

Illiteracy remains major problem

(Continued from Page 3)

with fewer than six years in school is double that of those with 9-11 years of schooling. This tends to become cyclical for the odds that children of illiterates will also be illiterate has been borne out in studies. It seems that illiteracy, then, is an unwanted birthright passed on by caring, but often powerless parents. Deprivation in the home where there are none, or at best, too few reading materials, is often coupled with the lack of support needed to indicate that reading is both enjoyable and essential. According to Haki R. Madhubuti, an author and publisher, "... nonreading people may be the most dangerous contributing factor in our misdevelopment over the last 25 years in this country."

What is the cure? Is there one? It has been determined that \$5 billion, or \$100 per illiterate, is needed to effect a cure. We are a long way from that sum. At present, about \$3.50 is spent by the government for literacy programs, and the threat that even that paltry sum may be cut is very real. Some say that the monies needed should come from the private sector; another group advocates more government involvement; still a third group demands that the schools do more in the reading programs and teacher training/selection. There is no easy answer, yet the problem must be attacked swiftly if we are to keep it from worsening.

Several programs have been started to address the crisis. In New York City, the Literacy Volunteers Organization has instituted a program that brings 150,000 adult volunteer tutors into the classroom. University of Miami stu-



Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Daisy Bates, Arkansas State NAACP President, on the steps of the Supreme Court with students that integrated Central High School of Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1967.

One of the world's most famous teacher/philosophers was an illiterate Black slave in Greece named Aesop.

dents tutor illiterate public school children for academic credit. Corporations such as GM and Dow Chemical have programs for their employees and are reaching out into their communities to aid public school students. These companies are aware that because inadequate education results in an unprepared labor force, improved education may decrease the costs that the corporations would have to assume in the future for extra training, accidents and injuries within their plants.

Since reading is the basis for literacy, in 1977 B. Dalton Bookseller, the nation's largest bookstore chain, decided to institute a program to improve and encourage reading among the country's poor readers. It pledges five percent of its annual taxable income to its literacy program. B. Dalton is involved in 10 states and 40 communities at the present time with grants, management assistance and volunteer tutors. The company is attempting to organize a network between the public and private sector on a national level to develop a nationwide literacy program.

One of the most ambitious literacy projects was begun in 1966 out of an idea born of simple curiosity. The late Mrs. Robert McNamara decided to see what would happen if some students from low-income families in Washington, D.C., were allowed to choose and keep books that they liked. When she found that their response was that reading was fun, RIF or Reading is Fundamental, was born. At her urging, in 1975 Congress created the Inexpensive Book Distribution Program (IBDP) which provides matching funds based on amounts that RIF raises locally to buy books for children.

RIF also persuaded the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., to adopt RIF and act as its fiscal agent. Waldon Books and *Time Magazine* promote the project through advertisements. Hundreds of publishers and distributors pro-

vide discounts for RIF books. Today over 127,000 volunteers serve 4700 RIF projects in this country, whose headquarters are located in the nation's capital.

Another reading incentive program has recently been introduced by World Book-Childcraft, and is called PATH (Parents and Teachers Helping). It is designed to assist parents in stimulating their children to read at home. Co-sponsored by 27 state PTA's, it supports basic reading programs in the school system and attempts to encourage children to read more and watch less TV. Guides are provided without cost to any interested PTA, parent groups, and/

As far reaching as the programs mentioned are, more businesses and individuals are needed to take an active role in turning the tide against illiteracy. To the individuals involved, illiteracy can be socially embarrassing and psychologically devastating. Therefore, care must be taken to educate, and consequently change, the defensive attitude that many adults have about this delicate problem. They can then determine that the interest shown in their children is not patronizing, but a genuine concern about their future.

With almost half of our children afflicted with illiteracy, it is incumbent upon those of us who can, to help those of us who can't gain the necessary skills to enable them to join in the workforce and earn a decent wage. As stated in a recent article in *Black Enterprise*, "... in a capitalist society, however else a person's worth is measured, issues of wealth and income ultimately enter into the equation that determines parity between the majority and the minority." With so many of our people illiterate or poorly educated, the opportunity to achieve parity is nonexistent.

The issue, then, is very clear. Since help will not be available in any large amounts from the government(s), we must set up our own programs within our own communities. With strong leadership and dedicated volunteers, we can close the literacy gap.

WATCH A VIDEO MOVIE 3¢



PGE electricity works around the clock. When you consider all it does for you, it's a mighty good buy. **PGE**

The Independent Scholar and The Bicentennial Observance

Among J. M. Gates' creative celebration were:

The Elements of Change by Gates, © 1976
The Free and the Brave by Gates, © 1976

Commentary in *The American Grain* — Oregon Long Poems, © 1976
Notations from the Twentieth Century (manuscript with analytical commentary by Gates on early post-war Japan including the Fourteenth United States-Japan Student Conference)
Circle #7 (Bicentennial Commemorative Edition) edited by Gates, © 1977

Work in Anthologies:

200 Years to Here, © 1976 *Anthology of Bells*, © 1978

Cited in:

Contemporary Authors, © 1976 *Drum Voices*, © 1976
Dictionary of International Biography, © 1976
Afro-American Poetry and Drama 1760-1976, © 1979
and other Bicentennial publications

Gates' poems and prose relate the dynamics of the work environment.

Support our advertisers

Say You Saw It in The

PORTLAND OBSERVER



Mary Futrell Winner of American Black Achievement Award

Mary Hatwood Futrell, the president of the National Education Association, is the recipient of the Business and the Professions Award for her achievements as president of the National Education Association, America's largest teachers union with a membership of 1.7 million, and for her commitment to the task of improving the quality of public school education.



Albertsons®

© Copyright 1985 by Albertsons, Inc. All Rights Reserved