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MARVA COLLINS' WAY

Published by J. P. Tarcher, Inc., Los Angeles © 1982

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Bill Sittman



Founded in 1975

Marva Collins

June 9, 1983

President Ronald Reagan
President of the United States
of America
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

I cannot tell you how much the little things in life means! Just a phone call emphatically made my day, and most of all it made me excited enough to want to do even more with my life.... and most of all, to do for others. I have climbed a very tough mountain, but I refuse to sit at the top and enjoy the view. I am still looking for more mountains to climb.

Because of my decision to enroll at Westside Preparatory School we have hundreds of adults coming into the school this summer to enjoy the joy of learning, and most of all to become self-reliant and to know that they all have the innate savvy to become universal citizens of the world.

Again, thank you Mr. President for taking the time out of a most busy day to encourage me to not only continue to improve myself, but to give hope to others. I do hope that the media and the world will also know that you are a most caring person, and may they know that all American citizens matter to you.

With gratitude,

Kevin J. Ross
Kevin J. Ross

"Any child can be a real achiever."

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Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor rehearse for a revival of "Private Lives," opening on Broadway in May. Twice divorced, Burton and Taylor play a divorced couple who get together at a country house and end up battling. (UPI)

Westside star Ross graduates to tutor



Bob Herguth

Kevin Ross, the 6-foot-9-inch college basketball star, continues to make good progress among the grade-schoolers at Marva Collins' Westside Prep, 4146 W. Chicago. His reading skills and confidence are so advanced now that he is able to help tutor the youngsters on the side. And he'll work with them in summer activities camp.

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degree here. He's kind of a catalyst and a hope for a lot of people here.

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"I've been on TV shows and given motivational speeches at two schools," Ross told us. "The movie [of his life] will probably start in a couple of weeks. What am I reading now? *Manchild in the Promised Land* by Claude Brown."

'Back to basics' gets a chilly reception

The educational establishment, special interest groups and federal and state bureaucracies are indignant and on the attack over the outspoken beliefs of a feisty black woman in Chicago who has successfully educated children thought to be uneducable.

The American Spectator's current issue carries an illuminating article by Rita Kramer, author of *Marva Montessori: a Biography*, about the woman — Marva Collins — who gathered a ragtag band of ghetto children in a makeshift classroom and proceeded to teach them how to read, write and do arithmetic. Not only did these uneducables learn the basics, they learned them from the classics — Plato, Aristotle, Virgil, Dante and Shakespeare.

Soon, these supposedly uneducable children were scoring higher on intelligence tests than their reportedly brighter classmates in the public schools.

Marva Collins calmly explained that her success with these ghetto youngsters was premised not on intricate theories of educational method but on the persistent goal to teach the youngsters self reliance based upon self worth.

She argued that self reliance is the key to bringing so-called deprived youngsters into the mainstream of success.

"You give a man a fish and he has a meal for a day. You teach a man how to fish and he can dine for a lifetime," was her way of explaining the fruits of her method.

Alas, success, honor and good sense failed to prevail in the wake of the outcry from those who have so miser-

Paul Salters



ably failed — the educational establishment, the special interest groups and the bureaucrats whose jobs depended upon spoon feeding the same old pap that guarantees failure, not failure for them, but for their victims. Thus can jobs be maintained and the cash flow kept gushing.

Marva Collins offended current wisdom. Black leaders attacked her because her method could have deprived them of the base of misery upon which they feed. Who would need these leaders when the masses ceased to function in ignorance and poverty? How, indeed, could they profit from such a possibility?

The educational establishment followed suit in a hysterical outcry because the premise that going "back to basics" could eventually topple the great self-perpetuating structure upon which contemporary education is based. Who would need vast institutions of education anymore when all you really needed was someone conversant with the ability to read, write, do arithmetic, and who had mastered the legacy of western civilization? The liberal arts schools might have flourished but not the schools of education, where method is so much more important than substance.

At last, the bureaucrats began shrieking at the plucky Marva Collins. How could it be possible for chil-

dren to learn so well and so fast without the continued flow of federal dollars and the paper pushers who created the flow?

What might happen if the children of the ghetto actually left the ghetto? The specter of the underprivileged achieving success was too great a horror for the bureaucrats. Their jobs were at stake.

Ironically, the bureaucrats and the educational establishment latched onto a particularly nasty ad hominem argument to do harm to the woman. The American Spectator points out that they attacked Mrs. Collins for having started her school with CETA funds. She did, in fact, collect some \$62,000 in CETA funds when she first created the school but gave up the money when her methods began achieving success. Upon turning her back on federal money, unfortunately for her, she also had the temerity to suggest that money had unquestionably failed to end the misery in the ghetto. A solid education and self reliance, she maintained, would ultimately lead to that cherished goal.

The fact she once accepted federal money in no way diminishes the truth of her methods or what she is saying.

The bureaucrats and educational establishment, so lavish in their hysteria, of course can't be expected to address issues — the educators because they are incapable of addressing issues, having spent their time learning method to the detriment of thought, and the bureaucrats because they could not afford to bring the beacon of logic to bear upon their egregious programs.

Paul Salters is a member of The Enterprise news staff

Second story women

By Mildred Hamilton
Examiner staff writer

AN EXULTANT SHOUT, "Fin!" startled the Mission District on a recent Sunday as a padded figure tossed her paintbrush in the air and scampered down the scaffolding in front of the Women's Building at 3541 18th St.

Patricia Rodriguez had painted the last stroke of the huge women's history mural across the front of the building — 18 months after she had been commissioned to create it.

"I am finished, finished, finished," she yelled as she danced in the street, stopping the car of a friend. The talented muralist was swept off to the Cliff House for a drink in celebration. "Then I went home, toppled over and slept for hours," she said with a chuckle.

Now wide awake and aglow with the joy of accomplishment, the artist talked about the project that has turned the drab front of the Women's Building into a vivid feminist banner. The larger-than-life figures of Navajo activist Katherine Smith, Chicana labor organizer Dolores Huerta, artist and feminist Louise Nevelson, black educator Marva Collins and emancipated Asian-American slave Polly Bemis dominate the block. They are forceful testimony and tribute to the social concerns of the women's center.

The muralist and her supporting team are accepting compliments. And preparing to volunteer again as every-day painters to help repaint the still shabby exterior of the two floors above the mural.

How do you start a mural?
Rodriguez grinned. "First you scrub the wall. You scrub hell out of the wall with trisodium phosphate."

Before that, however, you need the artistic reputation to be invited by Women's Building officials to create a landmark mural. (The San Francisco Women's Center/Women's Building was opened in 1979 as a non-profit, community-sponsored, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural women's and neighborhood center.)

The artist, a small, sunny woman with black curly hair framing animated features, talked about herself and the mural as she stood in front of the building. Few neighbors among the regular kibitzers recognized her in a hot pink blouse and black suit, with earrings and makeup. "My painting garb was four layers of warm clothing. By the time I got on my thermal underwear, three sweaters, two pairs of socks, hiking boots, gloves and hats, boy, was I big!" Rodriguez extended her arms to outline a width equal to her 5-foot-1-inch height.

Of Mexican-American heritage, she is a native of Marfa, a small West Texas desert town, also the birthplace of her parents. "We migrated around Texas, then came to California as my parents sought better jobs. I was 12 before I was able to settle down in one school, in Oxnard. It took me time to catch up, but I was so happy there. I got A's in art and music."

After high school graduation and a year in junior college, she lived briefly in New York before moving here and winning an Art Institute scholarship in 1970. "It was a great year for minorities to get scholarships, but the Art Institute blew my mind. It was operated New York-style. When I did paint, the instructor said with a sniff, 'It's very Mexican.' I decided if I have this bent, I'll do it for my own community."

She organized her first painting project for the Jamestown Community Center, and after earning her bachelor's degree, formed Mujeres Muralistas with Irene Perez, Graciela Carrillo and Consuelo Mendez. They painted 20 murals in the Mission District — big bold paintings important in the artistic blooming of the neighborhood. "My first mural was painted in 1972, in Balmy Alley (a street of murals), and I can see it from where I now live."

Rodriguez mixed community and volunteer work with her five years in the mural group and earned her M.A. at Sacramento State University. She was then invited to teach at UC-Berkeley: "mural painting, Chicano art history, silk screen, for five years."

Deciding to branch out in 1980, she began to experiment with box sculptures. Her prize-winning work is now widely exhibited. She lectures, is doing a series of small canvases and has just been invited to be in the Michigan show of the National Chicano Art Studies Conference and to have her first New York show.

"That kind of schedule is why every time I have a few spare minutes, I fall asleep. It has been seven days a week of work since the actual painting of the mural started last September. And for a living, I got a grant last fall for a year from the California Arts Council for my Mission Mental Health Center job. I teach art to clients — there are mural projects at three treatment centers. I feel that I have been hanging in there for 10 years."

After Rodriguez was invited to design the Women's Building mural, there were long discussions on the women's history theme and a decision to pick a woman to represent each community. The artist's search took her to women's studies programs of several colleges as well as community centers seeking candidates. "We wanted powerful figures. Once we had the names, art history student Lu-Yong Ma at San Francisco State did research on their backgrounds."

Costume research also preceded Rodriguez' preliminary drawings, which were approved by the San Francisco Art Commission. She received a \$4,000 grant from the city Office of Community Development through the Mural Resource Center. "That covered paint and brushes and about 50 cents an hour for me. The Navy donated our scaffolding."

After the September wall scrubbing, Rodriguez put an ad in the Women's Building newsletter for volunteer helpers, "women who could paint." She soon had a team: Miranda Bergman, Sarah Edkins, Nicole Emanuel, Celeste Smeland and Frances Stevens — of diverse age, experience and background.

The scrubbed wall got a clean white primer, and the design "pounced" across the 12-foot high, 100-foot wide strip 15 feet above the street. The artist explained "pouncing" — "The drawing was made on perforated paper. It was rolled in place and charcoal powder applied. When we removed the

paper, we had the outline, and we started painting in oil."

The volunteers were out on the scaffolding "about 8 a.m., as soon as the moisture evaporated," for three to 10 hours a week each, and Rodriguez usually painted 20 hours a week, juggling her other projects and jobs.

"The weather was fine, at first, and then the rains came. Sometimes I said to myself, 'I must be crazy. It is pouring and I am out here painting.' The first hour in a cold, wet day was torture, then you got caught up in it and it was fun. The volunteers were great. We supported each other, and Celeste Smeland, who created the Women's Building Vida Gallery, was my coordinator for the whole project. Fawn Yacker made a film of the work."

The mural was started on the left and the artists moved to the right as they painted. "I had a timetable of two months," Rodriguez said with a wry laugh. She did the first figure, the strong featured Katherine Smith standing protectively in front of her golden, wind-sculpted Navajo homeland in Arizona, "and she refuses to be forced off of by the federal government."

Painting and supervising, Rodriguez was always in charge of color design and mixture. She did the faces of the women.

"We always had audiences, and older women were

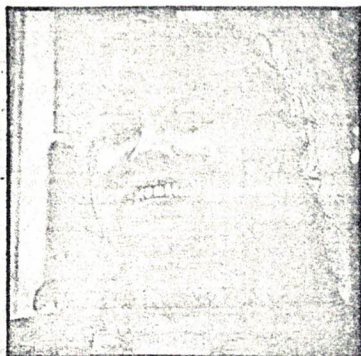
particularly appreciative of the mural's recognition of women's achievements. We also had critics. One of them disliked one of the figures and kept saying, 'That woman looks like duck.'"

"We sealed the mural with an ultra violet screen sealer to preserve it. There will be a check in four years to see if more sealer is needed. The mural proper is complete, but some painting remains to be done around the windows and the arches between the figures, as well as the wall area above the mural."

The mural already has brought Rodriguez a commendation from the mayor's office, and the artist believes it is achieving its goal: bridging the Women's Building and the community. When the Women's Building held a community celebration of its completion March 6, there was a large enthusiastic turnout of neighborhood residents.

"What the mural represents is integral to our work," building spokeswoman said. "It represents our commitment to struggle against racism side by side with classism, sexism and imperialism."

The mural reminds us, girls and women of all colors, shades, added, of what the dominant society does not tell us: that we have heroes, thousands of them.



Patricia Rodriguez: 'First you scrub the wall'



Faces from the mural section on farm labor

Standing 10 feet tall

FIVE FEMALE SYMBOLS of strength — four living women and one 19th century survivor of slavery — stand 10 feet tall in the new mural on the front of the Women's Building. They are:

• Katherine Smith, a 66-year-old Arizona Navajo who is fighting the federal government's attempt to remove thousands of Navajo and Hopi people from their homeland of centuries.

• Dolores Huerta, a 53-year-old native of New Mexico, a pioneer in organizing agricultural workers, a United Farm Workers official and a force in obtaining migrants such rights as disability and unemployment insurance and old-age pensions.

• Louise Nevelson, the 84-year-old sculptor, a Russian Jewish immigrant who worked in poverty and isolation for years before attaining international recognition as an artist. The Nevelson panel also features the faces of dancer Martha Graham, jazz pianist Mary Lou Williams, photographer Dorothea Lange and writer Audrey Lord.

• Marva Collins, the 40-year-old black educator whose "self-reliance" philosophy of teaching has made her small private school in Chicago a national model.

• Polly Bemis, also known as China Polly and Lulu Nathov. Born on a farm in China in 1852, kidnapped, sold into slavery and smuggled into San Francisco, she never stopped fighting for her freedom. She finally convinced a gold miner named Bemis, who had won her in a poker game, to free her. She then operated her own small produce farm in the Gold Country until she died.



Black educator Marva Collins, one of the four living women represented on the murals



Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor rehearse for a revival of "Private Lives," opening on Broadway in May. Twice divorced, Burton and Taylor play a divorced couple who get together at a country house and end up battling. (UPI)

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AIMS OF WESTSIDE PREPARATORY SCHOOL:

The school was established to dispel the myth that inner-city children cannot, do not, and refuse to matriculate as well as other children. In response to a strong concern for the increased rapidity in which children of the Westside of Chicago seemed to be dropping out of school, and with an increasing attitude that these children could never be more than what they were, I felt it a compelling reason to begin Westside Preparatory School on the second floor of our home in September 1975.

With \$5,000 from my teacher's pension fund, help from my husband, and discarded books, Westside Preparatory School was born with confidence in the ability of our children and loads of determination to make certain that these children could dare to dream of a better future because I made today hopeful.

The needs of our community determines largely the curriculum of our school, but I feel that children must not only be able to compete locally, but universally as well. Westside PREPARATORY School reaffirms its position to be an institution that believes in the concept and dignity and self-worth of each child. We do not believe that children are just a bit statistically too inferior to learn; we do not believe that background has anything to do with children's performance.

The school attempts to provide each student with an opportunity to master skills and basic knowledge that will become marketable

AIMS OF WESTSIDE PREPARATORY SCHOOL:

PAGE TWO

Skills enabling that student to function not only in his immediate locale, but as citizens of the world. It is also our belief that children need to develop a sense of responsibility, self-reliance, self-determination and to develop as moral and responsible citizens of the world---not as leaners of society, but as egalitarian lifters of the world.

RESULTS:

Children ranging in ages from four to thirteen matriculate at Westside Preparatory School. Those students who can pay tuition pay \$150.00 per month; those students who cannot pay matriculate at the school with the monies earned by Marva Collins through speaking engagements, book fees, and residuals from the movie. Two Buildings at 4142 and 4146 West Chicago Avenue have been paid for by cash. The school now needs more teachers and larger quarters.

The school does not solicit funds, take federal funds or at this time apply for grants. IT IS OUR FEELING THAT SOCIETY SEES THE NEED IN THIS AREA, AND IF THEY ARE TRULY INTERESTED IN THE LIFE-TIME SUCCESS OF THESE CHILDREN THAT THEY WILL HELP IN WHAT EVER WAY THAT THEY CAN.

Children go on to high school many times after sixth grade, and for those children who cannot pay private high school tuition, again, Mrs. Collins pays the tuition for these children.

AIMS OF WESTSIDE PREPARATORY SCHOOL:

PAGE THREE

This year, Mrs. Collins has a college student who has matriculated in a well-known college for four years and still reads at a grammar school level. This student, unlike millions of others has made the first courageous step to do something about the increasing fetid education that far too many students are presently receiving. Mrs. Collins does not believe in failure, and it is her philosophy that a child does not need a teacher in order to fail, she feels that the good teacher makes the "POOR" student "GOOD", and the "GOOD" student "SUPERIOR". She does not believe in excuses and it is her firm belief that when her students fail that she and her staff has failed.

Children who have formerly been labelled learning disabled, dyslexic, and socially retarded have all flourished at Westside Preparatory School and all of these children have been able to function as normal students and to go on to high school. There are no miracles at Westside Preparatory School,---just hard work and a firm belief in the self-worth of each student. The staff often spends many Saturdays working with slower students until they are able to feel good about themselves. Young students begin to study Latin and French at grade three and they begin to read at age four. The great books program is introduced as soon as children are able to read. The school also teaches logic, economics, biology, and most of all, each student believes that they are no longer leaves being blown from here to there believing what ever they are told.

