

"WE GOTTA GET SOME LEGISLATION GOING ON OPEN-CUT MINING BEFORE THIS WHOLE PLACE LOOKS LIKE AN EARTH-SCAPE!"

# Grim solace: Academic test scores are declining all over the country

By B. Bruce-Briggs  
In the Wall Street Journal  
If you have been concerned about the quality of public education in your community, you can take some grim solace from the prospect that, with very few exceptions, schools have been deteriorating everywhere.

A Hudson Institute team headed by Frank E. Armbruster painstakingly assembled available pupil achievement test scores from throughout the nation and found an almost unrelieved picture of decline in scholastic performance, quite unrelated to economic background, race, or geographic location.

The decline of college boards scores has been well publicized, but a similar downward trend in almost all achievement tests has not been noticed. The materials used for the Hudson study titled "The U.S. Primary and Secondary" were tests of pupils' ability to read, write, and perform fundamental mathematics, administered to huge numbers of students over several years. It can be argued that any sort of achievement tests are at best an imperfect measure of what students learn, a problem Hudson solves by disregarding the content of tests and merely comparing results for the same test over time. If the tests are flawed, there is no reason to believe they were more imperfect in a later than in an earlier year. And whatever are their weaknesses, the achievement tests are the best objective measure of scholastic proficiency we have available.

**Alarming Examples**  
Analysis of these tests is a laborious business, requiring

considerable expertise or experience, which makes for difficult reading for a layman. But here are a few examples: The median or middle ninth grade New York State student in 1973 scored 41 on a reading test where the median score was 50 in 1966. For the math test the drop was from 50 to 39. Tenth grade Ohio students fell from 27.0 to 25.2 in a math test between 1968 and 1972.

Educators will complain that evaluating schools by the criteria of tests of reading and counting is grossly inadequate. They are educating "the whole child," including immeasurable talents and qualities, to which Mr. Armbruster replies, in effect, if you are doing better at what can be measured, why do you think you are doing better at what cannot be measured?

What are we to blame for this miserable performance during a period when teacher-student ratios have been dropping, teachers have been better educated and better paid, generously equipped new buildings have been built, and expenditures per student have nearly doubled in constant dollars? Educators typically attribute poor achievement to environmental factors, maintaining that what happens in the schoolroom is inconsequential in dealing with the negative consequences of disadvantaged family background and adverse social conditions — lack of jobs, poor housing, racism, etc. Mr. Armbruster refutes this theory in several ways: he finds that test results have declined in districts where there has been little or no racial change.

On the other side, he points to

West Virginia where scores have held up among its poverty-stricken blacks and hillbillies despite the huge emigration of the most motivated families to the industrial Midwest.

But Mr. Armbruster's most fascinating section is a historical chapter on the social conditions of yesterday. He reminds us of how terrible were the slums of the past, how poor, ignorant, and unmotivated were the parents. Millions of students entered the schools without a glimmering of English. According to "environmentalist theory, these unwashed immigrant children were unteachable; yet they were taught. Mr. Armbruster will grant that today's slums are worse in only one way — the "permissiveness" of indigence, promiscuity, violence, and crime, which also penetrates the schools. In former times, "slum habits, behavior and language were left at the schoolyard gate."

The Hudson study lays the blame for scholastic failure directly on the educators. Mr. Armbruster broadly implies that teachers are lazy — for example, they no longer require as much homework because it is too much work to correct it. "Rap sessions" are much easier than prepared lessons. He is particularly concerned about the younger teachers, believing them to be less likely to be experienced and motivated than their predecessors.

The administrators come in for some knocks, too. It is argued that declining student-teacher ratios are somewhat specious because they merely

reflect the introduction of a replacement teacher (to teach finger painting or "Frere Jacques") while the regular teacher is having coffee in the lounge.

**Gimmicky and 'Innovations'**  
Another reason for the academic debacle is laid out in sections labeled "Gimmicky" and "The Attitudes of Recent, Fashionable Writers, Administrators, and Educators on Some Educational-Social Aspects of Schools," where Mr. Armbruster lays into team teaching, busing, automatic promotion, and other inept "innovations" and then lambasts ethnic studies, black English, and "relevant" courses apparently intended to disillusion students from the legitimacy of standards, authority, and American institutions.

