



Think outside the cube.
Join the MCrowdSM program today!



Advertise on NYTimes.com

Let Down the Barriers

By BOB HERBERT
Published: Monday, May 19, 1997

More than 30 years ago, in one of the many nasty fights over integrating the New York City schools, there was a huge march in a snowstorm across the Brooklyn Bridge. Fifteen thousand boisterous protesters, most of them women and all of them white, marched from the Board of Education in Brooklyn to City Hall in lower Manhattan. What they wanted was no change in their mostly white neighborhood schools. Integration may or may not have been O.K. as a concept, but steps to make it a reality got those parents out of their homes and onto the bridge in a hurry.

The protesters, singing "We got troubles of our own," were anxious not to be seen as racists. When a black man named Walker Williams was spotted on the bridge, a protest leader yelled through a megaphone: "Put him in the middle! Put him in the middle!"

Mr. Williams was given a placard and hustled into the line of march. He was not a parent but that didn't matter; he was black. Almost certainly he was confused. A reporter for The Times wrote, "After a few minutes, he disappeared."

That was in March 1964. Thirty-three years later real integration is still a radical notion, still rare. But it's not dead. The Manhattan Country School, to cite one example, has long attracted parents who want their children to grow and learn in an atmosphere far removed from the destructive rhythms of racial isolation, prejudice and hate.

There are other examples, but fewer than you might imagine as we near the close of a century that delivered so much in terms of science and technology and so little in the way of tolerance and human understanding.

Now comes a tiny experimental effort in the Hamptons that is bringing together families from breathtakingly different backgrounds. At the Hayground School, housed for the moment in the Bridgehampton Methodist Church, small children can be found chattering easily and knowledgeably about a Passover seder, a traditional Native American snake dance, the life of Fannie Lou Hamer, or Dickens.

The school was founded a year ago by a group of parents and educators who felt that in addition to a rigorous academic environment, children should have the opportunity to interact normally and regularly with youngsters from a variety of backgrounds. The idea is to try to resolve, at least to some degree, the perpetual conflict between the ideals of equality and brotherhood on which this country was founded and the relentless hostility and suspicion that saturate our daily lives.

E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE

TicketWatch - Theater Offers by E-Mail



Sign up for ticket offers from Broadway shows and other advertisers. See Sample
jfiresbaum@mac.com Sign Up
Change E-mail Address | Privacy Policy

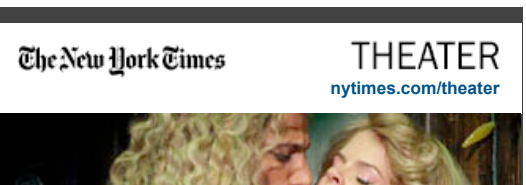
Advertise on NYTimes.com

MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

1. Op-Ed Columnist: How to Raise Our I.Q.
2. Really?: The Claim: Nasal Irrigation Can Ease Allergy Symptoms
3. The Curious Cook: They Do the Work, You Reap the Yogurt
4. Dress Codes: Riding the It Factor
5. Genes Show Limited Value in Predicting Diseases
6. State of the Art: The Quest to Shrink the S.L.R.
7. Op-Ed Columnist: When Nature Calls
8. By Degrees: Third-World Stove Soot Is Target in Climate Fight
9. Does Bo Know He's Top Dog?
10. Video Prank at Domino's Taints Brand

Go to Complete List »



There are fewer than 60 pupils, ages 5 to 14, at Hayground. They come from very wealthy families and families that are not quite sure how next month's rent will be paid. Some are white and some are black. Some are Latino and some are from the 300-acre Shinnecock Reservation in Southampton.

"It's great to watch the kids interact with such freedom, such abandon and such joy," said Roy Scheider, the actor, who is one of the founding parents of the school. "This is normal for them. I wish that we adults could have the same feeling."

Mr. Scheider, who recently did a benefit performance for the school with the actor Danny Glover, recalled the atmosphere of prejudice within his own family when he was growing up. "My father, who had a service station in New Jersey, would always spew out this venom about black people. Just the worst kind of stuff. But there was this guy who worked for him with the unlikely name of Friend Avery, who was black. And he was crucial to my life."

Friend Avery became a mentor to Roy Scheider, filling emotional and other needs that Mr. Scheider's father did not. At Hayground, the relationship between Mr. Avery and Mr. Scheider is reflected in myriad ways. When an effort is made to discard prejudices and stereotypes, mentors can come from many directions, and unusual friendships can become the norm.

Hayground is privately financed and two-thirds of the youngsters receive some form of tuition assistance. The school, which has a waiting list of applicants, will move into a new building in September. It is far too early to tell if Hayground will be a success. But for people who think the nation's ideals should be something more than a cynical sound bite, its splendid and courageous mission is tremendously important.

A version of this op-ed appeared in print on Monday, May 19, 1997, on section A page 15 of the New York edition.

[More Articles in Opinion >](#)



Big hair and denim dreams

Also in Theater:

[A guide to celebrities on Broadway](#)
[The sell: 'Reasons to Be Pretty'](#)
[Panties, squirrels and lots of ammo](#)

RELATED ADS

[What are Related Ads?](#)

- » [Home Parent Education](#)
- » [Children Learning](#)
- » [Children Stories](#)
- » [Enterprise Integration](#)
- » [Raising Children](#)

Ads by Google

what's this?

[Radiant Barrier Systems](#)

Reflective insulation for home or business. Buy direct & save.
www.RadiantBarrier.com

[Crowd Control Barricades](#)

Low Prices on Barricades & Safety Barriers Factory Direct
www.PortableBlockAids.com

[OLSAT Test](#)

Books and software to increase your child's score on the OLSAT test.
www.thinktonight.com

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



PRACTICAL TRAVELER



[Getaways That Are 'Guilt Free'](#)

FASHION & STYLE »



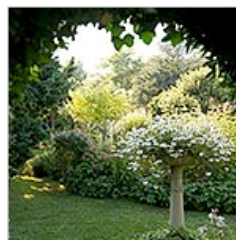
[TV Royalty, but No Longer a Housewife](#)

OPINION »

Outposts: Family Secrets

Commerce Secretary Gary Locke is an American success story with a special perspective on immigration, Timothy Egan writes.

HOME & GARDEN »



[Grey Gardens Is Reborn in Fact and HBO Movie](#)

OPINION »



[Op-Ed: Regulate Me, Please](#)

MUSIC »



[It's Not Over Till the New Lady Jumps Into the Role](#)