when the stark realities of climatic change and biotic impoverishment will become fully manifest? Can we summon the clarity of mind to speak the words necessary to cause us to do what ought to have been our obvious course all along? □

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Spretnak, Charlene, *The Resurgence of the Real*, Reading, Pa.: Addison-Wesley, 1997.

<sup>2</sup>Hawken, Paul, *The Ecology of Commerce*, New York City: Harper Business Press, 1993, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup>Berry, Wendell, *Standing by Words*, San Francisco: North Point Press, 1983.

<sup>4</sup>Orwell, George, *A Collection of Essays*, New York City: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1981, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted in Michael Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in S. Miller, “A Note on the Banality of Evil,” *Wilson Quarterly*, 22(4), p. 55.

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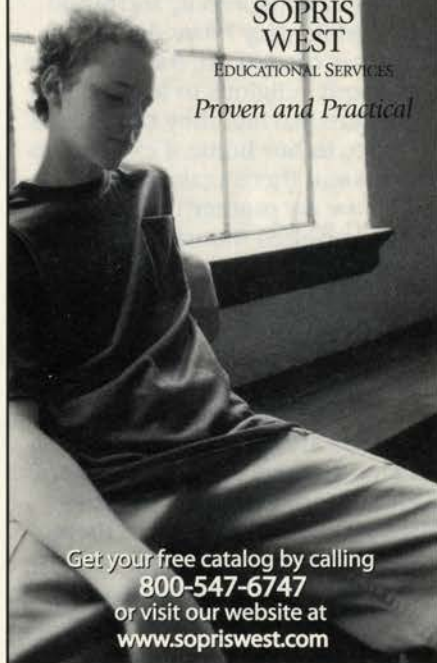
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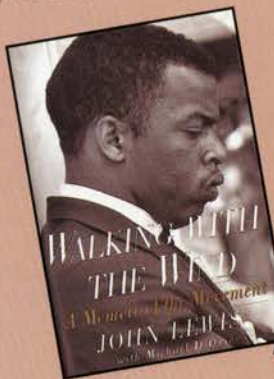
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