What is to be done? Mr. Armbruster holds that education is too important to be left to the educators. He would rather heed the judgment of American parents, and presents a battery of poll data showing overwhelming public support for teaching basic reading skills and respect for law and authority, for stricter school discipline, for more accountability by administrators and teachers, for paying teachers on the basis of performance, against teacher tenure, against busing for racial integration, and against student privileges.

However much they may reflect common sense, Mr. Armbruster's explanations are debatable and his prescriptions are necessarily speculative, but the fact of declining academic performance is unchallengeable.

## Editorials Our Opinions

### Proposed amendments have problems

THE COALITION for Political Honesty's attempt to get its three proposed constitutional amendments on the ballot in November had problems from the outset, but the effort already has been worthwhile.

Coalition Chairman Patrick Quinn has vowed to appeal this decision to the Illinois Supreme Court, meaning that they still have a chance to be on the ballot.

They are sworn into office. Another would prohibit legislators from voting on bills in which they have a personal or financial interest.

The third would prohibit double dipping, the practice of allowing legislators to be on two governmental pay rolls at the same time.

Although the two-year pay prohibition is reasonably clear cut, it is unnecessary. Largely because of the coalition's activity on behalf of its amendment addressing the issue, the legislature approved a bill this year accomplishing the same purpose. And this prohibition is more proper in the form of a state statute than as a constitutional provision.

The other two proposals as they were drawn have problems. They should not be enacted in their current form, particularly as constitutional amendments.

Judge Cohen said that "to deny other income to a public servant during that member's entire term in the General Assembly, but to allow others to draw income from their private professional practice, business, farm... is patently unconstitutional."

Although that is not as clear to us as it is to Judge Cohen, his interpretation of the double-dipping proposal does indicate its weakness. The issue could be better handled in a statute.

### Buckley can throw hat in, but we hope his aim is bad

NO DOUBT it's many a young person's ambition to be President or at least a candidate for the office.

The weight of the evidence suggests Sen. Buckley is trying to bring out an element of the Seventh Cavalry to rescue Mr. Reagan in the final scene.

To announce for an office for no other reason than to deadlock a parliamentary body is a terribly negative approach to politics and public service.

We're aware this has happened in the past. But in almost all other instances, the minority candidate — someone, say, like Robert M. LaFollette — had a serious position or regional interest to put before the convention.

Sen. Buckley's basic positions are more than adequately represented not only by Mr. Reagan but, for the most part, by President Ford.

Other than the advance pay issue, the General Assembly has refused to deal adequately with the problems the proposed amendments address.

If the Supreme Court refuses to overturn Judge Cohen's ruling, the coalition should not abandon the effort on behalf of its objectives.

Democratic cohorts, who helped nominate him to run for governor, played a major role in the process that killed it.

So now we have Sen. James Buckley of New York preparing himself to put his name before Republican delegates next week in Kansas City.

Gov. Reagan and William Buckley admire each other with almost the same fervor with which they admire themselves. Sen. Buckley's native conservatism may go even further to the right than that of Sen. Barry Goldwater.

Gov. Reagan believes his strength will grow on subsequent ballots if he can deny President Ford a victory on the first ballot. Maybe and maybe not.

Obviously, all people over the age of 35 have the right to run for President. That includes Sen. Buckley. And we're tempted to say something like the more the merrier except for one thing — the reason offered for Sen. Buckley's possible "bid."

There are a lot of different theories on why this is so — some say that employers are paying for educational credentials or that those who stay in school longer are already from advantaged backgrounds or that those who get more schooling are brighter and more motivated to succeed.

Whatever the reason, the relationship between years of schooling and subsequent income is there.

This does not mean obviously, that everyone with the same number of years of schooling will earn the same amount of money. Schooling is no guarantee of success or a good job, but it does seem to be increasingly necessary for getting ahead occupationally.

Because this relationship between education and occupational success exists, efforts to improve the status of blacks have included programs to increase college enrollment of blacks. Certainly, if blacks are to play an equal role of leadership in the nation's government and economy, it is important to have a large pool of college-educated blacks.