AIMS OF WESTSIDE PREPARATORY SCHOOL:

PAGE FOUR:

Mrs. Collins has just authored THE MARVA COLLINS' WAY, a book that she hopes will give hope to millions of frustrated parents, and hopefully, it will encourage those teachers who feel that children "can't" will once again, begin to believe that all children can if they are not taught too thoroughly that they can't.

Displine problems, drugs, fighting, absenteeism, and other negative things heard across the country about other schools do not occur at Westside Preparatory School. The children have learned how to tick and their goal is to learn how to tick better.

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Ex-player stressing reading

United Press International

CHICAGO — After four years of a college career spent mainly making field goals and free throws, Kevin Ross says he has come closer to making a goal that really counts by improving his reading.

Ross, 24, played basketball at Creighton University from 1979-82 until a knee injury hindered his career. The 6-9 center played for Creighton in the NCAA Tournament in 1981, but did not graduate.

Last September, Ross decided to enroll at Westside Preparatory School, run by "superteacher" Marva Collins. At the time of his enrollment, he was reading at the sixth-grade level. He has improved to the 12th-grade level.

Ross said secretaries at Creighton often helped him make the grade by reading his assignments and completing the required work.

"I will not be a part of the facade," said Ross. "It does make me angry, but it's a big disappointment to see kids come out of school without the skills they need. When four years are up, you're just out there like a squirrel on a tree limb."

Ross towers over his Westside classmates, who range in age from four to 14, but is a very "positive image" to them, Collins said.

"I can see the progress I've made here at Westside," Ross said. "I'm trying to reach a goal for myself. I am no longer in the shadows of darkness. I see a bright future. There's no one who can take my education away from me."

Collins, the founder of Westside, said he was also pleased with Ross' improvement in school. Collins said Ross made improvements in six areas, but regressed in vocabulary because he was nervous when he took the California Achievement Test that is used to measure a student's progress.

"He is well-liked, and rather than being self-conscious about his age or size in the classroom, he has concentrated on learning," Collins said.

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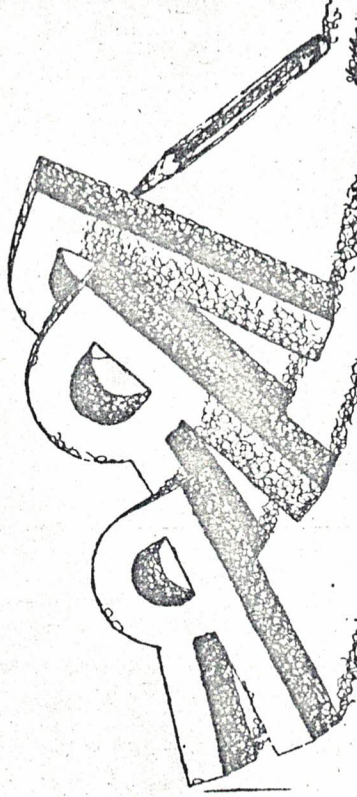
Traiblazing or just hard work?

4-11-83

MARVA COLLINS, the last time we looked, was "in" again.

The reputation of the Chicago teacher of the "underprivileged" has swung wildly. In the mid-Seventies, when her private, shoestring school began attracting attention — primarily because her pupils actually learned — she was hailed as a new force in education: the high priestess of "back to basics." She was considered for U.S. secretary of education. Her "unorthodox" statements on the problems in public education caught up with her a few years later, however, and both her work and her theories were challenged. She used public funds and she was little more than a drill sergeant, claimed her detractors. Even some of her school's test scores were called into question.

Two years ago the anti-Collins campaign was at its height; magazines and newspapers were falling all over themselves pointing out the "flaws" in the Collins method. Now her defenders are mounting a counterattack on her detractors; and, once



Roanoke Times
4/9,000

again, she is being over-praised, perhaps because she has often been over-criticized.

rent theories about what makes Johnny learn. But her results speak for themselves.

The latest encomium, in the American Spectator, compares her with Maria Montessori, the Italian educator. But at the center of all the controversy is a determined woman who loves to teach, not an educational revolution. Her methods — concentration on basic skills wedded to an uncanny ability to make her students feel their individual worth and potential — may well clash with some cur-

She is unorthodox only to the extent that she adheres to methods that were broadly applied and broadly accepted a century ago, before the educational theorists swept the field. Those methods are based on common sense and hard work; and more and more parents are beginning to realize that it is the teacher — dedicated and demanding — who is the key to education.

nificant numbers are choosing the latter course . . .

This is so, Mr. Monagan and the critics of coed sports argue, because children normally prefer to "struggle for their first independent sense of skill, recognition, and identity in the security of their own sex." Placing unwilling children in a coed situation, he writes, simply creates "new fears of ridicule and failure."

The argument that engendered coed sports—that they would produce "more assertive women and more sensitive men"—suggests several further questions, Mr. Monagan says. One is whether coed kickball and other games can accomplish that. Another is: "Just what is so urgently in need of reform in the minds and buddy systems of American 9- and 10-year-olds?"

"For the possibility is quite real," he concludes, "that the physical progress and developmental needs of many children are being disrupted for the sake of one rarely examined presumption—namely, that any means of breaking down the polarity of the sexes is healthy."

Education Week

On Dismantling The Testing Apparatus

"... [T]he entire portentous and expensive apparatus of the Scholastic Aptitude Test [S.A.T.] is irrelevant for determining its stated purpose of determining who should go to which college," writes David Owen in the May issue of *Harper's*.

Mr. Owen would like to see the apparatus dismantled. In a lengthy attack on the Educational Testing Service (E.T.S.)—the Princeton, N. J., manufacturer of the S.A.T. and a range of other standardized tests, he touches on the most commonly voiced criticisms of "aptitude" testing.

He asserts: that the S.A.T. is not as useful a predictor of college achievement as high-school grades and that the testing organization's claim that it measures scholastic aptitude is specious; that the test reflects the educational and social advantages of the students who take it and is biased against minority students; that the tests themselves are faulty and ambiguous (he takes the reader through a series of sample questions to argue this point, questioning whether some answers are more "right" than others); and that, for all practical purposes, S.A.T. results are not needed by most colleges and universities.

Citing a 1980 paper by Rodney T. Hartnett and Robert A. Feldmesser, formerly research scientists at E.T.S., Mr. Owen says that "although virtually all American colleges require their applicants to take a standardized admissions test, hardly any actually use the score in making admissions decisions."

The Inevitable Backlash Against Marva Collins

Marva Collins earned a national reputation by teaching children who were once considered "unteachable." The liberal establishment only started to question her motives and results when she started questioning their assumptions about what role a school should play in society.

That is the opinion of Rita Kramer, the author of several books on education, in a profile of Ms. Collins in the April issue of *The American Spectator*.

Current writing on education-related subjects in magazines, newspapers, and journals of opinion

Ms. Kramer paints an admiring picture of Ms. Collins, a teacher in the Chicago public schools for 14 years before she started a school in her neighborhood that stressed hard work and a rigorous reading program.

A backlash was inevitable, Ms. Kramer writes, in view of the fact that the so-called "miracle worker" from the rundown Garfield Park area practiced a teaching strategy that challenged the views of black leaders, teachers' unions, and education theorists all at once.

"A lot of careers, which means money and a lot of prestige," writes Ms. Kramer, "would be called into question by the idea that pounding away at basic skills and old-fashioned exhortation could make a difference in the lives of children far more than anything money could buy or legislation could provide."

The writer acknowledges that Ms. Collins may have strayed from her own ideals with her acceptance of federal funds.

But, she says, "the issue in the Marva Collins controversy isn't Marva Collins's personality or even her past funding—it is the truth or falsity of what she says about schooling." That, Ms. Kramer concludes, is what the teaching establishment fears.

Students Need Strong Base Of Common Knowledge

"Educational formalism" holds that the content of English courses is simply a vehicle for teaching students the formal skills of reading and writing and therefore should be left to a teacher's discretion.

E. D. Hirsch Jr., writing in the spring issue of *The American Scholar*, says that theory is misguided. Mr. Hirsch says that he, of all people, should know, since "I was, like others in the field, a confirmed formalist."

Education Week
April 20, 1983

experiment conducted by Richardson and colleagues at the University of Illinois. Two groups—one Indian and one non-Indian—were asked to read a passage of similar length, vocabulary, sentence structure, and number of ideas. The Indian group's pieces was about an Indian and the other was about a non-Indian.

Both groups did well with the passage, but the Indian group did better on their own culture and poorly on the other's culture.

"Briefly, good style contributes to our reading of unfamiliar material."

we must continuously backtrack through different hypotheses about what we are referring to," Mr. Hirsch writes. "It is true not only for good reading, but for good writing, he adds.

Mr. Hirsch recommends that the curriculum board be established to recommend titles that would lead to "cultural literacy," the term he uses for the acquisition of a society's basic knowledge.

Technology in Education Improve Training, Methods

Despite the excitement about the use of computers in schools, James Traub writes in the March-April issue of *Harper's*, there is very little going on with computers now that holds promise for improving education.

Mr. Traub, an editor of the *Harvard Educational Review*, notes that there are already 130,000 computers in the nation's schools. The number is growing fast. He says the desk-top machine "will not be driven from the schools," regardless of what it brings.

On the other hand, an accompanying article written by Anne Shahmoon says computer use in schools remains limited. The number of computers in schools will have to increase by 50 percent yearly, until there are 1 million terminals, before each elementary and secondary student can use a computer just 30 minutes each day, she says.

Mr. Traub says that no matter how many students have access to computers, the issue of equity, both within and between schools, is not helped by the fact that computers will not help school until teachers receive better training and commercial vendors develop

Kevin bounces on —through 6 years



**Bob
Herguth**

Six-foot-9-inch Kevin Ross is now about six school years ahead of last September, when he enrolled with eighth-graders at Marva Collins' West-side Prep, 4146 W. Chicago.

The 24-year-old basketball star from Creighton U. took another California Achievement Test this week at Providence-St. Mel High, and it showed his over-all rank at about the national average for high school seniors.

He equals the norm of graduating seniors in reading vocabulary and comprehension, in written expression, and in math concepts and applications. He ranks a semester behind that in spelling and math computation. And he equals high school sophomores in language mechanics.

All the tests—in September, January and this week—were administered by Harvey Gross, director of admissions at Providence-St. Mel. Ross ranked at the sixth-grade level last fall and the ninth-grade level in January.

"I knew he would do it," said Collins. "It just goes to show that Kevin was not learning-disabled. We have millions of Kevins out there."

CRONKITE VIEWS '84: Walter Cronkite visited Chicago Thursday and warned that "too many" totalitarian trends satirized by author George Orwell in 1984 are "still powerful" in democracies. "Doublethink today makes Guatemala and Chile a part of the Free World," the revered anchorman told the Broadcast Ad Club. Cronkite finds it "most disturbing" that for some in "the managerial society . . . the test isn't what's true but what works." He said "respect for fact" is "at the very core of the survival of freedom." He satirized modern doublespeak, including new terms for death and taxes. He said the saying now could be: "In this age, there is nothing so certain as 'negative patient care outcome' and 'revenue enhancement.'"

ECLECTIC TYPEWRITER: "I'm too old to retire," said George Burns, 87. . . . Jessica Savitch, 35, might switch networks (NBC hired Connie Chung, 36, from a CBS station to do the "Weekend Nightly News," now anchored by Jessica).

LOCAL CELEBS: Condolences to the family of Audrey Seaton Sullivan, longtime public relations executive here. . . . Attorney Patricia A. Russell, ex-FCC exec, is Women's Day speaker at Operation PUSH.

PUNS & FUN: "Cheers for the bishops! No nukes is good nukes" (Rabbi David Graubart). . . . "The Russian submarine commander's theme song must be 'Have You Driven a Fjord Lately?'" (Dave Hansen).

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Kevin Prepping for big speech



**Bob
Herguth**

Young Kevin Ross will give the commencement address May 25 to graduates of Marva Collins' Westside Prep, 4146 W. Chicago. He is the 6-foot-9 basketball star from Creighton U. who enrolled fulltime among eighth graders at Westside last September, intent on learning the basic educational skills—especially reading comprehension—that he missed even after four years of college, and no diploma.

"The children love him here," said Collins. "And because he has such rapport with them, we felt

there was no one in the country they could identify with more" as a speaker. Tests show that Ross advanced three school years in five months at Westside, which he entered with Creighton's encouragement.

Ross plans to work this summer at a camp for Westside youngsters. He also plans to get his degree from a Chicago college.

LET'S FRISK FRISCO: "Between the Cubs and the Democrats, you'd think *somebody* could beat San Francisco" (Fred K. Rosen).

A ZOOOPER OCCASION: Lincoln Park zookeeper Pam Jensen marries N.Y. electronics technician Chris Dunn here Friday. They met in a space-age way, through a computer network. "A company in Ohio has a program that's a CB simulator," explained Pam, who cares for Sinbad the gorilla. "It links home computer terminals all over the U.S. and Canada." Pam's "handle" on the network was ZEBRA 3 and Chris was CHRISDOS. After communicating by computer awhile, they met, and terminal love developed.

ECLECTIC TYPEWRITER: Now Mickey Rooney says he has no intention of quitting movies and throwing away his honorary Oscar, as he reportedly vowed earlier. He's angry because the U.S. Supreme Court dismissed his suit seeking part of residuals for actors when their movies go on TV.

LOCAL CELEBS: Sox organist Nancy Faust's baby is due any day now. ... On May 21, pretty Hilary Balfour will be the 10,000th grad of Loyola U.'s dental school, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary. ... A Channel 11 special, "Ambassadors of Cabrini," features state Rep. Jesse White's tumbling team and will air at 9:30 p.m. Monday, May 2. ... PR whiz Margie Korshak visits May 1 on Channel 2's "Lee Phillip Show". ... Prize-winning photog Carmen Reporto shows slides Wednesday at the Portes Cancer Prevention Center's dinner in the Art Institute.

PUNS & FUN: "Overweight persons choose desserts but dieters eschew them" (Al Hamburg). ... "A marriage that breaks up early is first-clash" (Rabbi David Graubart). ... "I tried visiting Dracula the other day but he was out to bat practice" (Eddie Gold).

INQUIRY

THE ISSUE: EDUCATION

Marva Collins, 46, is a private educational administrator in Chicago who has earned many awards for her innovative methods. She was the subject of the film *Welcome to Success: The Marva Collins Story* and the book *Marva's Children*. Collins, who was offered and refused the secretary of education post in 1981, was interviewed by *USA Today's* **Barbara Reynolds**.



Marva Collins

Turn life's lemons into fresh lemonade

USA TODAY: Your most famous student at Westside Preparatory School is 24-year-old Kevin Ross, a star college basketball player, who went through 16 years of school without learning to read. How could that happen?

COLLINS: That's happening to millions of children. Kevin had enough sense to say, "I'm going to do something about it." People in my own neighborhood do not read. There are around 30 million illiterate people in America. Kevin is just one of many people, one of millions.

USA TODAY: Studies show that under your tutelage Kevin has come from a 2.2 reading level to 12.7 in about four months. How did you improve Kevin's reading scores so fast?

COLLINS: I worked on vocabulary, starting with basic vowel sounds, comprehension, and just constantly working at it.

USA TODAY: Is Kevin a victim of the athletic system rather than racism?

COLLINS: Kevin just happened to be an athlete and he didn't get as much as the average black child, but how did he ever get through grammar

USA TODAY: Why did you have to start your school?

COLLINS: I think the expectations of minority children are very, very low. It seems to be almost a hypocritical kind of situation. It is OK for them to be mediocre when they are young, but all of a sudden when they get older, then they are stupid, they are inferior, they are welfare recipients, and it seems a different standard is expected of our children. They are very cute when they are small. All of a sudden, they become 17, 15, 16, and they are no longer cute. I believe that our children did not possibly have an opportunity to become universal citizens of the world, to be able to compete in the marketplace for jobs.

USA TODAY: Before you opened Westside Prep, you were a Chicago public school teacher. Are private schools doing better?

COLLINS: Education is declining not only in public schools, but in education all over. It's no longer just public schools. We get children from very prestigious, very wealthy families, which could send them to Switzerland, or anywhere to school. My own daughter is in a prestigious private school, and she isn't being taught correctly either. Right now, Japan and Germany are incurring difficulties with their children in school. American children are the victims of Dick and Jane. Yale, Harvard, the University of California at Berkeley have remedial reading courses.

USA TODAY: What is the

Marva Collins' method of instruction?

