

Preface

I write this brief preface as three American astronauts streak home from the moon in their Apollo 17 spacecraft. This flight portends to be the last moon voyage for the United States during this decade and perhaps this century. Apollo 17 represents the demise of a special fantasy that has nurtured the members of this society for some years now. Succinctly, in spite of the ills and turmoil in America, we have had the grandeur and daring of the space missions to reaffirm the uniqueness of ourselves as a people. But with this latest fiery launch went the last of the spectacular diversions from the national realities of politicians being shot, of fifty thousand lives lost in jungles halfway around the globe, of babies dying from malnutrition, of heroin spreading beyond the confines of the contained black community, of the powerless chafing under the continued refusal of the powerful to peacefully grant them admission—the last illusion of America as a peace-loving, nonaggressive, and tolerant society. We are up against the wall. We now can no longer turn to the moon to find America.

This book describes what has happened to one group of young black children in an urban school during the Age of Apollo. The narrative of their school experience, individually and collectively, begins with their

first day of kindergarten and continues through to their second grade Christmas party. During these few brief years, white America had given up on the ideals of Camelot and the Great Society to opt for a period of benign neglect. Either way, though, it did not seem to matter much to the children. They continued to attend an all-black school inside a black community persistently and doggedly contained by surrounding whites. Even beyond the realities of racism, their education was influenced by the pervasive impact of schools in perpetuating the existing inequalities of American society—whether those inequalities be in the white or black community. What is to follow, then, is an account of how one school began to shape the lives and options of one group of black children, and how the children responded at different times with compliance, defiance, or simple withdrawal.

The data for this study were gathered in St. Louis between September 1967 and January 1970. The endeavor was funded by a grant (No. 6–2771) to the Social Science Institute of Washington University by the United States Office of Education. A much earlier draft of this book served as my doctoral dissertation, entitled “The Socialization of the Ghetto Child into the Urban School System,” which I completed under Dr. Helen P. Gouldner. The larger research project, of which I am reporting one aspect, was begun by Professor Jules Henry and remained under his direction until his death. It was thereafter carried on by Irving Louis Horowitz and David Pittman and finally brought to fruition by John Bennett and Helen Gouldner. All of these principal investigators have left their mark on this study. In addition, I profited from the contributions and criticisms of David Carpenter, Lee Rainwater, and George Rawick. I would also acknowledge my fellow graduate students, Steven Jones, Marco Pardi, Patricia Roberts (deceased), and Carol Talbert, who participated in other aspects of the larger project.

Parts of the data presented here have appeared previously in the *Harvard Educational Review*, *Journal of Higher Education*, *Phylon*, and *Urban Education*, and in my own edited volume, *Restructuring American Education* (Transaction Books, 1972). I am grateful for consent to

include it here. Marjorie Lundell, Roslyn MacDonald, and Anne Morris have all borne the brunt of typing on the several drafts. Finally, the debt of gratitude to my intellectual compatriot and wife, Marilee, is of a special order.