# Book Reviews

## School Desegregation as a Psychological Factor

**Black Monday's Children.** A Study of the Effects of School Desegregation on Self-Concepts of Southern Children. GLORIA J. POWELL, with special assistance of Marielle Fuller. Appleton-Century-Crofts (Meredith), New York, 1973. viii, 334 pp., illus. $16.50.

The central thesis of this book, containing a considerable amount of supporting statistical evidence, is that black children in segregated Southern schools have significantly higher self-concepts than black children in desegregated schools. Moreover, black children in general are reported to have higher self-concepts than white children, whether the whites attend segregated schools or not.

The author's point of departure is what she takes to be an important rationale behind the Supreme Court decision of 17 May 1954, namely, that the segregation of blacks produces a low self-concept among them. Her study offers documentation for the very opposite conclusion, based on responses to 100 scale items by early adolescents (seventh, eighth, and ninth graders) in three Southern cities—New Orleans, Nashville, and Greensboro, North Carolina. In each city the testing was done in one all-black school, one all-white school, and three desegregated schools with different ratios of black to white students; the schools were "chosen or matched according to the socio-economic status of the students" (p. 50).

One of the implications of this work which will be drawn by others besides the author is not merely that desegregation is hardly worth the effort but that it has serious negative effects. Yet, as the author correctly notes, the far more important issue in the original Supreme Court desegregation decision was the relatively poor quality of the education that blacks received in segregated schools, coupled with the almost complete exclusion of blacks from admission to superior advanced and accredited professional schools, such as schools of law and medicine. That was the crux of the matter which resulted in striking down the *Plessy* vs. *Ferguson* ruling on the possibility of "separate but equal" facilities. The self-concept issue was secondary, although it was later elevated to greater significance by those who wished either to celebrate or discredit the role of social scientists in the supporting brief. This distinction between the primary and secondary effects, purposes, and functions of desegregation is the first of several points at which underlying assumptions in this study might be appropriately challenged. (The 1954 Supreme Court decision, and the social scientists who supported it, never meant to imply that raising the self-concept of blacks would be the most important consequence of desegregating the schools.)

A second matter of contention concerns the nature of self-concept, and the problematic question of whether it can be adequately tapped by operationalizing it with 100 scale items administered in test form. While I have reservations, for the purposes of this short review I shall accept the operationalization and proceed as if that were not an issue. Even given the arbitrary decision to accept this particular operationalization, self-concept is obviously related to a number of variables, of which attendance at an integrated or segregated school is only one. We could identify a sense of economic, political, and esthetic independence or worth, patterns of kinship identity and group status, and others. Although the author acknowledges this complexity, the empirical part of this study does not attend to it.

Finally, and most important, the data from the study are not the basis of the central interpretation at the end of the book. Ultimately, the author explains the level and kind of self-concept of the children in the study not on the basis of the degree of segregation of their schools but by reference to social and political forces, the nature and content of which are not the data of this study.

For example, to explain the finding that black children generally have a higher self-concept than white children the primary reason offered (p. 290) is the emergence of black pride and black self-conscious dignity that developed out of the old Civil Rights movement and the recent Black Power movement. The reason is not offered, nor could it have been, that segregation causes higher self-concept among blacks. The subtitle of the book, "A Study of the Effects of School Desegregation on Self-Concepts of Southern Children," is therefore dangerously misleading. The study hardly shows, nor does it purport to show, that being in a desegregated school is the most important variable in self-concept. What it does show is that there is a correlation that is significant.

The book has several virtues. The attempt to set the problem in social, legal, and historical perspective is admirable and well done. The author is careful to present the full contextual matter around the social science arguments leading to the supporting brief in the 1954 decision, and the account is thorough, judicious, and informed. But lay readers and specialists alike will find too much table reading and table reporting at the expense of analysis and interpretation of the data presented. One often finds oneself wishing that the whole middle third of the book had been assigned to an appendix. This middle section is plagued by passages such as the following (p. 167), which come in an unremitting stream:

> The 43 white girls at the 18 percent black desegregated public school obtained a total positive score of 331, with 18 percent scoring below 300, 26 percent scoring 350 or above, and 2 percent scoring above 400. The mean variability score of 55 and the mean distribution score of 121 fall above the normative means for the scale. However, the mean self-criticism score of 35 is equivalent to the normative mean.

A closer and yet bolder interpretation of the data of the study would have been a more illuminating strategy than this kind of reportage.

Instead, the important interpretation

does not appear until almost the end of the book, and then it appears disconnected from the study, as a grafted appendage. This becomes apparent when we get to the heart of the interpretation, and look for explanations of, for example, the low self-concepts of whites:

> That white adolescents have low self-concepts should not be surprising in the face of the social revolution of the 1960's. First of all, a system of self-esteem based on the degradation of other human beings is bound to collapse. Secondly, following the black student movement in the South there was the white student movement in the North with the same theme—liberty and justice for all.

and from the same page (p. 290):

> As schools begin to desegregate, sometimes with violence, some conflicts for white adolescents present themselves as to identity models. Basically believing in human decency and the American ideal, can one really identify with the cruel "red necks" abusing passive nonviolent children?