Like his brother, William the Author, Sen. Buckley possesses a flowing eloquence. Again, like his brother, Sen. Buckley can be terribly disingenuous.

Sen. Buckley says his only purpose is to deadlock the convention on the first ballot to allow all the delegates to vote their conscience later on.

All sorts of theories are being offered about whether this would help more the presidential ambitions of former California Gov. Ronald Reagan or President Ford. Or whether his presence would make any difference one way or the other.

During the last three years, there have been conflicting reports about whether these efforts have succeeded or not. A steady growth since 1965 in the number of black college students was interrupted in 1973, when there was an unexpected drop reported by the Census Bureau in its annual survey of school enrollment. This decline was well-publicized, because of concern that an important trend had been stopped or reversed.

However, the subsequent increases in blacks' college enrollment in 1974 and again in 1975 have received little attention.

On the contrary, news reports have repeatedly (and inaccurately) declared during the last year that "fewer blacks are now getting into college" and that blacks are "falling behind in college enrollment." The census survey for 1975, which shows significant black gains, has received virtually no press coverage since it was released some weeks ago.

According to the Census Bureau, the decline in 1973 was a one-year phenomenon. In 1974, blacks' college enrollment jumped by nearly 20 per cent, and again last fall grew by 16

per cent over the previous year.

### Five-year plate bill's demise a mystery

OBSERVERS of government who expect legislation to be routinely approved when compromises are made and key individuals of both parties announce their support should be intrigued by what happened to a five-year license plate bill in the Illinois Senate this year.

Sen. William Harris, the Republican nominee to replace Mr. Howlett, and Treasurer Alan Dixon, the Democratic nominee, also both purportedly favored the bill.

The House passed it with little fanfare. But when it arrived in the Senate, what seemed to be one of the most popular proposals to hit the legislature since the last pay raise for members twisted slowly in the wind and died from mysterious causes.

First the bill stalled in the Senate Transportation Committee because its Senate sponsor, Sen. Charles Chew, D-Chicago, went globe trotting with heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali.

With time running out in the session, the measure was taken from Mr. Chew's sponsorship by some questionable parliamentary procedure suggesting some interest in passing the bill.

But then Sen. LeRoy Lemke, D-Chicago, who may or may not have been a front for unseen and publicly silent opponents of the bill, introduced an amendment that required all licensed drivers to prove they have liability insurance before they could get license plates.

Mr. Harris, who was in the Senate when all of this was going on, says he doesn't know who killed the bill or why.

Mr. Howlett says his support of it was firm even though his

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### Noise law was enforced equally

Editor, Southern Illinoisan: I think someone needs to remind the religious people who seem to be upset by the arrest of the two preachers in Carbondale that this is a free country.

No one forced anyone to visit the massage parlors, which a group of so called religious people forced out of Carbondale. These same people brought their children down to South Illinois Avenue when streaking was popular and said, "Isn't that shameful?" Why didn't they keep their children home — they knew what was going to happen.

Getting back to the arrest of the two preachers, the Carbondale police received many complaints about the loud speakers, as they did about the loud music downtown, their service.

A good police department enforces the law equally, which the Carbondale police did. I'm afraid that most people only wish to see the law enforced on the other guy and not themselves.

