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6438R – Freedom of Choice in Education

Guest: Dr. Henry E. Garrett

Morphew: Introduction...visiting professor of educational psychology at the University of Virginia...served for 30 years as professor of psychology at Columbia, the last 15 as head of the department there...he's been president of the American Psychological Association, vice president of the American Association for the advancement of Science and authored a number of books and articles in his field...considered an expert in the field of educational psychology...on our last discussion, we had reached the point where we were discussing how important it is for people to have the freedom of choice in determining the educational environment for their children and you commented that you were opposed to force, either forced segregation or forced integration but all of the force is used for integration in the South...what can the white community do to retain its freedom of choice if a white parent prefers that his children go to school with other white children...what can you do?

Garrett: Well, about the only recourse he has at present is to go to a private school or to move to a community where there are only white people, that is to take up residence where there is a segregation of a de facto sort.

Morphew: We're seeing this in the suburbs around D.C. and NYC

Garrett: Yes. The move from New York City, for instance, the flight, as they call it, of the whites from New York or from Washington to Virginia and Maryland. I think most of the time when people talk about desegregation, putting Negro children into white schools, they are concerned, the people who do the discussing, with the effect upon the white child. Actually, the effect upon the Negro child is even more deleterious or harmful, it seems to me, than is the effect upon the white child. At present, where there is simply token integration in most places, the white children ignore or have very little contact with

the Negro children. Now, there have been very little studies to show that this matter of being ignored plus the fact that the Negro children read considerably less well than the white, they do arithmetic, they do most schoolwork which requires some sort of abstraction less well so that they are a grade or so below the white child and they become very much discouraged as they have a right to. I think that here is where some realism and some sense should be gotten into the matter of desegregation, rather than to try to enforce a principle as though it were a moral imperative and that it's a good thing, for instance, to integrate willy nilly no matter what you do, whether you hurt the white child and the Negro child all at the same time.

Morphew: A lot of people are convinced that integration does at least help the Negro child if not the white, you're saying that it is of no value to anyone

Garrett: No. It certainly is of no value to the Negro child. He gets a sense of inferiority which is exaggerated out of all proportion of what it was before. Numbers of studies have shown that given the same opportunities the Negroes simply do not catch up. That's an old fallacy. I've been told that in five years they would catch up to the white children. They don't catch up. They're still behind. And they either drop out or they become disillusioned and they drop behind. They are siphoned off into remedial courses which are simply a lower level of course to try to bring them up to some point in their academic procession and the whole end result is bad. The white child gets a feeling of superiority. He finds his Negro associate is a good football player but he can't write an article for the school paper cause he can't write good English. The feeling of friendliness and equality which the integration of schools is supposed to engender simply defeats its own purpose.

Morphew: What effect will this have on the American public school system?

Garrett: Well, it's gonna ruin it. It's gonna ruin it as sure as shootin' if we keep on the way we are. I think that eventually we will have to come around to the point where the educational needs of a community are determined by the community itself. Now, in Jackson, Mississippi, a number of studies have shown that the average Negro child has the intelligence quotient about 20 points lower than that of a white, that the overlap in the school situation is not more than 10, 15 percent. By that I mean that not more than 10 or 15 percent of the Negro children in a class will be able to do work up to the median, the middle level, of that class. What you get, then, when you massively integrate, the white child doesn't get a good education because here he has to wait while this group is being brought up, the Negro child has an increasing sense of inferiority...., and the last state...is worst than the first. Common sense would say keep them in separate grades for another generation or so and then let's see where they stand.

Morphew: From your articles and testimony, you refer repeatedly refer to racial differences and you do not use the term 'racial superiority'...this is an important point and would you explain it?

Garrett: Well, I think the racial differences is of course the right term to use. The white man and the yellow man, the Chinese say, differ in a number of ways but we can't say

unless we take our own special frame of reference which one is superior. Is Chinese music or art superior to European music or art? Well, it depends upon whether you ask a Chinese or a European. You can, in other words, determine differences. Now these differences are judged with respect to what you want them to do. All of the evidence we have, psychological, and all historical evidence would lead us to think that the black man, the Negro, is not as capable in dealing with abstractions, words, numbers, diagrams, pictures, formulas, in the solution of problems. In other words, the Negro in Africa, the black African, never constructed a technical civilization, never learned to build...bridges, he never had a written language, and how could you expect him then to do European work, work that had been devised and suitable to Europeans as well as the European? I think the Negro should have a school set up in which the work is suitable to his level of performance.

Morphew: As an expert in the field, if someone came to you for counseling and said, what should I do with my child, should I send him to an integrated or segregated school? How would you counsel them?

Garrett: Well, I would tell them, of course, to send him to a school made up of members of his own race provided he could get away with it. There are places today where that could be virtually impossible, but to the extent that he can do it, I think he should. In the Deep South, where the gap between the Negro and the white is greatest, I don't think there's any sacrifice that is too great to maintain separate schools.

Morphew: In some states like Virginia, where you are living now, some parents have turned to private schools...is this a valid answer, likely to spread throughout the South and nation?

Garrett: I don't see how it can help it. The private schools have turned out to be excellent. Now, in Charlottesville and in Farmville (?) they are going to private schools and there have been others set up in Amelia and Powhatan and Surry. It seems to be the only refuge that the white parent has left. Most white parents such as most Negro parents want to give their children the advantages which they perhaps didn't have themselves, but certainly the best they can find, and they don't want blackboard jungle, they don't want a situation where they have to have the child sent to school and return home accompanied by a policeman. They don't, it isn't that they are afraid that the color of, the white parent, that the color of the child will rub off on their child, but the attitudes, the slovenly speech, the low morals and all of the rest of it will rub off and that's what they don't want and I don't think they should have to have it.

Morphew: Private schools are spreading in the north as well

Garrett: Private schools have always been strong in the North and they have catered mostly to the wealthy classes because the tuition was fairly high and that has made for a financial differentiation, but I see no reason why the state when it taxes parents for schools shouldn't allow the parent to use that tax money to send his child to the school of his choice and not force him to send him to the public school which has been integrated.

We are now faced with the anomalous situation where the Negroes, the NAACP, say, is not only saying that the Negro child can go to school with the white but the white *has* to go to school with the Negro child. He can't get out. He's got to do it. He's caught. So the term, the decision is being made not by the parent of the child, not by school board, not by the principle. It's being made by Martin Luther King and Roy Wilkins or that abominable Farmer.