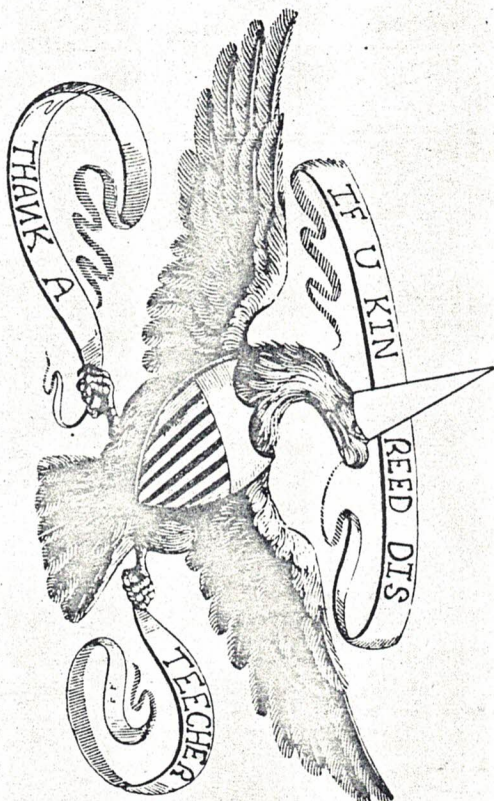
COLLINS: It's all about believing in yourself and not allowing people to break your spirit. It's about determination and belief in what you can do. It's not letting people break your spirit. You don't run around with a "poor little me" attitude. "Poor black me, somebody is going to do it for me." Our creed here that is recited everyday by the children says that society predicts but they will determine. If society draws a circle that shuts them in, they will draw one that shuts them in. They are taught to believe that God is not some cosmic heliophy at their beck and call. We have to get rid of that zealous, religious fervor, that God is going to take care of us.

USA TODAY: That sounds more like Marva Collins philosophy. What do you teach?

COLLINS: We teach children to think, we teach logic. We teach Latin. Marva Collins way is, perhaps, what most people have forgotten, the way children were taught back in the 1920s. Children were taught elocution and that Shakespeare, Emerson and Thoreau were not too difficult for grade school students.

USA TODAY: Aren't you saying let's return to the basics?

COLLINS: We have to return to doing the things that built America. Go to the better stores, such as Saks, Lord &



Illustrations by Tom Gibson

Taylor, and they almost look like K-Mart. There is a decline of merchandise, and services. It's not just in schools. You look at writers who write articles, how many really take the time to do research or do they take everybody else's clips and you see the same article? How many of them really take the time to get the facts?

USA TODAY: Since the more affluent leave for the suburbs or private schools, doesn't that mean that public education is not a successful system?

COLLINS: I was cleaning my drawer recently, and I found my high school autograph book. There wasn't a misspelled word in that book. I called my daughter and told her that children were able to spell and be halfway literate in racist Alabama, where I grew up. We are so busy living now that we forget the past. There was a time when public school children did learn to read. We aren't talking about being doctors, lawyers, chemists, scientists, but they were able to read the menu. They were able to read newspapers. I don't care how many excuses we make that might get us off the hook, it is not going to save us. My grandmother could read the Bible. We are talking about people now who can't complete an application. I mean, had Kevin received a degree and graduated, he would never have been able to do a job because he couldn't really complete an application. What do we have when our children receive diplomas? We are running around with more and more degrees. I have more difficulty with the teachers here than I ever have with the children.

USA TODAY: Won't President Reagan's emphasis on tuition tax credits benefit private schools, such as yours?

COLLINS: If we have the tuition tax credit, what makes us think that all schools aren't going to return to being mediocre again? That's not a cure-all. We keep putting Band-aids on hemorrhages. I am not looking for benefits. I'll make my own way. All I want society to do is to leave me alone. I don't want anybody to do anything for me, just get out of my way and I'll do it myself. I really don't want money stuffed in here. I could be a very wealthy woman. I have turned down a million dollars to start 100 Marva Collins Inc. schools. But I am not turning out Big Macs. Where am I going to find the teachers? At least Big Macs have quality control. How can I go out and set up 100 Marva Collins schools and make sure that children are learning? We would have the same illiteracy that we have now.

USA TODAY: It has been said that although you are teaching an appreciation of white literary artists, you are ignoring the works of black scholars.

COLLINS: That's not true. There is not a subject you could ask me about that I can't talk to you about, whether it is the Dow Jones averages, or

whether it is Neanderthal man, and that is the same with our children. How do you segment knowledge? You certainly have to know about everything. It's so sad when people tell me they have not read Plato's Republic, because you have to if you are to understand white society.

USA TODAY: Would you respond to the recent controversy in which you were accused of leaving children on a bus if they couldn't pay tuition, or taking federal funds after you denounced that practice, and of overstating test results?

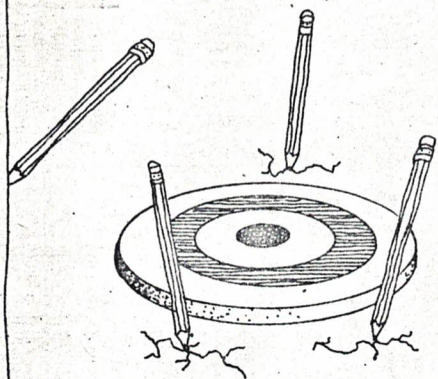
COLLINS: What do I care about what people say? You know, I bought these buildings. I pay the teachers here. I sponsor the children who can't pay, so as far as I am concerned, they can continue to predict but I shall continue to determine. We kept doing what we were doing. In fact, it was very good for me. I hope they start another controversy because it will probably increase the sales of my books and my speaking engagements. I was gone 15 weeks in a row. I made more money than I have ever made in my life, so it was very good for me. You know, if life gives you a lemon, you make lemonade. That's what we teach our children.

USA TODAY: Whites are trying to integrate your school, which is located in one of the worst ghettos in the nation. Isn't that unusual?

COLLINS: It is not unusual. If I can make a better mouse-trap than my neighbor, the world will beat a path to my door. We have what the world needs here. So, we have a child whose father is senior partner of one of the largest law firms in the city, whose other children go to Smith College and Vassar.

USA TODAY: Can you sum up what is happening at your school?

COLLINS: What we are doing here is creating children who are going to make their own way. We are creating children here who will say to the world, "Either take my hand and come on with me, or I'm going anyway without you." We have children who do not have self pity. We have children who do not have brackable wheats. We have children whose spirits can't be crushed.



Doan Van Toai and David Chanoff
USSR out of Vietnam

Herb Greer
Rebecca West at 90

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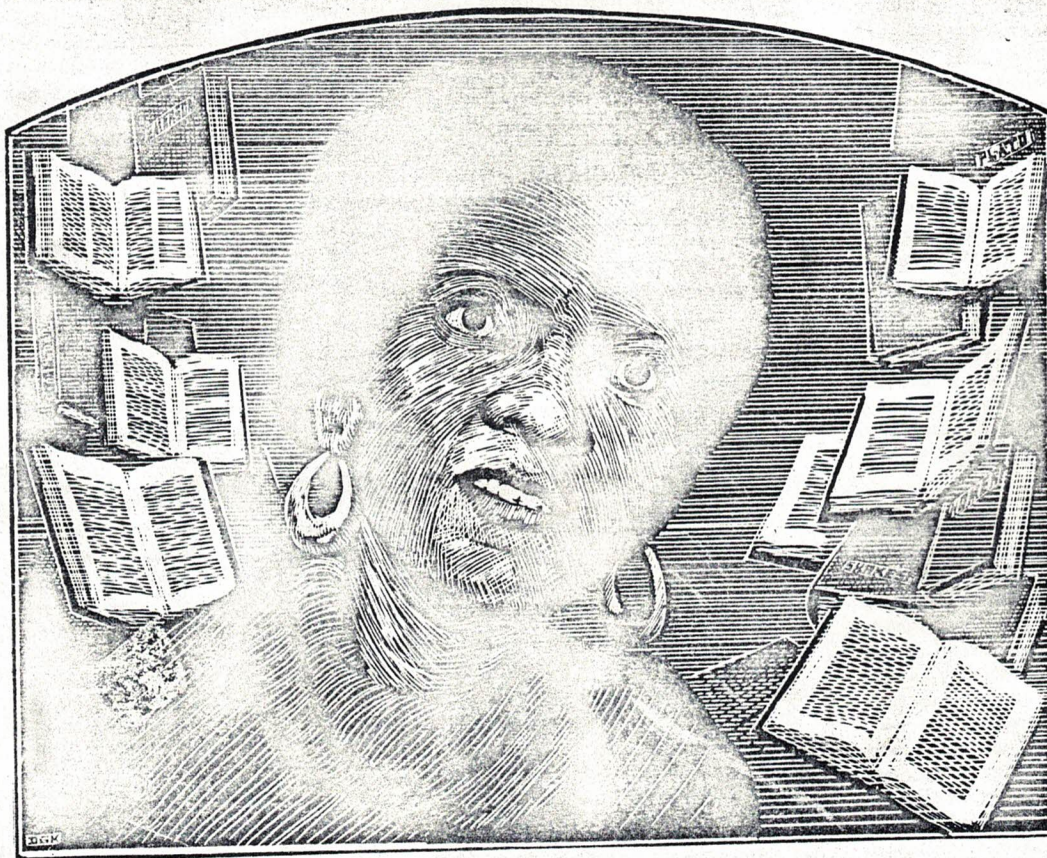
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NO. 4

Hugh Kenner: The Beauty of Bureaucracy

Werner J. Dannhauser: Jacobo Timerman Lies

Marva Collins, Teaching Our Children Well
by Rita Kramer



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Rita Kramer

MARVA COLLINS AND AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION

The "controversial" history of a contemporary innovator.

In the fall of 1975, after fourteen years of teaching, twelve of them in the Chicago public schools, Marva Collins opened a small private school (four pupils to begin with, one of them her own daughter) in a donated basement room in Chicago's run-down Garfield Park, the neighborhood where she lived and had been teaching. She made use of books salvaged from the trash bins of the local public school and a salary provided by the government-funded Alternative Schools Network.* Within months, enrollment had tripled and her previously "unteachable" or "learning disabled" pupils all learned to read, increased their verbal and math comprehension, and went on to read at increasingly higher levels. Their attitude toward school—and toward themselves—had changed.

At the end of that first year, she decided to take over the school herself, and moved it into her own home, changing its name to Westside Preparatory School. Again, she scrounged furniture, materials, books. She used her own pension money and her husband contributed the labor that made a classroom out of part of their apartment. Her success in teaching previously backward and unruly children got around. More parents brought their children, and local press reports were followed by national publicity about the one-room school in which so much was being accomplished by means of so little but one woman's dedicated efforts.

*In 1979 she ended her connection with the ASN, an arm of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, but her participation in the program would eventually become a weapon in the hands of her detractors.

Rita Kramer is author of *How to Raise a Human Being*; Maria Montessori: A Biography; *Giving Birth: Childbearing in America Today*; and, most recently, *In Defense of the Family: Raising Children in America Today* (Basic Books).

In the spring of 1977 Marva Collins sent a letter to a *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist who had written about suburban high-school students who didn't know who Shakespeare was or anything about his works, and invited him to visit Westside Prep. His story on the school, including some of the children's compositions on Michelangelo, da Vinci, Aesop, and Hinduism, was syndicated to newspapers around the country. And Marva Collins has been in the spotlight ever since. As journalist (and co-author of Marva Collins's book) Civia Tamarkin puts it, "Readers were touched by the story of children who had been discarded as 'unteachable' climbing to superior achievement in a school that was always short of books, paper, pencils, and even chalk."

An article in *Time* in December of 1977

brought thousands of letters from parents, thousands of dollars from individual contributors, and more publicity in other magazines—*People*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Saturday Review*, etc.—and newspapers. Educational journals ran stories about the school. Parents, teachers, press, all clamored to visit. School officials came from as far away as Europe. In the fall of 1979 CBS ran a segment on Westside Prep on "Sixty Minutes." It elicited six thousand letters and made Marva Collins a nationally known figure. By the end of 1980 she had been mentioned in the *New York Times* as a possible Reagan choice for Secretary of Education and a year later she was the heroine of a prime-time television "docudrama" seen by an estimated 19 million viewers.

What she had done and what she thought about it have now become the subject of *Marva Collins' Way*,† a book guaranteed to incur the wrath of just about everyone in the education world today. In it, she explains the ideas and methods that first brought her acclaim and, more recently, opprobrium.

As millions of magazine and newspaper readers and television viewers know by now, Marva Collins's classroom technique was to begin with a discussion of a book the children had read, writing each new word on the blackboard and breaking it down into its phonetic components and discussing its meaning, letting the discussion roam over matters of history, geography, poetry, botany, while making sure the children mastered new words and added them to their vocabulary as they added ideas to their experience. ("The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another.") All the while she would be encouraging and



†J.P. Tarcher, Inc. (distributed by Houghton Mifflin), \$12.95.

prodding them, and holding forth on the value of learning as the key to success in life.

Instruction was always individualized; the day's "lesson plan" grew out of the questions asked that day about what had been read by the children. And she was constantly on her feet, checking each one's work, making comments, giving help. She insisted on order and discipline in the classroom. And she succeeded in gaining her pupils' respect both for herself and for the learning she was helping them acquire.

"It seemed to me that the children would be more anxious to read if they were interested in what they were reading." Rejecting the look-say method in which children associate words with pictures and read the same simple words and sentences over and over until they recognize them, she taught phonics, in which children learn to sound out the vowel and consonant sounds that are part of all words, and in place of the "Look, Jane" readers she taught from classics of fable and fairy tale:

I chose those stories because they teach values and morals and lessons about life. Fairy tales and fables allow children to put things in perspective—greed, trouble, happiness, meanness, and joy. After reading those stories you have something to think over and discuss. More than anything, I wanted my students to be excited about reading. I wanted them to understand that reading is not an exercise in memorizing words but a way to bring ideas to light.

The emphasis on "relevance" that limits reading to stories about lives like their own in worlds they already know "undermines the very purpose of an education. It doesn't expand the children's horizons or encourage inventiveness and curiosity. Instead it limits perspective to the grim scenes they see every day of their lives. Children do not need to read stories that teach 'street smarts.' They learn enough on their own. What they need are character-building stories. They need to read for values, morality, and universal truths." And so she taught classical literature rather than the books churned out by publishers today as "young people's books."

She assigned reading from Plato, Homer, Tolstoy, Emerson to children whose reading had begun only months before, sounding out the new words, talking about the ideas, and always, always relating those ideas to the children's own future lives. Curiosity, ambition, and self-control were the aims of her method, and if her pupils did not always understand the finer points of philosophy or poetry, as her critics claim, they were familiarizing themselves with a world of heroes engaged in adventures of ideas and establishing a sense of values that might send them back to these same texts years later.

Over the years, I have come to believe that some of the problems plaguing modern education are the result of the emphasis placed on

'progressive' teaching methods. In an effort to follow John Dewey's notion of a student-centered rather than subject-centered approach to learning, schools have too often sacrificed subject matter, being more concerned with how they taught than what they taught. . . . It is a mistake to assume that in order to stimulate creativity and critical thinking you must rule out any learning by rote. Memorization is the only way to teach such things as phonics, grammar, spelling, and multiplication tables. . . .

I'd ask the children, "How are you going to

"Children do not need to read stories that teach 'street smarts.' They learn enough on their own. What they need are character-building stories."

run a corporation if you can't run yourself?" . . . I didn't hesitate to discuss crime in the ghetto, drugs, prison, or teenage pregnancy. I told them welfare is just another form of slavery. . . . I did not teach black history as a subject apart from American history, emphasize black heroes over white, or preach black consciousness rather than a sense of the larger society. . . .

She told her pupils, "I don't want to hear any jive talk in here or any of this stuff about black English. You must not just think of yourselves as black children or ghetto children. You must become citizens of the world, like Socrates." As she put it, "Instead of teaching black pride I taught my children self-pride." It was what she had brought with her from her middle-class Alabama upbringing, and what she found in such short supply in the urban slums of the North.

The child of a well-to-do black businessman in the segregated South, Marva

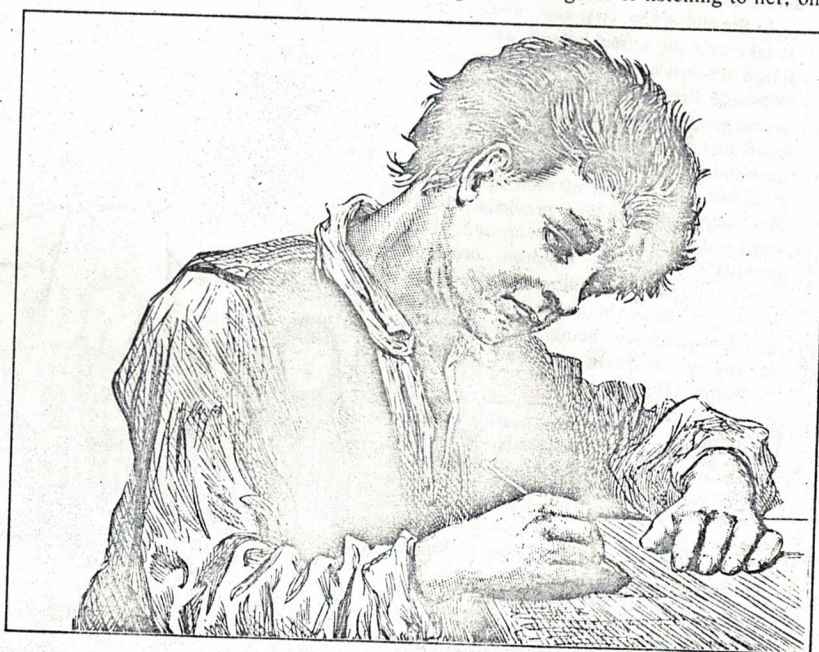
Collins was brought up on pride. Her father was a strong personality and a successful man and she grew up respecting him and herself. Years later, looking around at many of her Garfield Park neighbors and wondering why "my southern pride stuck while theirs didn't," she reflected that "part of the problem is that people are looking for easy solutions."

