

## How to turn on the turned off

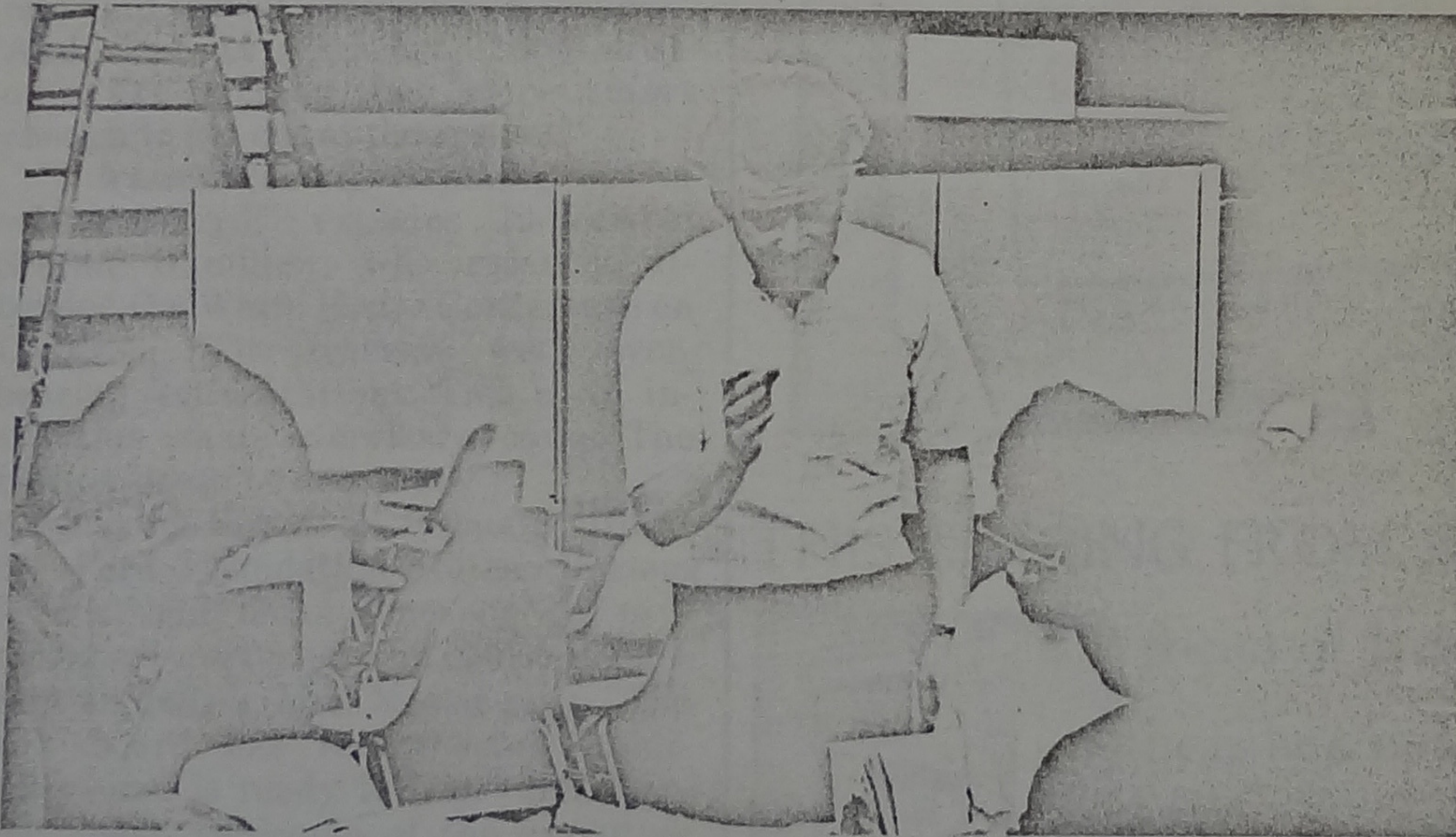
Harlem Prep gets dropouts into top colleges—but financial support gets stickier

Like most of its neighbors amid the urban decay of upper Manhattan, Harlem Prep endures a hand-to-mouth existence. But thanks to a rare blend of intellectual vitality, personal attention, and social awareness, the tuition-free school has been turning its "uneducable" misfits on to learning with remarkable success. "They say I'm a dropout," says one black youth. "I say the school I went to before was a penal institution trying to pass as a school."

