TWO FACTS, I am sure, are evident to all of us. We desperately need an appraisal of the history of education in northern black ghettos, but because of the incredible lack of research on this subject in the past we can only dimly perceive the outlines such a study might take. Consequently, I should like to suggest a few leading questions which might guide this investigation and to indicate some of the sources to which historians might turn for evidence and insights. Let me stress the speculative and tentative character of this essay.

There are many familiar facts that need to be turned into puzzles. My first leading question, then, is why have scholars and educators defined Negro education as chiefly a southern problem, at least until the Brown decision? Strikingly little of the mass of writing prior to 1954 dealt with the schooling of black people in northern cities. In his detailed and useful book, The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order, Horace Mann Bond, for example, devotes only one chapter to the situation in the North. Progressive educators in the North, prolific on almost every other subject, were strangely silent on the special problems of black ghettos; accurately reflecting their perspective, Lawrence Cremin does not

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have any index reference to Negroes in *The Transformation of the School*. Gunnar Myrdal talked mostly about black education in the South and had this to say about Negro education in the North:

There Negroes have practically the entire educational system flung open to them without such discrimination. They are often taught in mixed schools and by white teachers; some of the Negro teachers have white pupils. Little attempt is made to adjust the teaching specifically to the Negroes' existing status and future possibilities. The American Creed permeates instruction, and the Negro as well as the white youths are inculcated with the traditional American values of efficiency, thrift and ambition.

Henry Bullock continued this tradition of focusing on the South in his recent monograph, *A History of Negro Education in the South*.

One might argue that this southern emphasis simply reflects comparative deprivation: the unequal and separate southern Negro schools were vastly inferior to those in northern cities. One might less cogently say that poor education in the northern ghetto is a recent development. As Gilbert Osofsky has shown, oppression in the ghetto has deep roots. Sixty years ago one might have heard the question and answer I witnessed last year: "What do you think of education in Harlem?" "I think it would be a good idea." No, I think this neglect of education in black ghettos is but another instance of the fact Ray Stannard Baker observed in 1908 and of which Ralph Ellison reminded us later: the black man has been invisible to most white people in the North. So the story of education in black ghettos is part and parcel of the white problem, here revealed in the blind spots of educators and scholars.

If we assume that it is essential to learn the perspective of the black man, then it is obviously important to begin with the set of expectations about education that the Negro migrant carried with him to the promised land in the North. Just how did southern black folk view schooling? We know, for example, that Negroes' experience with the southern system of "justice" profoundly affected their attitudes toward northern police. A Watts rioter put the matter vividly:

In Mississippi they comes at you, and they says: "Nigger, keep your place!"
In California they tells you, "Nigger, keep your place!" And you say: "What you say, white man?" And they say: "You living in the land of opportunity...!" So you don't know what to think... you just turns around and walks off. Then it come: "Boy, just you don't get outa line, or I'll bust your head!" So you make for him... and there he is: standing, smiling. That's what bust you all up inside... the highpockrassy.

Sensitive studies by men like Charles S. Johnson suggest that southern blacks had a curiously ambivalent attitude toward education. On the one hand, one might call education the opiate of the black masses, since Negroes seemed to persist in believing in the educational dream of success even though society frustrated this dream. But on the other hand, there is considerable evidence that perceptive blacks realized how whites were manipulating them. Hear what Richard Wright said in 1941:

Deep down we distrust the schools that the Lords of the Land build for us and we do not really feel that they are ours. In many states they edit the textbooks that our children study, for the most part deleting all references to government, citizenship, voting, and civil rights. Many of them say that French, Latin, and Spanish are languages not for us, and they become angry when they think that we desire to learn more than they want us to. They say that "all the geography a nigger needs to know is how to get from his shack to the plow."

Letters written home by black migrants to the northern cities often expressed the hope of equal educational opportunity, but the experience of racism in the North may well have awakened the old ambivalence. Was it not true that in the North as well as in the South the white man controlled the schools for his own purposes? Autobiographies of brilliant men like Malcolm X and Gordon Parks vividly show how even the most successful black students faced bizarre discrimination in school. Of course attitudes of Negroes toward education varied widely with their social class and general ideological stance: Kelly Miller might have agreed more with Roy Wilkins than with Marcus Garvey; a black insurance executive today might have more educational opinions in common with Booker T. Washington than with Stokely Carmichael.

A related issue is this: what effects did the bureaucratization and centralization of city schools have for the education of black chil-
dren? My hunch is that the decentralized control of schools common in many city schools in the nineteenth century gave opportunities to ethnic groups similar to those sought by black power advocates today—influence over the appointment of teachers, the spending of money, the curriculum. If this was in fact the case, then there probably was Irish power, German power, Italian power. There are important differences, of course, between the role of education in earlier times, when entry jobs in industry required little or no training and when the society worshiped credentials less than it now does, as compared with today, when automation has destroyed many non-skilled occupations and when schooling has become the gateway to the most desirable jobs. There are many differences, also, between the forms that ethnic political and economic power has taken for various immigrant groups in the past and the nature of the black-power movement today. But as citywide school boards emerged and superintendents increasingly made educational decisions for the district as a whole, the chance for local ethnic and political groups to influence education diminished.