They have been led to believe that someone else is going to do things for them. Too many black people have fallen into the pattern of listening to the self-proclaimed leaders who find it in their own best interest to make people feel there are "free rides" in this world. If so many foreign immigrants could come to America and make it, so can people like those in Garfield Park. . . .

I am convinced that the real solution is education. We have to teach children self-reliance and self-respect. We have to teach them the importance of learning, of developing skills, of doing for themselves. I am always reminding my students that if you give a man a fish, he will eat for only a day. If you teach him how to fish, he will feed himself for a lifetime. . . . The legacy I want to leave behind is a generation of children who realize that you can't get something for nothing, who are proud and resourceful enough to take care of their own. In this messed-up world, the only children who are going to make something of themselves are those who come from strong parents or those who have had a strong teacher. Or both. . . .

Co-author Civia Tamarkin, who spent time in the classroom watching Marva Collins teach, describes her working the audience like an entertainer, an old-time preacher, giver of love as well as learning. She functions, in fact, like the ideal parent. Tender and tough, uniting affection and discipline in the same source, so that the child must accept the one in order to enjoy the other.

Much of her success must be attributed not to method but to manner. It is her character that impresses. Over and over again, reading her or listening to her, one



hears her satisfaction in the process of hard work and its resulting accomplishment. Her sense of mission is contagious, like her love of well-turned phrases, telling mots, and aphorisms.

Marva Collins is an example of what an exceptional individual can accomplish through "determination, perseverance, stick-to-it-iveness, and pride"—and the personal charisma that enables her to inspire her pupils with those same qualities. When one of the parents of a pupil at Westside Prep was asked on "Sixty Minutes," "Do you think what happens here in Mrs. Collins's school could be made to happen on a grand scale in the public schools?" she replied, "Only if you had a grand scale of Marva Collinses."

On the same program, she herself said she never claimed to be a miracle-worker: "Anyone can do it who's willing to walk from desk to desk and really work at it from dawn to dusk."

. . .

Marva Collins's emphasis on traditional methods of instruction and readings in the classics, on the importance of hard work and high expectations, could have been forgiven. Even an oversize ego or an abrasive personality could have been forgiven. Her scorn for the sacred cows of the contemporary education world could not. Along the way to national recognition she had said things like, "It was my school and I felt the public had no right to tell me how to run it. That especially meant government bureaucrats and special interest groups pushing minority rights." She told CBS's Morley Safer, "Buildings do not teach, people do," and added, "I would hate to think a union would have to protect my job. I have too much pride."

She had no use for the proliferation of specialists like curriculum facilitators, or

programs like those in "black English" or "black studies," for the idea that a black child must be taught by a black teacher in order to have a "role model," or retain the language of the streets in order not to damage his "identity." And she had no use for busing, pointing out that ineffective teachers and low-achieving pupils can be found everywhere. "Miseducation is not a function of a child's race or neighborhood

Whether she was ignorant or duplicitous, the charge of having accepted federal funds while decrying the failure of federal funding to solve the problems of schools in the urban slums is still a smokescreen, if not a smear.

but of the teaching methods he or she is exposed to from kindergarten on."

The backlash was inevitable. She had offended the black leaders by stating that black children's educational needs were no different from those of other children and were a matter of expectation, hard work, and discipline rather than special schools and special courses, that individual initiative and not group advantage was the answer to their plight.

She had offended organized professionals in the teaching world by suggesting that individual teachers if they worked hard enough and cared enough could strike the spark that would turn around the failing pupil, teach the unteachable to value learning.

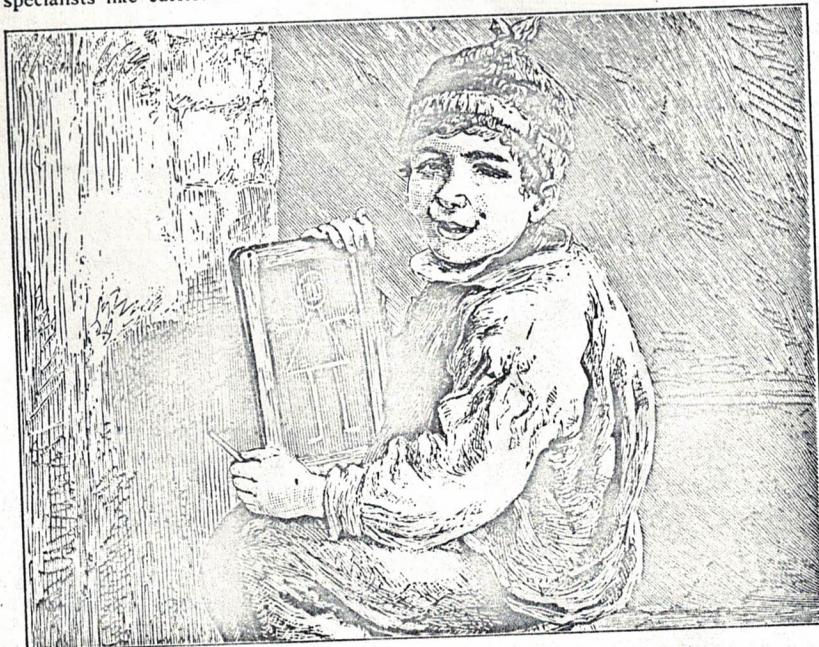
She offended the whole spectrum of

special-interest groups by suggesting that the schools were failing—not because they were not doing what only the family could do, not because they were not being used to change society forcibly enough or fast enough—but because they were not doing what they could indeed be expected to do—confront the individual student with the challenge of a demanding teacher in love with learning and equipped with disciplinary sanctions. Far from tactful, she took on the whole educational establishment when she criticized "the countless schools across the country that mislabeled children, simplified textbooks, diluted curricula, and created special curricula for 'underprivileged' children." A lot of careers, which means a lot of money and a lot of prestige, would be called into question by the idea that pounding away at basic skills and old-fashioned exhortation could make a difference in the lives of children greater than anything money could buy or legislation could provide. She is at odds with those who blame the system as much as with those who blame the victim.

It was a full-page ad by the SmithKline Corporation in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Newsweek* in the spring of 1980 that provided the occasion for the first counterattacks by those she had so egregiously offended. The ad showed Marva Collins in the classroom and quoted her on a number of her favorite topics including an enthusiastic plug for tuition vouchers. Her espousal of free-market activity in the education business referred to "cheats and profiteers among teachers and administrators" as well as "among the hawkers of education gadgetry." And she was quoted in the *Washington Post* as saying "most public school teachers she knew couldn't speak well or spell words correctly themselves." This was throwing down the gauntlet.

United Federation of Teachers president Albert Shanker responded by devoting one of his weekly columns in the *Sunday New York Times* to defending the public schools against Marva Collins's charges and raising questions about the evidence for her own claims, especially with regard to reading scores.

But the full fury of reaction was still to come. By the end of the year she had been mentioned as a possible choice for Secretary of Education in the new cabinet (and had immediately rejected the possibility) and had been the subject of an inspirational drama based on her life and achievements starring Cicely Tyson on CBS's "Hallmark Hall of Fame." This was too much for the public-school establishment, and retribution was as swift as it was mean-spirited. *Substance*, a monthly journal published by substitute teachers in the Chicago public schools, claiming to "expose" the "Marva Collins hoax," accused her of doing nothing more than success-



fully using "a drill-based instruction with small, select groups of children."

Since Marva Collins had never claimed more for herself than drilling children in the fundamentals in such a way as to awaken and sustain their interest, it was hard to find in this charge anything particularly damaging.

More damaging were the charges that despite her strong stand against public funding of special education programs for minorities, the money she had accepted from the Alternative Schools Network to start Westside Prep was CETA money, of which she received a total of \$69,000 before taking over the financing of the school herself. (Someone had gone to the considerable trouble of digging up the checks cashed by Marva Collins up to 1979, when her relationship with the program ended.) Whether she was ignorant or duplicitous, the charge of having accepted federal funds while decrying the failure of federal funding to solve the problems of schools in the urban slums is still a smoke-screen, if not a smear. It attacks the speaker instead of addressing itself to what is said. The real question—the value of her approach, the degree of its effectiveness and applicability—is left untouched. We are asked to dismiss the ideas because of what the woman did.

The *Substance* article was part of a campaign in which a *Chicago Tribune* syndicated columnist and a reporter for local television channel WBBM joined the attack. She was being used, was the charge, by white society and "the white media," by "those who would replace public education with private education where the government could not adequately halt discrimination against blacks, Hispanics and the poor." A disgruntled teacher who had recently parted company with Marva Collins was found to contribute a sour word or two about the lack of "proper testing procedures." Granting all these things—that she may be difficult personally for some colleagues and employees to get along with, that she had once accepted money of the kind she said would not solve the problems of the schools while setting about to show how those problems could be solved, that she painted her pupils' achievements in the most favorable light, none of these is the real reason for the attack so effectively orchestrated to tear her down in the same media that had built her up.

One by one, the labels of "Super-teacher" and "Miracle Worker," pinned on her by the media, were torn off. As *Variety* put it, "the media giveth and the media taketh away." *Newsweek* and the *New York Times* did wrap-ups in a sadder-but-wiser vein. Only the *Wall Street Journal* pointed out that the issue was not education but the politics of education, quoting the co-author of her book, "She never pretended to be more than a hard-

working teacher who is good at motivating children."

Despite red herring and ad hominem arguments, what has brought the wrath of so many down on Marva Collins's head, what they cannot forgive and need to discredit, are her scorn for educational gimmicks and educational jargon, her insistence on a common-sense positive approach to teaching all children by means

One by one, the labels of "Super-teacher" and "Miracle Worker," pinned on her by the media, were torn off.

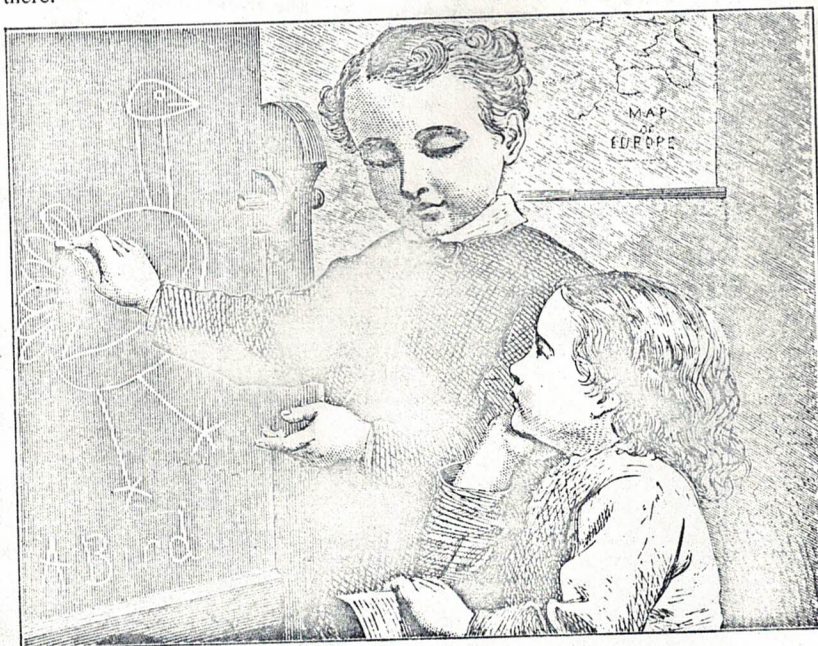
of old-fashioned drill and traditional literary values. The idea that hard work and becoming acquainted with what has stood the test of time in the ongoing dialogue of literature is still the best foundation on which to build thoughtful men and women and responsible citizens is not popular today. It is a threat to teachers who want to feel defeated by the shortcomings of pupils and system rather than make the effort to overcome those shortcomings; by those blacks, Hispanics, and others who want to feel entitled to reparative public aid on the grounds that society owes it to them; and to those myriad facilitators, coordinators, and other bureaucrats whose programs are threatened by any departure from the pious cant of the day on why children come out of so many public schools having learned so little. It is a threat to the tax-supported programs to ensure racial balance in the schools because it insists that what matters is not who goes to what school but what is expected and even demanded of them there.

Marva Collins is the latest example of a recurring figure in the history of schooling—the educational wonder-worker. As such she stands in the direct line from Pestalozzi toward the end of the eighteenth century through Froebel, Itard, Seguin, and Montessori, all teachers who devised methods for teaching the unteachable and then found those methods to have wider application.

When Maria Montessori had succeeded in teaching children previously considered uneducable to read and write and, indeed, to outperform the normal children in regular schools, it occurred to her to ask "the reasons which could keep the happy healthy children of the common schools on so low a plane that they could be equalled in tests of intelligence by my unfortunate pupils," and thus a new theory and a new method of education were born.

The story is always the same. The word is spread, visitors come from all over, the innovator is hailed as a miracle-worker, books are written, followers gained, a new theory and method are proclaimed—and eventually forgotten as what proves of lasting value enters the mainstream of methodology, becomes part of how things are done in most schools, until a new method emerges in new hands in response to new conditions, and the cycle begins again.

Nineteenth-century innovations in classrooms that made it possible for the first time to teach large numbers of poor children at once in common schools in the cities of Europe and to socialize the immigrant poor in the United States came to seem rigid, and rote learning gave way to Montessori's emphasis on individual mastery in the service of independence and Dewey's emphasis on cooperative expression in the service of democracy. Now



Marva Collins appears as the apostle of a return to fundamentals, to the mastery of skills and appreciation of tradition that has come to be known as "back to basics."

Technology has made it all happen faster today. It took decades for word of Pestalozzi's accomplishments to reach all of Europe from his school in Yverdon, years for the world to hear about the Kindergarten, the radical innovation undertaken by Froebel in Thuringia, months for Montessori's accomplishments in Rome to be spread by newspapers and magazines in both the Old World and the New. The electronic media create instant heroes today—and have a way of devouring them almost as soon as they have served them up. Educators, philanthropists, religious leaders, political figures came to observe the goings-on at Montessori's Casa dei Bambini, and were followed by the journalists who made her name a household word. A series of articles in *McClure's* magazine made her famous in North America. In Marva Collins's case it was a television program followed by countless interviews with her and articles about her school.

Montessori lectured and published widely, but in a year of tireless effort she could not have hoped to reach the audience Marva Collins can address in a single half-hour appearance on a television talk show. But neither could her detractors command the resources of Marva Collins's enemies in the organized teaching community, and it took them longer to bring her down. In the end, Montessori's influence was diminished in this country when she too ran afoul of the educational establishment, which in her day meant the policy-makers at leading teacher-training institutions like Columbia University's Teachers College, where John Dewey's disciple William Heard Kilpatrick held sway. Kilpatrick had

no use for the Italian Catholic woman and her gospel of individual development through self-directed mastery of prescribed tasks. It was not a doctrine that accorded with his understanding of the needs of citizens in a participatory democracy, in which the emphasis was to be on group cooperation.

The parallels between the personalities and careers of the two women are striking.

...Montessori's influence was diminished in this country when she too ran afoul of the educational establishment...

While Marva Collins's importance and influence are not in the same league with Montessori's, the parallels between the two "miracle workers," the one in the Roman slums at the beginning of the century and the other in the Chicago slums of today, tell something about the nature of the relationship of teaching to learning and of the maverick teacher to the pedagogical establishment, now as then.

