

40 percent genuinely illiterate. Relating again to the 119 boys in Maryland, 21 could not write their name legibly. Fifteen could read a second grade reader with great difficulty. One of the reasons, and I don't object to this, for taking some of the most disadvantaged students and placing them in these Conservation Corps Centers, was to try and provide a framework where rehabilitation had a good chance of success.

Criticizing these centers for not providing the kinds of vocational training that would suit these students to go immediately out into the world and get high-paying jobs is like criticizing this camp for not teaching them how to swim, when they first have to try and save them from drowning. This is the real and critical problem that these Conservation Corps Centers have had.

The Conservation Corps is not a substitute for education. I am perfectly aware that society may have failed very badly both in vocational education and across the board. I gave whatever was left of my youth to the whole idea of education, as a professional, as a citizen, and as a parent. I am perfectly aware of the continuing problems as far as funding properly our educational system. I have said all my life that education is the greatest return on investment that the American people receive. Hence, because a system can't do everything, it is not right to criticize it. I would be perfectly willing if we could expand existing educational systems to go down far enough to take care of these most disadvantaged children. I would be very much for it. I don't think it is going to happen, and I don't want to sit around and wait for nirvana or the millennium. I would prefer to do something about it.

Former President Harry S. Truman said, "I hope that all my errors and sins will be those of commission and not of omission." Well, I hope that all the errors we make in this educational process will be from commission and not from omission.

I think the conservation centers have a viable program. When I saw the first 115 kids come to Catocin, Md., I was so distraught that I told my wife that retaining 10 percent of these enrollees in camp for 2 weeks, would be a miracle. They were hostile. They were antisocial. Over 80 percent of them needed extensive medical treatment, and one young man, even after he was again on his feet from a serious malnutrition debility, hostility hadn't been exorcised at all. He said, "I wonder if they are fattening me up for the kill."

This difficult group of young people, had lost hope, and couldn't care less about learning. The problem in the conservation center is not teaching somebody how to read, it is teaching them to want to learn how to read—which is a far more difficult task. If you can't motivate someone in an interest in education, you can't teach him. And therefore, I don't think that the basic problem has had a thorough delineation in order that a full appreciation of the state of young men who come to the Conservation Job Corps.

The statistics, that talk of dropouts, mask the real miracle, that is, the miracle of retention. I would have assumed far more would have dropped out, in terms of the nature of the problems. Despite such problems, however, I think the Conservation Job Corps can provide most, and I emphasize most, disadvantaged children with an opportunity.