One leaves the book with the gnawing concern about the possible spuriousness of the findings. Even the author hints at it: (i) the issue is not segregation or desegregation but the quality of the educational experience, and (ii) self-concept is related to larger social and political forces outside the school experience.

But let us assume that the finding is not spurious, and that blacks in segregated schools do have higher self-concepts. The policy implications would be no clearer than the muddy ones that we presently face. If the society perpetuates the structural barriers now confronting black youth (and those barriers are in part grounded in inferior, segregated educational training), of what use to social change is this "higher self-concept"? Are there really any good answers to the formulation of this question: Would you rather be on top and think poorly of yourself, or be on the bottom and think highly of yourself? There are other alternatives, of course, including questions, proposals, and strategies for dramatically improving the educational institutions that are supposed to educate youth, black and white. The author is clearly concerned about these questions, but is less than persuasive with the implication that the study of self-concept as here presented joins those alternatives.

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## T. H. Huxley

**Scientist Extraordinary. The Life and Scientific Work of Thomas Henry Huxley, 1825–1895.** CYRIL BIBBY. St. Martin's Press, New York, 1972. xii, 208 pp. + plates. $8.95.

Arthur Sullivan and T. H. Huxley were continually urged by well-meaning friends to abandon their public forum for something "nobler"—Sullivan to rescue British music from the long doldrums since Purcell's death, Huxley to lead a life of academic research. "Do take the counsel of a quiet looker on," wrote Hooker, "and withdraw to your books and studies in pure Natural History; let modes of thought alone." *Ivanhoe*, Sullivan's grand opera, was a flop. "A cobbler should stick to his last," he remarked sadly as he returned to Gilbert. But Huxley, the polymath of his age, could have done anything superbly. He fitted enough natural history into the interstices of his later life to fulfill a total career for the most ambitious. His decision to concentrate on public education and the national administration of science was consciously made. If he lacks the reputation of a Newton or a Darwin today, this only reflects the bias of historiography that exalts innovators and downgrades publicists and synthesizers.

Cyril Bibby has written a taut and eloquent biography of Huxley. So much has rarely been said in a mere 150 pages. Its eloquence rests upon a wise decision to let Huxley speak for himself, and upon the author's knack for gracious epitome—virtually a lost art among prolix academics. The account is chronological and covers all facets of Huxley's life; Bibby shrinks neither from the intricacies of coelenterate anatomy nor from the details of debates with Gladstone on the nature of the Godhead. The appendix, with its short takes on 207 of Huxley's contemporaries, is a delight. On Darwin, for example (p. 163): "Although hypochondriac and always glad to have Huxley as his 'bulldog,' Darwin was a shrewd man of business and did very well with his stocks and shares." On Wilberforce (p. 182): "He was a brilliant scholar and administrator. . . . His memory has perhaps been unduly darkened by the 1860 British Association episode at Oxford, where he was demolished by Huxley in the debate on evolution. Still, his nickname of 'Soapy Sam' must have had some significance."

Unfortunately, the book is marred by three serious and intermingling problems: Bibby's hero worshiping, his "prospective bias," and his unfamiliarity with some details of the scientific issues that Huxley treated. The prospective bias, an anachronistic approach to history (in more than one way), attempts to judge a man by whether he was "right" according to present-day values or judgments of absolute truth. On social and political issues, this bias produces a particularly unfortunate distortion of history, for one cannot even make the scientist's naive claim that we strive, by uniform and timeless methods, for correct answers. Thus Bibby, ever searching to remake Huxley as a 20th-century liberal, selects some quotations about individual potential that would fit the beliefs of a Kennedy or a King. Any hint to the contrary is quickly compromised (p. 133, for example): "These papers do seem to emit a mild aroma of prejudice on the side of private property. Yet they were by no means one-sided, and some passages are perhaps more meaningful to our generation than they were to his own." Yet I, for one, do not need a set of inspirational sentences in the style of introductions to Gideon Bibles; I want to know how Huxley, a child of his time, influenced it in return. After all, the "liberal" leaders of Huxley's day affirmed the inferiority of blacks though rejecting it as a justification for slavery and colonialism. When we ignore this, we only serve to separate Lincoln the legend from Lincoln the man—a functional strategy, perhaps, for a nation too young to have a true mythology; but scarcely a desideratum for scholarly books.

On empirical matters, a combination of prospective bias and hero worshiping can, at its worst, imitate the approach to Old Testament that only seeks utterances prophetic of the New. Thus, Huxley is depicted as the Elijah for the reacceptance of Mendel (p. 45) and for the discovery of wonder drugs (p. 118). When these tendencies are united to an unfamiliarity with scientific issues, we get fallacious justifications for Huxley's mistakes. Huxley accepted Dawson's *Eozoon* as a true Precambrian fossil. Bibby (p. 67) commends this belief on the grounds that the modern discovery of Precambrian blue-green algae has vindicated *Eozoon*. The Precambrian blue-greens are, indeed, both present and abundant; but *Eozoon* is still an inorganic layering. Yet what does it matter if Huxley was