Both women were raised by parents committed to old-fashioned values, strict discipline, and a traditional code of behavior, and both, despite being members of disadvantaged classes (women enjoyed no greater equality in turn-of-the-century Italy than rural blacks did in the Depression South), were made to feel they were special children, with special gifts, of whom much was expected. Both were charismatic personalities working outside the establishment and inspiring

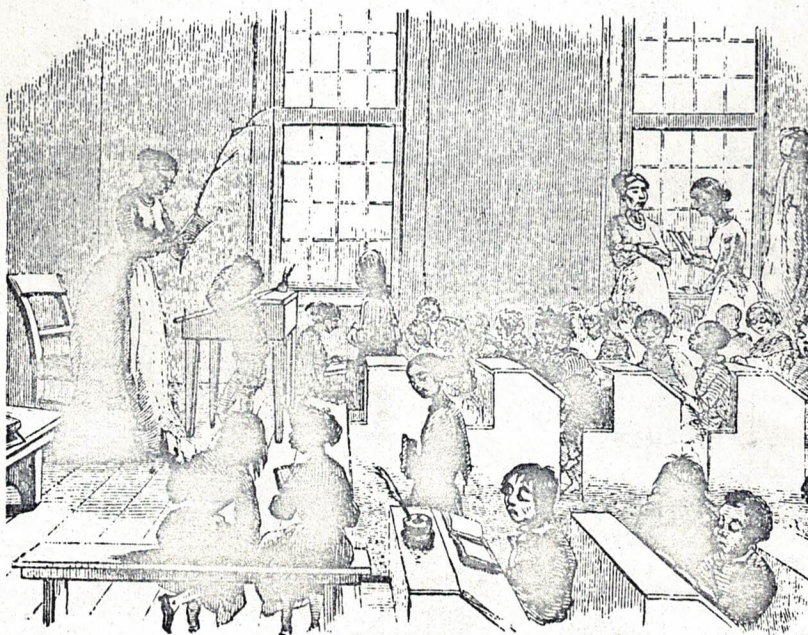
fierce loyalty and equally fierce hostility.

Like Montessori, who came to teaching serendipitously from medicine (she was the first woman to graduate from medical school in Italy), psychiatry, and the study of retarded children, Marva Collins took some education courses "because they interested me, though I had no intention of becoming a teacher." Like Montessori, she retained the perspective of the outsider. "I didn't know anything about educational theory, and I have often thought that worked in my favor. Without preconceived ideas and not bound by rules, I was forced to deal with my students as individuals, to talk to them, listen to them, find out their needs."

Exactly like Montessori, Marva Collins set up and took complete charge of a school in a run-down neighborhood where little had been expected or achieved in the way of education and where she could proceed in her way without interference from authorities—where, in fact, she herself would be the only authority. And from the beginning, she devoted herself unreservedly to her pupils. Some of them arrived before breakfast, not many hours after she had finished going over their assignments. Here is Montessori describing her early efforts: "I gave myself over to the actual teaching of the children, directing at the same time the work of the other teachers." She was there from eight in the morning to seven at night, teaching, observing, experimenting. For Marva Collins as for Montessori, her school became a testing ground for her ideas and methods. And within a surprisingly short time children who had been considered hopeless, unteachable, and/or incorrigible, the withdrawn and the rebellious, began to learn, took fire, "exploded," in Montessori's phrase, into reading and writing in a matter of weeks. In both cases one can see the effect of a strong personality influencing the outcome, of a woman tirelessly engaging the student with challenges in a way that implies a belief in his capacity to meet them. And in both cases the psychological effect of the personal appeal was presented in the context of a system of phonics by which the children learned to read by sounding out the letters that made words.

Like Montessori, Marva Collins has the kind of strong personality that invites identification, and she treated the children she taught with respect, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the children or their parents. Like Montessori, too, Marva Collins worked out a way of teaching she insisted on; she could use another pair of hands but not another mind at variance with her own. The history of education is a history of innovators who become remarkably intolerant of change.

But however authoritarian in the running of their schools and the application of their very different methods—the one relying on the child's progressive mastery of a set of programmed materials, the other on books



and verbal mastery—both Marva Collins and Montessori before her had the same aim—to make children independent, to teach them to do things for themselves. Fiercely independent individualists themselves, both women took on the educational establishments of their time singlehandedly in order to implement a system of teaching which aimed at producing—no surprise here—individuals like themselves. For Marva Collins as for Montessori, the end result of this upbringing was to be in control of one's self. This was the most important attribute of an individual, and to teach it as a value and inculcate it as a characteristic was the ultimate aim of the educational process.

Like Montessori, Marva Collins has been criticized for having, after only a couple of years of intensive work with relatively few children, put forward a statement about how children learn and a plan for reforming schools and, by implication, society. For nothing cuts closer to the bone of social philosophy than the question of the education of the young. Since the advent of common schooling the classroom has been perceived as the crucible for the reform of society. The schools can be made to serve the ideas of egalitarians, as we have had occasion to learn, through a forcible implementation of plans for such goals as achieving racial parity or such ideals as redistributing the benefits accruing to holders of professional and other higher degrees. Or they can be used in another way, by removing restrictions but imposing no other kinds of regulation, to ensure that equality of opportunity, if not necessarily of outcome, is available to all comers.

The year that Montessori's book on her method appeared in English and was reviewed in newspapers, magazines, and professional journals everywhere, and in which her fame was assured by a series of articles in *McClure's* in America and the *Fortnightly Review* in England, also saw the publication of a book called *The Promised Land*. The number-one nonfiction best-seller of 1912, it was the ringing testimonial of an immigrant to the public-school system that had "made an American" of her. The author, Mary Antin, saw the promise of America as an opportunity, not an assurance. In America, everybody had a chance, but it was up to the individual to secure the fulfillment of the promise. "That is what America was for. The land of opportunity it was, but opportunities must be used, must be grasped, held, squeezed dry." This attitude seems quaint, if not actually obsolete, in a time of Acts, Titles, regulations, guidelines, quotas—all enforced by the threat of withdrawal of federal funding or at the least of protracted, complicated, and prohibitively expensive legal procedures—intended to supersede individual merit and effort as determinants of success.

What Marva Collins has done is to suggest a return to an earlier vision of the role of the school in American society, as the key that unlocks the gates of opportunity for everyone by providing every individual with what he needs to go as far as his own talents and abilities and ambitions will take him, a force for socializing those of different backgrounds, bringing everyone alike into the main-

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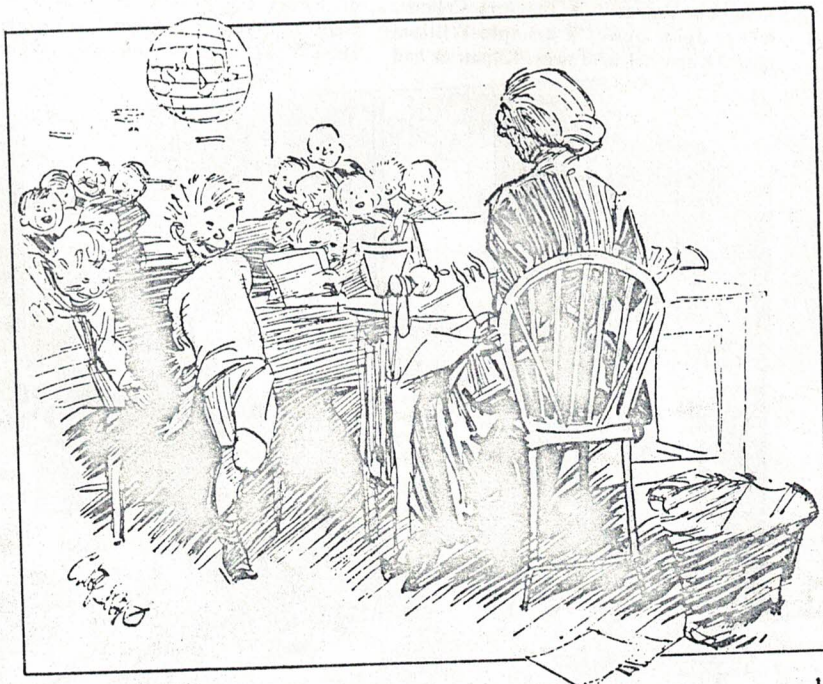
stream of American culture by transmitting the best of the past along with the skills needed to make contributions in the future. It is a vision which is at odds with a system organized in the interests of disparate entrenched special-interest groups each promoting what are perceived as the special needs of a particular sex, race, language-speaking group, or those afflicted with unfortunate physical or mental conditions, and with a philosophy that aims at distributing certification in proportion to numerical representation in the population rather than according to merit as evidenced in individual achievement.

What has gotten Marva Collins into trouble is her adherence to this old-fashioned belief in the necessity for thinking of education in terms of the individual and not the group. If one eager and indefatigable woman can excite and instruct lethargic and backward children in a

shabby room with a few books and some paper and pencils, what are we to think about the millions spent on teachers' salaries, elaborate curricula, instructional materials, government-funded special-interest-group programs, and a vast administrative superstructure that year after year continues to turn out nonfunctioning and uncaring illiterates?

Despite what her critics have been able to dredge up against her, the issue in the Marva Collins controversy isn't Marva Collins's personality or even her past funding—it is the truth or falsity of what she says about schooling. And what she is saying about elementary schools is no different from what James Coleman says in his latest report on the schools[‡]: that while family background and parental expectations are crucial determinants of who will learn how much, private and parochial schools do better than public schools—even for children from similar homes—because they impose stricter discipline and demand more in the way of academic performance, and that even public schools, when they enforce attendance, assign homework, and insist on discipline in the classroom, reach significantly higher levels of student achievement. This is something most caring parents have long ago figured out for themselves, but it is nice to have it official, wrapped in statistics and delivered to the door of the educators. Not teacher credentials but teacher commitment, not buildings, facilities, audio-visual and other fancy aids—i.e., not money—but hard work and high standards make all the difference. □

[‡]*High School Achievement: Public, Catholic and Private Schools Compared.* by James S. Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore. Basic Books, \$20.75.



Casualty of a Failed System

After 16 Years of School, Kevin Ross Starts Over

By EDWARD MENAKER

CHICAGO

KEVIN ROSS once was courted by college recruiters and says he had his class papers typed by school secretaries. Now Ross is struggling in a storefront grammar school in what amounts to an eighth-grade class, filled with pig-tailed girls and little boys who carry lunch boxes. He is 23 years old and 6 feet 9 inches tall.

Ross arrived at Creighton University in Omaha a little more than four years ago, a 23-point, 20-rebound-per-game sensation from Wyandotte High School in Kansas City. Boosters and alumni greeted him with a cake and a party and applause. Now, he is enrolled at what has become a fabled grade school in Chicago run by Marva Collins. Now he hears a different kind of cheering.

"I go up to the board to do an algebra problem and the little kids clap for me," Ross says with a smile.

"They actually applaud and really make me feel good. They help me and sometimes they ask me for help."

Kevin Ross's story is both surprising and sad. It can be said to be surprising because a major university is apparently owning up to its responsibility and trying to help a failed athlete. But it can also be said to be sad because Kevin Ross failed so miserably throughout 16 years of school that he not only never learned to write proficiently, but he never really learned how to read.

"Maybe, we all share the blame for Kevin's failure," says Creighton University's athletic director, Dan Offenburger.

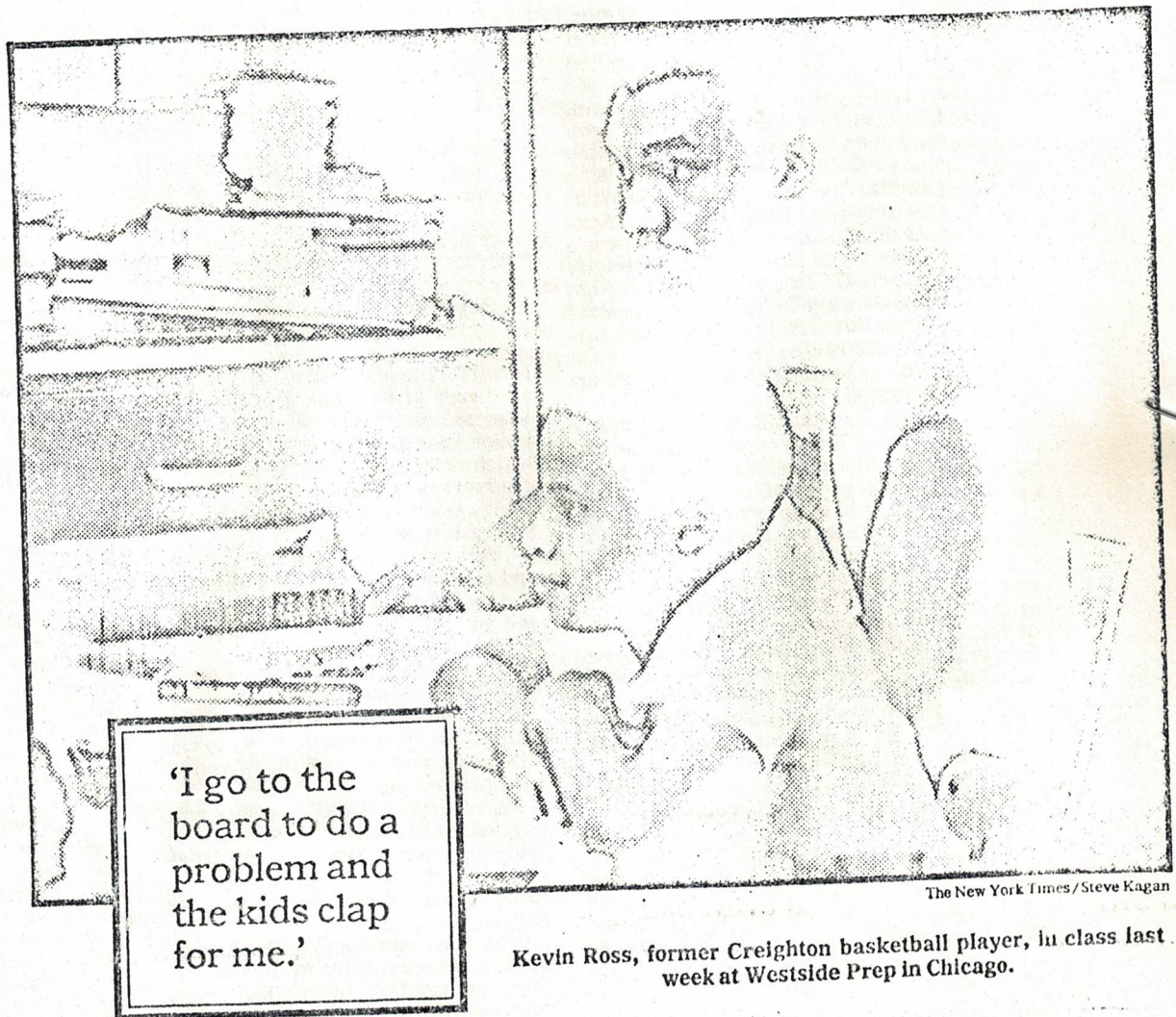
"The system failed him, Kevin failed the system, maybe his mother failed him, maybe I failed him."

"But does the school get 60 percent of the blame, the mother 30, the high school 10? I mean how do you assess who's to blame?"

Kevin Ross never became at Creighton the basketball star that he had been in high school. Offenburger confesses that Ross's talent may have been misjudged even as he was being recruited by Creighton.

"Maybe, we believed a little too much in his high

Continued on Page 27, Column 1



The New York Times/Steve Kagan

Kevin Ross, former Creighton basketball player, in class last week at Westside Prep in Chicago.

Kevin Ross: Another C

Continued From Page 25

school press clippings," Offenburger says now.

Ross says that Creighton promised him he would become the starting center. He wound up starting fewer than 10 games. Even in his best season, as a junior, Ross averaged only 6 points.

"Let's face it," says Offenburger. He "was not a great basketball player. He would have had trouble making it as a pro."

"But he was a good kid and he never stopped trying."

Opal Ross never stopped believing in her son's press clippings. She raised five other children besides Kevin. Now she's on disability retirement from the post office, where she worked as a mail sorter for nearly 19 years. She lives alone in a small apartment in Kansas City, Mo. Today she feels that her son never received a fair chance in basketball at Creighton.

"I feel he was robbed of his career," says Mrs. Ross. "I feel he was used by the athletic department, as far as basketball was concerned, and that they didn't treat him fairly."

Tom Apke, now the head basketball coach at Colorado, was the coach at Creighton when Ross was recruited. In an interview last week Apke said, "I had no knowledge of him coming into Creighton that he had any problems." But later in the interview Apke said: "Kevin Ross was viewed as a gamble. We accepted him knowing that we were taking a chance." Apke said that Ross was "a little bit over a C student at an average inner-city high school. Ross tested below the national average in his college entrance exams. But sometimes those standardized tests are not necessarily a good indicator because they can be culturally biased."

Apke said that Ross was accepted mainly on the strength of recommendations of high school counselors and his high school coach.

"But while he was an exception Ross was not the only borderline case that's ever been recommended and accepted by Creighton."

Apke and every other official of a school interviewed for this article refused to discuss specifics about Kevin Ross's classroom record, citing the Family Education and Privacy Act.

The Wyandotte principal, Thomas J. Rhone, remembers Ross as "having deficiencies," and that his reading and writing were behind grade levels. "But he was not the lowest of the lowest," Mr. Rhone said.

He made it through Wyandotte in the normal four years, according to Mr. Rhone, but not without special classes and tutoring by teachers. "Millions of kids get through schools each year with problems like Kevin's," Mr. Rhone said.