Of course this weakening of “political meddling” was precisely what the elite reformers wanted, but for blacks and other newly arrived migrants such bureaucratization may well have blocked access to teaching jobs and policy making. This is a debatable point. The NAACP magazine, The Crisis, for example, praised Superintendent Maxwell in New York because he did try to hire teachers by objective professional criteria rather than in response to political pull and favoritism, thereby opening the way for many Negro college graduates in the schools. But in any case, black people as a group in large cities probably had very little control over the sort of education their children received, no more control than in the South where white school boards and superintendents dictated policy. In short, black people probably saw themselves as subjects rather than as citizens of the educational system. As bureaucracies became more and more specialized, schoolmen seem to have assumed that Negroes belonged on the lowest tracks of the vocational curricula.

This brings me to a fourth issue: how did the schools respond to the low job ceiling for black people, and what were the consequences? You are familiar with the dreary story of discrimination in employment. What W. E. B. DuBois found in his study of Phila-
delphia Negroes in the late 1890's was essentially the same as a committee in that city discovered in 1942: no blacks need apply for most desirable jobs. Drake and Cayton learned that most of the redcaps in a Chicago railroad station in the late 1930's were college graduates. Training for white-collar jobs or trades usually led nowhere for Negroes (only for the black child was shorthand or plumbing a form of liberal education, good only for its own sake, not for a vocation). Schoolmen faced difficult choices: should they train skilled people who would be frustrated because they could not find jobs matching their ability? should they accept the job ceiling as an unalterable fact and give Negro children an education befitting a janitor? or should schoolmen try to enlarge the opportunities open to blacks? Despite the slogan of equal opportunity through education, I have found few cases where schoolmen tried to convince employers to practice what the American Creed preached. And if educators did accept racism in employment, they could comfort themselves with many scientific studies demonstrating that black folk had no aptitude for white folk's work.

Finally, let us turn to the question of integration: who favored intentionally segregated schools, and why? All across the North, and especially in states bordering the South, black and white children attended schools segregated by law or custom. Sometimes white racists were responsible, as in one New Jersey school where the school playground was divided by a high wire fence to shield white children from contamination by Negroes. Often the co-opted Negro middle class supported segregation because they hoped to gain or protect teaching or administrative jobs in separate schools. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick have documented this insfighting within the Negro caste; Gordon Parks has described the "house Negro-field hand" class struggle brilliantly in The Learning Tree. Ironically, the black people most like white people—the bourgeoisie—sometimes fought integration while the lower class demanded it. I suspect that the main reason that black people have wanted integration is their distrust of whites. Only if there were white children as hostages in their classrooms would the white teachers really teach; only then would there be adequate facilities and supplies. The term "educational genocide" may be new but the concept is not. A few individuals argued that black children learned
better and had greater racial identity and pride in all-black schools, but the argument was rarely heard except from white racists. The integration-segregation controversies often revealed the powerlessness of blacks to control their destiny and the astute ability of whites to set the different classes of Negroes against each other. This history helps to explain why blacks today want both power and solidarity.

In addition to the questions we have explored, there are of course many others to guide inquiry in the history of education in black ghettos. One might fruitfully study the conscious or unconscious racism of the textbooks, the subtle brainwashing of black children that led DuBois to edit a children's magazine and Carter Woodson to complain of the "miseducation of the Negro." Or one could appraise the impact of the official pieties of the schools on black children. "America is the land of opportunity"—what did this mean to the child who went home to a dark ghetto or who could not rise above the position of head bellboy? "With liberty and justice for all"—did reciting this create cynics, true believers, alienated or apathetic students? A number of studies suggest that the self-help ideology may have increased self-hatred and guilt as individual children blamed themselves for not surmounting almost impassable social barriers. Jonathan Kozol has recently said that children in Roxbury somehow felt that they were responsible for dilapidated buildings and inferior education in their neighborhoods.

It is obvious that one would have to use unusual kinds of historical sources to find even tentative answers to the sorts of questions I have suggested. Rather than writing the history of education from the perspective of the school administrator—the typical source and pattern in the past—one will need to try to see the school in social context, from the black man's point of view. Telling history from the bottom up is always difficult, but in the twentieth century historians have sources we are just beginning to exploit. Demographic and quantitative approaches are very useful, as are the more traditional types of school records and school surveys. But needed also is a social and psychological history which attempts to give voice to the feelings and experience and aspirations of the black masses, as Richard Wright did so eloquently in his Twelve Million Black Voices. Schooling often formed but a small part of the "ed-
ucation” of black people, as spokesmen like Claude Brown and Eldridge Cleaver and Gordon Parks have shown. Black literature and autobiography disclose much of the reality of growing up black (though historians naturally need to balance this private view of the world with representative public records). Sociological studies such as those made by the American Youth Commission in the 1930’s illuminate the life of ordinary black boys and girls and place their socialization in broad social context. Although whites often have not listened, black people have spoken eloquently about education in their newspapers and magazines. The following brief sampling of sources may suggest some of the variety and richness of evidence that awaits historians who seek to understand what it has been like to grow up black in white America.

1. Some perspectives of schoolmen on urban schools and the educational needs and characteristics of black pupils:


2. Education as seen in black newspapers and magazines:


"Minnie Bibb In White School: Enters Washington School in Alton After Many Years of Litigation: Eighteen Years Old But She Sits with Third Grade Children Just the Same—Is Larger Than Her Teacher—More Legal Complications Likely to Follow," *The New York Age*, October 1, 1908, p. 1.


3. Autobiographical and literary accounts of growing up black:


4. Sociological, political, and psychological studies:


5. Some relevant historical studies:

6. Miscellaneous:


———. "The School as a Social Center," *Charities*, XV (October 7, 1905), 76-78.