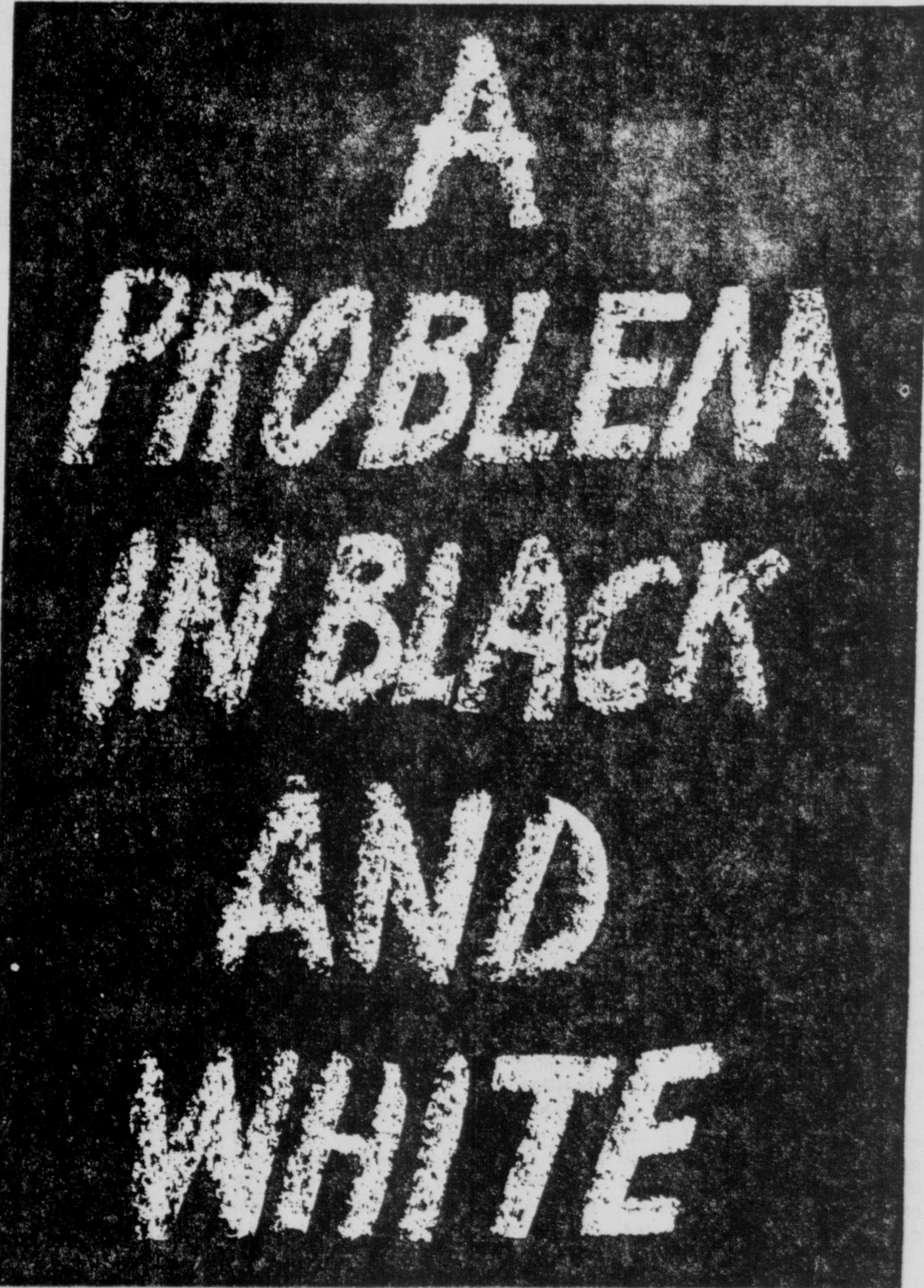
For all the problems that the city officials and the Car-

bondale police department face I feel that it has one of the most honest city governments in the state of Illinois, and I speak from experience, having lived in several. So how about all you do-gooders getting off their backs. I doubt if you could do any better.

Johnnie Knapp  
Hurst, Illinois

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### Letters to the editor



rate among high school graduates in that age group was nearly the same for blacks (41 per cent) as for whites (43 per cent).

This dramatic improvement in the number and proportion of blacks in college portends an expansion in the number and proportion of blacks in the professions and in managerial positions during the decades to come.

These socially significant trends reflect tremendous credit on the efforts of the civil rights movement, as well as the wisdom of government policies to expand the number of places in public colleges.

But perhaps what is most important, the gains of the last ten years are due to the determination of ambitious black students to invest in their future and the willingness of their families to stand behind them even during a period of economic recession.

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By 1975, 20.7 per cent of blacks in this age group were in college, compared to 26.9 per cent of whites.

The major difference between black and white college enrollment today is accounted for by the larger proportion of blacks who do not graduate from high school: In 1975, 27 per cent of blacks 18 to 21 years old were not in school and had not graduated from high school, compared to 15 per cent of whites of the same ages.

But the college enrollment