Kevin Ross says he had been told by the recruiters that if he just went to class, he would get his degree. He is slightly embarrassed when he



Kevin Ross with Marva Collins last week at Westside Prep in Chicago. The New York Times/Steve K.

recalls some of his early classes, such as theory of baseball, and ceramics. Ross contends that it was not until his junior year that he even understood which classes were required for graduation.

Mrs. Ross describes Kevin's problems this way:

"You know, he was a big kid, tall, and sometimes he didn't understand what was happening in class, I guess, and you know how kids are, afraid to ask questions at all."

"I think they gave him courses just to keep him eligible."

Offenburger concedes that at mid-term of his freshman year, Ross was struggling and that he was given an easier course load.

"We found he could do better with physical activities and theory courses," says Offenburger. "My recommendation for a lighter load for Kevin was approved by the Dean of Arts and Sciences."

Offenburger maintains that Creighton did not stretch its standards for Ross, saying, "Kevin took legitimate courses with the different departments of the college, courses available to any student, not just Kevin."

"He was treated no different than any other disadvantaged kid at Creighton. The only difference

that there were more people concerned with him, and more people concerned directly."

Ross showed several of his grade cards to The New York Times. Among the courses he took in the first semester of his freshman year were two-hour courses in theory of track and field (grade satisfactory) and theory of baseball (grade A); a one-hour course in squad participation (basketball, grade A); a three-hour course in introductory ceramics (grade C); a three-hour course in photography (satisfactory), a two-hour course in first aid (grade C) and a three-hour theology course (grade D). In the next semester he took a similar course load. He had four A's, and a C in the theology course.

Offenburger says that Ross was able to maintain his basketball eligibility, though he might not have been completing enough requirements for graduation. It was as Ross proceeded through his second year at Creighton that, according to Offenburger, "we began to identify the difficulties with which we had to deal."

It was also at this point that Offenburger took a step he had not wanted to take with Kevin Ross.

ality of a Failed System

that he not return to Creighton," Offenburger says, "because of the academic challenges involved."

"But Kevin told me he felt he could overcome the challenges. I thought it would be tough but I respected Kevin's sincerity."

In 1980, Offenburger and Apke had Ross evaluated in a special program at the University of Missouri in Kansas City.

"They suggested he see an optometrist," Offenburger says. "They said that Kevin had some kind of deficiency for his eyes, skipped spaces as he read."

Offenburger says Ross underwent special tutorial help at Missouri and when he returned to Creighton, "he was able to maintain his eligibility." Ross's being tutored at Missouri raised a problem with the National Collegiate Athletic Association because he was attending another school, and N.C.A.A. regulations prohibit a college from providing a special service for an athlete that it doesn't provide for other students. But, Offenburger says, "when we proved that we do this for other students, the N.C.A.A. relented."

At the end of his junior year, Ross had arthroscopic surgery to remove bone and tissue fragments from his left knee. This incident seemed to focus the bitterness and confusion of his three years at Creighton.

"Kevin went to the doctor alone," Ross says, using his first name to make his point. "Kevin went to surgery alone."

"Nobody seemed to care. I did everything on my own. I busted my tail to do everything for them basketball-wise and then they just left me alone."

In his senior year, Kevin wound up on academic probation. His course load included three physical education courses, a ceramics course, and an English course. His grades were two F's, two D's and a satisfactory. It was also another lost year in basketball. He averaged about 3 points a game during a season in which the team went from Missouri Valley Conference champions to one with seven victories and 20 losses in its first season under Coach Willis Reed. By the end of the year Kevin still found himself a year to a year-and-a-half short of his degree.

Ross maintains that along with his reading difficulties, he also had problems with his writing, that he had used cursive writing in high school but did not use it at Creighton when he found out he could get by with printing. And, he maintains, class papers that he printed were handed over to athletic department secretaries to be typed.

Neither Offenburger nor Apke said they had any knowledge of this, but each conceded that they would not have been surprised if it had happened.

"We would not approve a secretary typing for a student," says Offenburger.

er. "But I think it would be naïve to think that a student could not get close enough to office staff or a secretary and that she would give in and do the favor."

"I never remember this happening but I won't say that it didn't happen."

It was Offenburger who broached the idea that although Kevin had not reached his potential in basketball, perhaps he could reach his potential in education.

"The crime at this point would have been walking away from him, letting him drop into oblivion," says Offenburger.

"Maybe, there was some guilt. But I think more importantly, we just felt responsible to this kid. We had promised him an education and now we were going to follow through on it."

"It's just that we didn't feel that we were equipped at Creighton to handle Kevin's problem."

Offenburger remembered a school in Chicago called Westside Prep that had been profiled on the network television program "60 Minutes." It was run by a woman who was called a "miracle worker," and a "super teacher." The school supposedly reached out to children considered to be at an educational dead end. Kevin Ross seemed to fit the bill.

Offenburger proposed the idea and even flew Ross and his mother, at Creighton's expense, to Chicago for a look at the school.

"We talked and talked," says Offenburger. "But in the end we realized it had to be Kevin's decision and Kevin's decision alone."

Ross remembers it this way:

"Offenburger called me in and said 'you haven't got the guts to go to that school in Chicago. You haven't got the guts to be with those little kids.'"

"I told him that he was wrong, that I wanted an education and that I'd go anywhere to get it."

Offenburger worked through the Creighton administration, eventually even getting the Westside Prep idea approved by the school president. Creighton agreed to bankroll the idea, in essence extending Ross's scholarship another year. He enrolled at Westside Prep last month. He lives with a family in Chicago.

After 16 years of schooling, Kevin Ross is back at the start, this time at a school that faces a busy street lined with factories. It is sandwiched between places like the Hawthorn Grill and the Dessent Sheet Metal Company on West Chicago Avenue. Over its storefront facade are the simple white metal letters spelling "Westside Prep."

Ross is now in the hands of Marva Collins, who started the school in a room of her home and has gone on to gain an international reputation for success. She says that she will do in 10 months what was not done for Kevin Ross in 16 years.

Ross appears determined to get his education even if it means going back

to the basics and being with children, some of whom are less than half his age.

"You deal with kids on their level," Ross says.

"They're people just like you and me," he adds. "It makes me feel good to see them getting something at their age that I didn't get."

Ross denies that he had a reading deficiency and says that the explanation of his eyes skipping spaces was just being used as an excuse by Creighton.

Ross says that in just the short time that he has been at Westside Prep his reading has improved. He turns to a book-lined shelf and pulls out a small pocketbook from which he begins reading. It is Edith Hamilton's mythology, "Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes." He reads slowly but correctly and says that he understands what he has read.

He squeezes himself under his make-shift desk. In front of him are books like Plato's Republic, The Portable Machiavelli and Introduction to Algebra. Kevin Ross is in the last seat at the back of the first row as you enter the room, almost sticking out into the doorway.

"I don't care how people look at me," says Ross. "All I know is that I'm here trying to better myself."

"I feel like I was in a bottle and that I just escaped," Ross says. "Many nights I actually went home and cried."

"Sure, they're helping me. But, they put me through a hell of a test. You can't slap a dog or treat a man bad and then give him gold and expect him to forget about the past."

"I'm the one who has to live with this the rest of my life."

When Offenburger was asked if Creighton would take Ross back after his 10 months at Westside Prep, he said, "when my phone rings and Kevin tells me where he is and what he needs, I'm going to do everything I can to help him."

"I'm prouder of Creighton than ever before," Offenburger says. "You can look at it this way, you know, that a lot of educational institutions have to take the blame for its failures. In Kevin's case Creighton has accepted the blame and done something about it."

"When you try things that are creative, sometimes they work and sometimes they bomb out. But at least we're giving it a shot."

Says Kevin Ross:

"Basketball is tucked away in the attic now. I want to be a somebody."

"I could say a million nice things about Creighton, or about my high school, but it all still comes out the same way in the end."

"Where did I miss out?"

Edward Menaker is a news writer-producer at WLS-TV, the ABC-owned station in Chicago.



Tribune photos by Ernie Cox Jr.

After four years in college, basketball player Kevin Ross couldn't keep up with a class of 3d graders. Now basketball is taking a back seat—Ross is learning how to read and write.



In college, all he could read was the defense

By Linda Kay

HE COULD NOT punctuate a sentence. He never capitalized the pronoun "I." Unable to write cursively, he printed. He could not differentiate between the words are and our, knew and new, or too, to and two. He had never read an entire book.

Yet Kevin Ross possessed a high school diploma and attended Creighton University in Omaha for four years.

Last September, Ross made news when he enrolled at Westside Preparatory School in Chicago. "The plan was to put Kevin in the classroom," says Marva Collins, the school's founder, "but he couldn't keep up with my 3d graders."

Six-foot-nine-inch Kevin Ross, a highly regarded prep athlete in Kansas City, Kan., the basketball team captain his senior year at Creighton, could barely read and write when he entered Westside Prep. Today, he is making slow but steady progress.

"I just don't know how I made it through all those years of school without those skills," says the 24-year-old Ross, a soft-spoken giant, as he sits at a table piled with books and magazines. "I sure knew how to play basketball, though."

ROSS' STORY, which will be told in a made-for-television movie at the end of the year, is shocking even to those familiar

Continued on page 8, col. 6

OVER

Ross

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with academic scandals in college sports.

It is also very timely in light of a rule recently adopted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association. That rule, which takes effect in 1986, stipulates that to compete as freshmen at a Division I school, incoming athletes must have a 2.0 average [out of a possible 4.0] in a specific number of core curriculum courses and a combined score of 700 [out of 1,600] on the Scholastic Aptitude Test or a 15 [out of 36] on the American College Testing exam.

"Either pay for it now and get yourself educated, or pay for it later," says Ross. "You're going to pay one way or the other."

Ross is proof of that. But unlike many athletes who suffer in silence, Ross admitted his illiteracy and sought help.

At Westside Prep, Ross is attempting to learn in nine months what he failed to learn in 16 years of school: how to read and write.

AT FIRST, KEVIN joined the children aged 4 through 14 who attend the private school founded by Collins, a commanding woman both praised as a miracle worker and criticized for her unorthodox methods.

Within days, Collins pulled him out of the classroom and began working with him one on one.

"I made the mistake of not testing Kevin before he came here," Collins says bluntly. "I thought he at least knew the basics. But Kevin still has to pick up the skills we teach to the 4-year-olds. And it would be too demeaning for him to be in the classroom with them."

Ross was unfamiliar with rudimentary phonetics. "The thing she has taught me which has helped me the most," he says, "is the vowel sounds: a, e, i, o, u and sometimes y."

After three months, Ross took an achievement test to gauge his progress. He had improved the equivalent of two grades in reading skills.

THAT WAS A BIG disappointment to Collins, who counted on Kevin jumping five or six grades.

"A lot of the teachers here thought I did very well, but she's pushy," says Ross. "Instead of settling for in-between, she wants total improvement. I believe I will increase my scores a heck of a lot when I'm tested again." Ross will take the achievement test a second time Jan. 29.

Ross probably would not have come to Westside Prep if hadn't been injured in his junior year at Creighton. "I knew I was passed along in school because I was a good athlete," he says. But when he hurt his knee and required surgery, that lesson really hit home.

No longer of great value to the team, Ross suddenly found himself on academic probation in his fourth year at the school.

"I was supposed to return to Creighton for a fifth year, but I got the worst grade card I ever got," says Ross. "They put me on academic probation. Then I knew I had gotten a free ride for four years. Then everything started coming to me. They told me I couldn't come back to school."

FOR ALMOST FOUR years, Ross took college courses designed to keep him eligible, not to help him obtain a degree. Education courses and classes in philosophy and religion were blended with courses like theory of baseball and theory of basketball "to help balance out the grade point," Ross says.

"If I had a report to turn in, I'd get a book, try to read a chapter or two and write the report by copying some of the book," he says.

In addition, a school secretary would read books for Ross and type up the pertinent points. Ross would submit that as his paper. "I went to class, I did my work to the best of my ability. It really hurts when you want to do something so bad but you just lack the skills."

ROSS, WHO SAYS he was ready to "explode" with frustration when the school denied him another year, says the athletic department offered to help him explore a couple of options.

"I could have gone to Australia to play basketball," he says, "or gone to the police academy. But what good is it if you can't fill out a police report? And if I went to Australia, I'd come back three years later and still be a dummy."

"I want to be looked on as a successful and intelligent person, not just a jock. I want a woman to love me for my mind and the knowledge I have, not for being a super athlete."

Interestingly, it was the athletic director at Creighton who suggested still another option: Westside Prep. "They didn't think I'd have the guts to come," Ross says. "They said I wouldn't last a week."

But after visiting the school last spring and seeking the advice of his family, Ross decided to enroll. Creighton is footing the bill for the tuition.

HE LIVES IN an apartment near the school and does little else after class except read [he recently finished his first book, "Five Smooth Stones"] and play with some of the students, who view him as a big brother.

"Kevin doesn't have a lot of time to fool around," Collins says. "He has a whole life to make up. If Kevin wants to succeed, he can't go to discos. People criticize me. They say Kevin needs a social life. But he can't afford those luxuries."

Nevertheless, Ross is brimming with plans. He wants to take lessons in speech and drama so he can talk comfortably to high school students about his life. He is thinking about playing himself in the television drama, he thinks about one day returning to basketball, and he would like to start other schools like Westside Prep, perhaps with the money he makes from the TV show.

1430 Ross: Plays of Life Most Vital Lessons

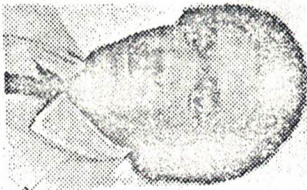
By Robert Dorr

World-Herald Staff Writer

Former Creighton University basketball player Kevin Ross says his decision to return to elementary school to learn to read and write was difficult, but necessary "to learn the plays of life."

In an essay, he wrote: "It is not easy to take the road seldom taken. It was not easy to return to grammar school to get the basic skills that I had missed for 16 years. However, no problem can be solved until it is faced."

When he arrived at Chicago's West-side Preparatory School last fall, tests indicated he was reading and writing at the elementary level despite 16 years of edu-



cation, including four years at Creighton.

One test put his writing at the second-grade level. Creighton officials said other tests indicated Ross' reading and writing, while poor, were a few grades higher.

"Everybody thought he was a dummy," said his teacher, Marva Collins. Now, she said, Ross "is doing very, very well."

She said she read Ross' essay, one of many he has written since enrolling at the private school, before he sent a copy to The World-Herald. "I thought it was good," she said.

In a telephone interview, Ross, 24, said he continues to be enthusiastic about his schooling. He said his self-confidence is increasing and he thinks more clearly.

Mrs. Collins said she has stressed the need for Kevin to improve his reasoning ability "to get him to establish his own opinions." She still tutors him individually on reading and writing, she said.

Ross said there is a 50-50 chance he will return to Creighton at the end of the current school year. He might work toward a degree at another college, he said.

Ross' story has received nationwide attention in newspapers and on television. MGM has decided to make a documentary movie, Mrs. Collins said.

Ross titled his essay "A Modest Proposal." The title comes from an essay written by 18th century British satirist Jonathan Swift. Ross recently read the Swift essay, Mrs. Collins said.

Ross said he wrote the essay "from my heart. This is how I feel."

Mrs. Collins confirmed that Ross wrote it. The thoughts and grammar are his, and it shouldn't come as a surprise that he is capable of writing such an essay, she said.

"I expect a lot — the best — from Kevin. I expect a lot from everybody," she said.

The unedited text of the essay follows:

A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR 1983

by Kevin J. Ross

As the turbulent noise of 1982 dies away, we must begin to think of alternatives for 1983. To repeat the same mistakes is to say that there are no cures for the fetidness of our time.

As a former athlete, I have just one proposal for the betterment of our youth. They must learn early that they cannot conquer the world in a pair of gym shoes.

I feel that sports is emphatically needed in every curriculum. I however, feel that sports must not be given priority over the future survival of a student. One must begin to think of the time when the scoreboard is no longer lit, and the crowds no longer cheer, and we are only as good as the last day that we were on the playing field. The playing field of life is forever, and we must let our children know that we appreciate their every effort to participate in sports, but too, they must be able to participate in life as literate citizens of the world, and not as past sports heroes.

Today's fetid facts must awaken us to the reality that something is drastically wrong with a country who can put men on the moon, a country which is envied by other countries, and most of all a country that is far too powerful to be illiterate. Illiteracy and power simply do not mix.

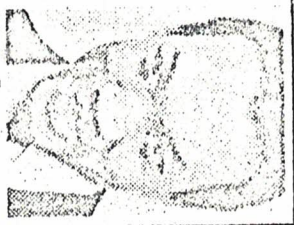
The denouement of what is must be faced with stark reality, and wishing that our children could be academically superior and superior on the academic fields at the same time may simply be the American nightmare rather than the American dream. Alliterative jingles and prettily wrapped packages with decadent goods inside is simply just another way of avoiding fact. Nothing can be solved until it is faced.

It is about time that we all admit that we have paid sports figures such phenomenal figures that all children feel that the way to share the American dream is to become good in sports. The foundation of our nation however, is truly the preparation of our youth, and if we continually make children think that sports is more important than academics then we shall surely all suffer at the hands of our reluctance to act. The same children that ill prepare today will one day lead us.....What then?

VIEWS

PAGE 31

An address by a very special graduate



Kevin
Ross

PERSONAL VIEW

The word "graduate" means to have completed a course of study. You will never, however, finish the challenges of life. You must never see difficulties as insurmountable. You must never be afraid to believe in your own self-worth, since it can only be measured by you.

Much has been given to you by your parents and by the teachers at Westside Preparatory School. Therefore, much will be expected of you.

You must carve your own dreams on shapeless stone. The pursuit of success will demand more of you than the pursuit of failure. As Shakespeare said in "Julius Caesar": "Our fate is not within the stars... it is within ourselves."

Believe in the good and the right. Each time one of you stands for an ideal, or acts to improve your own life and the lives of others, you will send forth a tiny ripple of hope to those who may not dare to hope.

A true education makes people easy to lead but difficult to drive, easy to govern but impossible to enslave.

You must become addicts—addicted to the reality that your skills are not failure-proof. We will never be in the land of the done. Learning and succeeding is a lifetime pursuit.

Each day will bring its new challenges. Some people will call them problems. You must see them as opportunities and not belabor why they happened, but think of solutions.

Alexander Pushkin once said: "I know my power, for me this knowledge is sufficient." Each of you must use yours to eradicate persecution, callousness and tyranny in all its forms.

Westside Preparatory School has been a beacon of hope. When the world saw darkness, Marva Collins saw light. When society drew circles that shut us out, she taught us to design our own circles.

The slaves of the past found their way in the dark. Surely those of us today in the view of the light can do better. We Americans have become complacent, accustomed to "good enough." That is what now has us in such a decadent state. If we continue our present course, trying to dig from underneath our mistakes, we will be pretty much like trying to clean up the San Francisco quake with a toothbrush.

Everything has its price, even success. There are no free rides. There can be no fudging of answers, no easy facades. The heights cannot be attained by flight. Great men work while others sleep.

When others saw flags of failure waving above our heads, Mrs. Collins saw success. We must never negate this faith. We must never let the dream of "I can" and "I will" die.

Life has always marooned the hesitant, but you were taught to be inspired, to etch and carve your own

66 Learning and succeeding is a
lifetime pursuit.

✓
99

statistics. Plato's "Republic" reminds us that "education is cumulative, and it affects the breed." Your breed has been affected for the very best, because the best has been given to you.

All the glorious places in the world have not been taken. The greatest book has never been written. The greatest song has never been composed. The greatest success is yet to be accomplished. Never yield your place in the line. Stand up and shout: "I can, I will, and I shall not retreat until I have accomplished my goal."

Nine months ago my life seemed rather bleak and dismal. I had to begin to wipe out 16 years of bad education. Yet I gained three years in just four short months! I knew I did not want to go through the rest of my life as one of 23 million illiterates. I knew I could afford to fumble on the basketball court, but a faux pas in life could be fatal.

motivators. You made my confidence soar. So tonight I say: "Thanks; you gave me hope and determination." The best brains in the world are in this room. Not to use them to answer the sad calls of our society would be a sin.

People with locked, rusty hearts attempting to force you to sit on the sidelines and catch the crumbs of the mainstream of society will be a recurring theme of your lives. Spend your lives, however, unifying for good, not pacifying your critics.

To be your own agent and not somebody else's advocate is not always popular. But remember, your own conscience must guide your actions.

One thing must be clear: It is easier to tag and label than it is to care and teach. The hypothesis is that students watch too much television, that we don't care, that we are a drug-crazed generation. I say to you, it is the adults who have created our illiterates. It is you who must heal the academic wounds of this world.

I also urge you to give back to others a portion of the rich blessings we have all received during our stay at Westside Prep.

Others will never demand as much of us as teachers have. But you must continually demand much of yourselves. You must become the Roman candles that will ignite others, and you must shoot off sparks to the hopeless.

Michelangelo once walked the streets of Florence with a piece of marble, and he said, "Inside this piece of marble is an angel just dying to get out." I, too, was like that. Inside was a real live person just dying to breathe literacy.

Thank you, Mrs. Collins, for giving me a new lease on life. May each of you have enough success to make you an asset to society. And enough failure to make you avoid complacency. Life is always calling you. Your luck is your own pluck. When society draws a circle to shut you out, drawn your own circle that will shut you in.

You know that envy is ignorance. You know that only in dreams is a ladder thrown. The climbing must be your own.

Kevin Ross is the basketball player who, completed four years of college and came out illiterate. This testimony that he no longer is was adapted from his graduation address.

grads get some towering advice

By Bob Herguth
Sun-Times Columnist

Kevin Ross, 24, stood tall and triumphant as he gave the commencement address to fellow graduates of Marva Collins' Westside Preparatory School.

"Learn, learn and learn some more," the 6-foot-9-inch Ross told his classmates from the seventh and eighth grades Wednesday evening.

"Never cease learning," the former college basketball star said, because then "the acrimonious debate about inner-city students will become as obsolete as covered wagons on the expressway."

The best brains in the world are located right here in this room tonight," he said.

Ross's topic at the crowded graduation ceremony in the Corona Cafe, 501 N. Rush, was "Re-lighting the Candle of Excellence."

He had written the speech himself, and he read it with feeling.

He was wearing a pin-striped suit, a graduation gift from his mother, Opal Ross of Kansas

City, Kan. And he finished to standing applause from pupils and their relatives.

Only last September, Ross had difficulty reading and writing when he arrived at Westside Prep from Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. He had just finished four years at Creighton with no degree or any immediate hope of one.

“Learn, learn and learn some more.”

—Kevin Ross

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He tests out at at the high school senior level in reading and math, and at the sophomore level in language mechanics.

The certificate he received Wednesday evening attested that he had reached these levels.



Kendrick Felder (left) and Nicholas Wells look up to classmate Kevin Ross after the three graduated

Wednesday from Marva Collins' Westside Preparatory School. (Sun-Times Photo by John Keating)

What now? Ross plans to attend Roosevelt University or the University of Illinois at Chicago and get his degree. "It will take a year or two," he said. "If it takes 10, I'm going to do it. It doesn't matter." A TV movie, of his fight for a meaningful education, is planned. And he and Collins are writing a book.

Collins, who sometimes taught

Ross one-on-one, said she hopes he attends college part-time next fall and also works at Westside Prep as a tutor.

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The school is at 4146 W. Chicago. Before giving his speech Wednesday, Ross said he felt "excited. This is the way I was before a basketball game. It's like I was an astronaut and had to jump in my shuttle."

College athlete finally learns to read

By Andy Knott
Chicago Tribune Service

CHICAGO — Kevin Ross, a 24-year-old former college basketball player, will graduate from high school this month for the second time, but this time he will take with him the basic educational skills he never got his first time around in high school — or college.

Ross gained national attention last September when he enrolled at Westside Preparatory School to improve his 11th-grade-level reading skills, despite four years of high school and of college. "The children love him. He is a symbol to the millions in this country who don't have basic skills and believe they can never help themselves," said Marva Collins, who runs the school.

According to results of an achievement test administered early this month, Ross now reads and computes mathematics as well as the average high school senior. On Wednesday, Collins released those results, which show Ross now about six years ahead of last September.

"The progress is amazing," Collins said. "But it is not unusual for a motivated student to progress rapidly. Remember, he has had 16 years of practice."

The testing was conducted by Harvey Gross, director of admissions at Providence-St. Mel High School, who first tested Ross in September and again in January.

The results show his reading skills to be at the national average for high school seniors. In spelling and mathematics, he is one semester behind the national average. He equals sophomores in language mechanics.

"I feel like I have learned a lot," Ross said Wednesday. "I have confidence that I can achieve anything now. I have learned that education is a lifelong pursuit, and I will spend the rest of my life learning."

The story of how Ross wound up at Westside Prep last fall has dismayed many. Ross, a 6-foot-9-inch prep basketball hero from Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Mo., received a

high school diploma and was vigorously recruited by several Midwestern universities.

When he enrolled at Creighton University in Omaha, Ross said that he could not read a restaurant menu.

He played four years at Creighton and claims he attended class regularly. And yet, when he left there in 1982 without graduating, his abysmal reading and writing skills prevented him from writing a personal check. His lack of education might never have been known had it not been for a knee injury that sidelined Ross much of his senior year.

He claims the school attempted to "unload" him by taking his scholarship away and forcing him to drop out because of the injury. He fought the school and stopped hiding his ignorance, he said.

"I realized I was tired of hiding the fact that I could not read," Ross said.

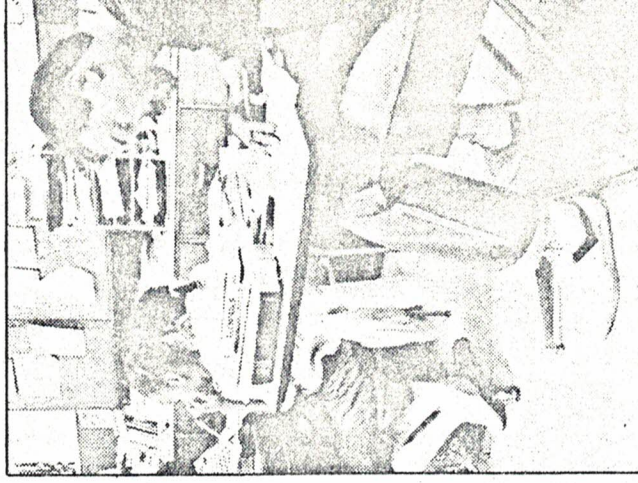
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Creighton officials reacted by sending Ross to Collins and paying his tuition. "But they didn't think I was serious," said Ross, who added that the experience made him bitter at first. "But I knew I must show them. I was never embarrassed. The best revenge is to achieve."

His future appears much brighter than it was last fall. Ross said he is contemplating enrolling this fall at the University of Illinois at Chicago to finish his degree. He will support himself from money he received for the rights to his life story, which may be made into a movie, he said. Ross also hopes to play professional basketball.

May 25th is graduation day at Westside, and Ross will give the commencement address.

"It is fitting," Collins said.



KEVIN ROSS, seen last year with junior high class, has now advanced to the equivalent of a high school senior.

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BACONS

Trailblazing or just hard work?

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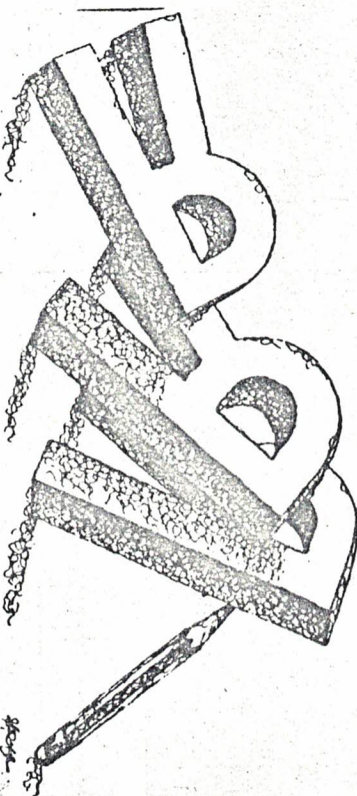
MARVA COLLINS, the last time we looked, was "in" again.

The reputation of the Chicago teacher of the "underprivileged" has swung wildly. In the mid-Seventies, when her private, shoestring school began attracting attention — primarily because her pupils actually learned — she was hailed as a new force in education: the high priestess of "back to basics." She was considered for U.S. secretary of education. Her "unorthodox" statements on the problems in public education caught up with her a few years later, however, and both her work and her theories were challenged. She used public funds and she was little more than a drill sergeant, claimed her detractors. Even some of her school's test scores were called into question.

Two years ago the anti-Collins campaign was at its height; magazines and newspapers were falling all over themselves pointing out the "flaws" in the Collins method. Now her defenders are mounting a counterattack on her detractors; and, once

again, she is being over-praised, perhaps because she has often been over-criticized.

Roanoke Times
4/9/83



rent theories about what makes Johnny learn. But her results speak for themselves.

The latest encomium, in the The American Spectator, compares her with Maria Montessori, the Italian educator. But at the center of all the controversy is a determined woman who loves to teach, not an educational revolutionary. Her methods — concentration on basic skills wedded to an uncanny ability to make her students feel their individual worth and potential — may well clash with some curriculum. She is unorthodox only to the extent that she adheres to methods that were broadly applied and broadly accepted a century ago, before the educational theorists swept the field. Those methods are based on common sense and hard work; and more and more parents are beginning to realize that it is the teacher — dedicated and demanding — who is the key to education.

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P-I EDITORIALS *Seattle*
Post
Urban League's
May 2, 1983
timely speaker

The Seattle Urban League's choice of speaker, Marva Collins, for its annual dinner this week was a master-stroke of timing, coming as it did in the immediate aftermath of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's scathing report on America's schools.

Collins had taught for 14 years in a Chicago elementary school when, in 1975, she got fed up with a daily diet of disinterested and sometimes stoned teachers dishing out what she considered junk education to unchallenged children. It was then she opened her alternative West-side Preparatory School in an upstairs room of her home. Since then the success of her teaching methods have received widespread national attention and acclaim.

She told her Seattle audience many of the nation's school systems continue to offer the lowest common denominator of educational mediocrity, through pre-packaged lesson plans and simplistic textbooks whose chief contents are large pictures. Meanwhile, she argued, the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic continue to recede in classroom significance. Rather than have children use their brains learning multiplication tables, they are given automatic calculators.

"We are now introducing illiterates to computers," she said, noting that such prestigious seats of higher learning as Yale, Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley had been forced to introduce remedial reading classes for some entering freshmen.

Collins' prescription for educational change in many ways echoes the national commission's recommendations for a return to basics. Two Collins comments, in particular, regarding the role of teachers, deserve thoughtful attention:

"Things do not teach, people teach" . . . and "dull teachers produce dull students."

grads get some towering advice

By Bob Herguth
Sun-Times Columnist

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Chicago

Chicago Tribune Thursday, May 12, 1983



Marva Collins and Kevin Ross, former college basketball player, discuss his achievement-test scores that show him gaining six years' worth of academic skills since he enrolled in Collins'

Westside Prep school in September. Ross, 24, left college with reading skills so poor that he was unable to write a personal check. "The best revenge is to achieve," he now says.

'Best revenge is to achieve' Ex-collegian finally learns how to spell, read

By Andy Knott

KEVIN ROSS, a 24-year-old former college basketball player, will graduate from high school this month for the second time, but this time he will take with him the basic educational skills he never got his first time around in high school—or college.

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SCORECARD

COLLEGE ATHLETICS III

Now that we've discussed college athletes 1) who can't read and 2) who get run off by their coaches, we move on to the subject of Kevin Ross, who was still virtually unable to read or write after playing center and forward for Creighton's basketball team for four years and who claims that in his senior year he had to resist the efforts of Coach Willis Reed, who was disappointed in his play, to hound him into quitting the team.

Belatedly accepting its responsibility for Ross's academic failings, Creighton in effect extended his scholarship for a fifth year by paying his tuition at Westside Prep in Chicago, an innovative private school with a reputation for helping youngsters overcome educational deficiencies. After he enrolled at Westside last September, photos of the 6' 9", 23-year-old Ross in a classroom with seventh-graders attracted national attention, as did the news that he'd tested at the second-grade level in reading.

The Ross story now has an almost happy ending. On May 25 Ross will graduate from Westside Prep, and he'll take with him academic skills he failed to acquire either in high school in Kansas City, Kans., where he received a diploma, or at

continued

SCORECARD *continued*

Creighton, where he loaded up on such courses as Theory of Track and Field, Squad Participation (basketball), Introductory Ceramics, Photography and First Aid. A recent test revealed Ross's reading skills now to be at the national average for high school seniors, and he says proudly, "I know about Plato's *Republic* now. I didn't know who Plato was when I came here."

Ross's dramatic academic improvement at Westside demonstrates, as does the progress of some of the athletes in Iowa State's remedial program, that colleges could do a far better job of providing a real education to the disadvantaged athletes they lure onto their campuses. It also underscores the need to modify the NCAA's recently enacted Proposal 48, which starting in 1986 will make minimum scores on standardized tests a condition of academic eligibility. Such minimums would throw the baby out with the bath water, barring eligibility—and probably as a practical matter, the awarding of athletic scholarships—to many academically deficient students who need only the proper opportunity and appropriate catch-up help to succeed in the classroom.

Instead of Proposal 48, the NCAA should adopt and *enforce* proposals that will require its member schools to educate those athletes they now only exploit. Then we wouldn't have to qualify occasions such as Ross's graduation as being "almost" happy. Ross says he's considering returning to college to pursue a degree in earnest—he's thinking about the University of Illinois-Chicago or Roosevelt University—and he pronounces himself pleased with his academic turnaround, saying, "Creighton labeled me 'rejected,' and I turned it over, and I put 'accepted.' " But he also says, "This is no time for me to celebrate because I know there are a lot of people out there like I was." Ross will have an opportunity to expand on this theme on graduation day at Westside Prep. He's scheduled to give the commencement address.

1420 Blame the teachers, not the schoolchildren

May 16, 1983

It will take superteachers, like Marva Collins,
to bring high standards back to the classroom

By Rita Kramer

Los Angeles Herald

In the fall of 1975, after 14 years of teaching, 12 of them in the Chicago public schools, Marva Collins opened a small private school (four pupils to begin with, one of them her own daughter) in a donated basement room in Chicago's run-down Garfield Park, the neighborhood where she lived and had been teaching. She made use of books salvaged from the trash bins of the local public school and a salary provided by the government-funded Alternative Schools Network. Within months, enrollment had tripled and her previously "unteachable" or "learning disabled" pupils all learned to read, increased their verbal and math comprehension, and went on to read at increasingly higher levels. Their attitude toward school — and toward themselves — had changed.

At the end of that first year, she decided to take over the school herself, and moved it into her own home, changing its name to Westside Preparatory School. Again, she scrounged furniture, materials, books. She used her own pension money, and her husband contributed the labor that made a classroom out of part of their

apartment. Her success in teaching previously backward and unruly children got around. More parents brought their children, and local press reports were followed by national publicity about the one-room school in which so much was being accomplished by means of so little but one woman's dedicated efforts.

In the spring of 1977, Marva Collins sent a letter to a Chicago Sun-Times columnist who had written about suburban high school students who didn't know who Shakespeare was or anything about his works and invited him to visit Westside Prep. His story on the school, including some of the children's compositions on Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Aesop, and Hinduism, was syndicated to newspapers around the country. And Marva Collins has been in the spotlight ever since. As journalist (and co-author of Collins' book, "Marva Collins' Way") Civia Tamarin puts it, "Readers were touched by the story of children who had been discarded as 'unteachable' climbing to superior achievement in a school that was always short of books, paper, pencils and even chalk."

As millions of magazine and newspaper readers and television viewers know by now, Collins' classroom technique was to begin with a discussion of a book the children had read, writing each new word on the blackboard and breaking it down into its phonetic components and discussing its meaning, letting the discussion roam over matters of history, geography, poetry, botany, while making sure the children mastered new words and added them to their vocabulary as they added ideas to their experience. ("The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another.") All the while she would be encouraging and prodding them, and holding forth on the value of learning as the key to success in life.

Instruction was always individualized; the day's "lesson plan" grew out of the questions asked that day about what had been read by the children. And she was constantly on her feet, checking each one's work, making comments, giving help. She insisted on order and discipline in the classroom. And she succeeded in gaining her pupils' respect both for herself and for the learning she was helping them acquire.

Rejecting the look-say method in which children associate words with pictures and read the same simple words and sentences over and over until they recognize them, she taught phonics, in which children learn to sound out the vowel and consonant sounds that are part of all words, and in place of the "Look, Jace" readers she

I chose those stories because they teach values and morals and lessons about life. Fairy tales and fables allow children to put things in perspective — greed, trouble, happiness, meanness, and joy. After reading those stories you have something to think over and discuss. More than anything, I wanted my students to be excited about reading. I wanted them to understand that reading is not an exercise in memorizing words but a way to bring ideas to light.

The emphasis on "relevance," which limits reading to stories about lives like their own in worlds they already know, "undermines the very purpose of an education. It doesn't expand the children's horizons or encourage inventiveness and curiosity. Instead, it limits perspective to the grim scenes they see every day of their lives. Children do not need to read stories that teach 'street smarts.' They learn enough on their own. What they need are character-building stories. They need to read for values, morality and universal truths." And so she taught classical literature rather than the books churned out by publishers today as "young people's books."

She assigned reading from Plato, Homer, Tolstoy and Emerson to children whose reading had begun only months before, sounding out the new words, talking about the ideas and always, always relating those ideas to the chil-

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dren's own future lives. Curiosity, ambition and self-control were the aims of her method, and if her pupils did not always understand the finer points of philosophy or poetry, as her critics claim, they were familiarizing themselves with a world of heroes engaged in adventures of ideas and establishing a sense of values that might send them back to these same texts years later.

Over the years, I have come to believe that some of the problems plaguing modern education are the result of the emphasis placed on 'progressive' teaching methods. In an effort to follow John Dewey's notion of a student-centered rather than subject-centered approach to learning, schools have too often sacrificed subject matter, being more concerned with how they taught than what they taught. . . . It is a mistake to assume that in order to stimulate creativity and critical thinking you must rule out any learning by rote. Memorization is the only way to teach such things as phonics, grammar, spelling and multiplication tables.

I'd ask the children, "How are you going to run a corporation if you can't run yourself?" . . . I didn't hesitate to discuss crime in the ghetto, drugs, prison or teen-age pregnancy. I told them welfare is just another form of slavery. . . . I did not teach black history as a subject apart from American history, emphasize black heroes over white, or preach black consciousness rather than a sense of the larger society.

She told her pupils, "I don't want to hear any jive talk in here or any of this stuff about black English. You must not just think of yourselves as black children or ghetto children. You must become citizens of the world, like Socrates." As she put it, "Instead of teaching black pride I taught my children self-pride." It was what she had brought with her from her middle-class Alabama upbringing, and what she found in such short supply in the urban slums of the North.

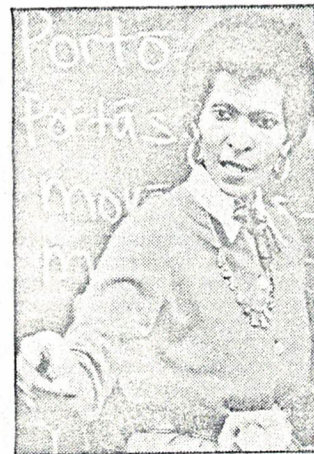
I am convinced that the real solution is education. We have to teach children self-reliance and self-respect. We have to teach them the importance of learning, of developing skills, of doing for themselves. I am always reminding my students that, if you give a man a fish, he will eat for only a day. If you teach him how to fish, he will feed himself for a lifetime.

Co-author Tamarkin, who spent time in the classroom watching Collins teach, describes her working the audience like an entertainer, an old-time preacher, giver of love as well as learning. She functions, in fact, like the ideal parent, tender and tough, uniting affection and discipline in the same source, so that the child must accept the one in order to enjoy the other.

When one of the parents of a pupil at Westside Prep was asked on "60 Minutes," "Do you think what happens here in Mrs. Collins's school could be made to happen on a grand scale in the public schools?" she replied, "Only if you had a grand scale of Marva Collinses." On the same program, she herself said she never claimed to be a miracle-worker: "Anyone can do it who's willing to walk from

desk to desk and really work at it from dawn to dusk."

Marva Collins' emphasis on traditional methods of instruction and readings in the classics, on the importance of hard work and high expectations, could have been forgiven. Even an overzealous ego or an abrasive personality could have been forgiven. Her scorn for the sacred vows of the contemporary education world could not. Along the way to national recognition she had said things like, "It was my school and I felt the public had no



Marva Collins teaching this year.

Marva Collins offended black leaders by stating that black children's educational needs were no different from those of other children. She offended organized professionals by suggesting that individual teachers if they worked hard enough and cared enough could turn around the failing pupil.

right to tell me how to run it. That especially meant government bureaucrats and special interest groups pushing minority rights." She told CBS's Morley Safer, "Buildings do not teach, people do," and added, "I would hate to think a union would have to protect my job. I have too much pride."

She had no use for the proliferation of specialists like curriculum facilitators, or programs like those in "black English" or "black studies," for the idea that a black child must be taught by a black teacher in order to have a "role model," or retain the language of the streets in order not to damage his "identity." And she had no use

for busing, pointing out that ineffective teachers and low-achieving pupils can be found everywhere. "Miseducation is not a function of a child's race or neighborhood but of the teaching methods he or she is exposed to from kindergarten on."

The backlash was inevitable. She had offended the black leadership by stating that black children's educational needs were no different from those of other children, and were a matter of expectations, hard work and discipline rather than special schools and special courses, that individual initiative and not group advantage was the answer to their plight.

She had offended organized professionals in the teaching world by suggesting that individual teachers if they worked hard enough and cared enough could strike the spark that would turn around the failing pupil, teach the unteachable to value learning.

She offended the whole spectrum of special-interest groups by suggesting that the schools were failing — not because they were not doing what only the families could do, not because they were not being used to change society forcibly enough or fast enough, but because they were not doing what they could indeed be expected to do — confront individual students with the challenge of a demanding teacher, love with learning and equipped with disciplinary sanctions. From tactful, she took on the whole educational establishment when she criticized "the country's schools across the country mislabeled children, simplified textbooks, diluted curricula, created special curricula for 'derprivileged' children." A lot of careers, which means a lot of money and a lot of prestige, were called into question by the fact that pounding away at basic skills and old-fashioned exhortation could make a difference in the lives of children greater than anything money could buy. Legislation could provide. She odds with those who blame the system as much as with those who blame the victim.

Despite what her critics have been able to dredge up against the issue in the Marva Collins controversy isn't Collins' personality or even her past funding — the truth or falsity of what she said about schooling. And what she was saying about elementary schools is no different from what James Coleman says in his latest report on the schools: that while family background and parental expectations are crucial determinants of who will learn how much, private and parochial schools do better than public schools — even when children from similar homes are bused to them — because they impose stricter discipline and demand more in the way of academic performance, and even public schools, when they enforce attendance, assign homework, and insist on discipline in the classroom, reach significant higher levels of student achievement. This is something most of the parents have long ago figured out for themselves, but it is not always official, wrapped in statistics and delivered to the door by the educators. Not teacher credentials but teacher commitment, good buildings, facilities, audio-visuals and other fancy aids — i.e., money — but hard work and high standards make all the difference.

Grading the state of education in America today

Can't we get to the heart of the matter?

By Alan W. Bock

We'll probably see a flurry of media attention and purported analysis in the wake of the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education that was released last week. It's unlikely that much of the discussion will get to the heart of the matter.

As is often the case, H.L. Menckin years ago was more relevant to the present than most current commentators can hope to be, and his commentary itself offers a clue to the paucity of good thinking. His 1908 book on Nietzsche had the following comments on education:

"Education, as everyone knows, has two main objects: to impart knowledge and to implant culture. It is the object of a teacher, first of all, to bring before his pupil as many concrete facts about the universe — the fruit of long ages of inquiry and experience — as the latter may be capable of absorbing in the time available. After that, it is the teacher's aim to make his pupil's habits of mind sane, healthy and manly, and his whole outlook upon life that of a being conscious of his efficiency and eager and able to solve new problems as they arise."

"The educated man, in a word, is one who knows a great deal more than the average man and is constantly increasing this area of knowledge, in a sensible, orderly, logical fashion, one who is wary of sophistry and leans automatically and almost instinctively toward clear thinking."

"Such is the purpose of education, in its ideal aspect. As we observe the science of teaching in actual practice, we find that it often fails utterly to attain this end. The concrete facts that a student learns at the average school are few and unconnected, and instead of being led into habits of independent thinking, he is trained to accept authority. When he takes his degree, it is usually no more than a sign that he has joined the herd."

The very language of the report last week that was supposed to criticize modern education is an indicator of the low esteem in which true education — helping individual people to become clear-thinking, capable, independent people open to culture — is held.

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Instead of thinking, we get media-wise slogans like "unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament" and "a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people," and, most outrageously, "if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

Those are cute phrases well calculated to catch the attention of headline writers and those who write teasers for the evening news, but they betray more of the teaser mentality than profound thought. Insofar as they betray thought at all, what can be inferred from them, and from most of the discussion that has surrounded the release of the report, is downright alarming.

The tone of the report and of most of those who have discussed that report is concerned about whether, with our mediocre educational system, America will be able to compete in the high-tech world of tomorrow. The implication is that the "educational" system should mass-produce technically competent cogs in the productive machinery rather than independent, thinking individuals.

What "solutions" does the commission offer? The usual. Longer school days, more school days per year, more discipline and homework, more attention to math and science. The kind of "education" contemplated by such recommendations is a travesty on the word itself.

Education is derived from the Latin words "e" and "ducare," meaning (roughly) "to draw out" or "to help individuals reach the potential that lies within them. When you're talking longer hours and more days, you're talking about something to be drilled into or imposed (inflicted?) on people. That may be training or it may be indoctrination. It isn't education."

The compilers of the report spend a lot of ink despairing over the future of the nation. They seem less concerned about the future of the actual individuals so ill-served by educational mediocrity, the daily tragedies of functional illiteracy or (perhaps more important) the person who did well in school by bioning up for exams

and has acceptable grammar, but doesn't know the difference between mousing slo-gans and thinking, who has never been exposed to the rich tradition of inquiry and thought that is our heritage.

Of course the commission was inquiring into "public" education. An institution financed by the state will naturally be designed to produce the kind of people who are useful to the state — people who have been trained to stand in lines, obey orders, respect "duly constituted authority," confine their original thinking to technical improvements, and perform the tasks deemed useful to the rulers with a fair degree of efficiency and a minimum of complaining.

The commission's complaints boiled down to whining that the products at the end of the assembly line didn't have the competence required to be efficient servants of the designs desired by society's masters.

I have a suspicion that the coming high-tech, service society everyone is predicting so facetiously may require a much more fundamental rethinking of what we mean by education than is dreamt of in government commissions.

Private, individualist innovators like Maria Montessori and Marva Collins in Chicago have demonstrated that a combination of individual attention, high expectations, loving discipline and enthusiasm can bring certified "low achievers" in deprived minority groups to a level of achievement far above the mass-man resisters of authority turned out by the public schools. We may need those insights.

It may be that children can learn what they really need — to read, write, figure and believe in themselves — in just a few years, maybe a few months, in circumstances far different from standard classrooms. There may be literally dozens of ways the essentials can be imparted, and we might do well to start ridding ourselves of the myth that spending hours and years in a classroom absorbing respect for authority is the only or the best way to reach the goal of independent, inquiring, adaptable and competent individuals.

Bock is a Register editorial writer.

Easy schools ruin the kids, expert argues

By Darrell Glover
P-I Reporter

America's schoolchildren have become "robotized idiots" who can't read or write, says the founder of the nationally publicized Westside Preparatory School in Chicago.

Recent changes in our educational system have made it easier for both students and teachers, and as a consequence "our children have little more to do than check true or false answers," Marva Nattles Collins said.

Collins, the guest speaker Thursday at the 53rd annual dinner meeting of the Seattle Urban League at the Sheraton Hotel, argued that:

"To continue to travel our present course of consistency (in education) is mental suicide. Until there are changes in our present system, our children will never reach their true potential."

'Admit defeat'

This generation of students will differ from all others because today's students "will be less educated than their parents," she said.

Children watch too much television because they can't read, Collins said, and this development has helped create an epidemic of teenage alcoholics and suicides.

More studies won't solve the educational problem, she said.

"We must admit defeat in education and begin anew," Collins said. "All of us will suffer from our reluctance to act."

Classrooms must become workshops again, she said, and "we must make the curriculum in our schools fit the needs of our children."

If children could learn to read by tackling difficult passages from the Bible 50 years ago, "what then is our excuse today?" she asked.

Unable to punctuate

First-grade readers contained more than 870 different words several years ago, Collins said, but today they contain only 72 words. "That's progress?"

The decline in test scores, she caused, in part, because students can't read the tests, Collins said. Students are unable to punctuate because they are not taught how to write.

Teachers must inspire students and return to using books that teach determination and courage, she said. "In teaching children to read we must teach them to learn to love to read."

If books are easy to read "they



Marva Collins, who runs a private school, says books that are easy to read "should be burned."

should be burned," Collins said, noting there are no easy methods to teaching and learning.

Dull teachers beget dull students, Collins said. Teachers must create an atmosphere of learning, and they must motivate and teach children not to be afraid to make mistakes or "express their latent thoughts."

Has own school

Current teaching methods and curriculum in the nation's schools have been devised by "experts who have never taught a class in their lives," said Collins.

Fed up with the school system in Chicago, Collins opened her own school in 1975. The school has grown to more than 200 students. Her story was made into a television movie.

"Our 4-year-olds learn to read by Christmas," Collins said. Fifth and sixth graders in the school take, among other courses, Latin, geography and reading, she said, and "each must write daily."

The success of the school has promoted visits from more than 2,000 educators from the United States and eight other countries, Collins said.

There are no hall guards in the school, no policemen have ever visited the school, and there is no graffiti on the walls, she said.

Children in the school "don't believe in can't, impossible or might have been," Collins said.