Housed in a former supermarket, Harlem Preparatory School, Inc., now has 400 students—blacks and whites

Prep gave only seed money, as they usually do—Ford Foundation with a \$280,000 grant and Carnegie Corp. with \$300,000. This money, allocated to prove out new ideas for a short period, is almost all gone. Says Carnegie's executive assistant Barbara Finberg, explaining the original financing: "We were interested in the ideas that came out of the schools. We wanted to see if they could be transferred so that the public school would pluralize its options." She adds: "This school has proved that there are students whose needs have not been met."

However much foundations like the school, they say that funding it indefinitely hardly helps the problems of ghetto education. Their main push must be to get the public schools to change.



Students get close personal attention in courses such as 'third-world' history.

who found traditional schooling boring or belittling. Most of the students are heading for the finest colleges in the U. S. But, at the very same time, Harlem Prep is heading toward financial disaster, with an expected \$100,000 deficit for this year.

There have been rumblings of dissatisfaction that center on the obviously overburdened headmaster, Edward Carpenter, who has been trying simultaneously to raise money, help students, and manage the school's finances in the charged political atmosphere of Harlem. (Some teachers walked out at the end of last year's academic year and some trustees have left more recently.) But the main concern is the fact that the financial resources on which the school's \$600,000 budget depends are drying up.

The foundations that backed Harlem

Money from corporations, too, is getting harder to come by. Companies such as Union Carbide had made small grants—one even donated a new kitchen—but some now are feeling the pinch of corporate cost-cutting. The Sheila Mosler Foundation, which has put in about \$250,000, reportedly will add no more this year, though Mrs. Mosler, wife of the former chief executive of Mosler Safe Co., remains vice-chairman of the board and has often come through with money to meet a week's payroll.

Standard Oil of New Jersey, however, continues to be a Harlem Prep mainstay—it recently gave an additional \$50,000 to the experiment. Clifton Garvin, Jr., executive vice-president and a director of Jersey Standard, calls Esso's total \$210,000 support "a part of its commitment to improving

the quality of life in New York City." **Elite colleges.** Still, these "believers" have been rewarded with an enviable record. Of 214 graduates, 204 are still in college, including Swarthmore, Washington & Lee, and some Ivy League schools, and 13 are on the dean's list. While more prestigious prep and high schools are hard put to place their best students, Assistant Headmaster Henry Pruitt boasts: "On college day we had over 100 representatives, all desperately vying with each other." This year's seniors already are agonizing over such choices as Harvard or Yale, Williams, or MIT. Pruitt's boast is a little disingenuous. Schools fight for Harlem Prep graduates because well-prepared black students able to stay the college course are a scarce commodity much in demand.

Harlem Prep's secret is less revolutionary than simply humane. "We don't do anything anyone else doesn't do," says Headmaster Edward Carpenter. "We just do it with love." Instead of faculty meetings, "Carp," as his students call him, calls the whole group together for a "family meeting" when problems arise. At his previous school, Michael Wilson says, "I only saw a guidance counselor twice in four years." By contrast, Carpenter's office door is always open; he is often writing letters to draft boards or lending students \$5. "We don't know what the words 'discipline' and 'punishment' mean," says Placement Officer E. Selma McPharland. "We know the student—the total personality and not just his scholastic test score."

**African studies.** Except for required courses in math and English, the curriculum is up to the students themselves. When a semester begins, teachers submit lists of every course they could possibly be qualified to teach. The subjects ultimately offered are those that most students prefer. The most popular usually include "third-world" studies, psychology, and media such as films. "We don't offer a language because the kids would want Swahili, and that won't help them," says Carpenter. "But courses in African history are popular—and meaningful."

"The school doesn't go by the book, and it doesn't go by the clock," says Esso Education Foundation's James Harris. This relaxed spirit is proving an effective antidote to the hostilities that often characterize ghetto life. Though predominantly black, the student body includes Jews, Moslems, and even one Mohawk Indian, all of whom

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mingle easily. Even neighborhood militants have learned to accept the mixture. Carpenter argues that it is a black-and-white world, and the school should not create an artificial environment. Moreover, while Black Panthers, Young Lords, and members of other radical groups all attend, "they leave their politics at the door," says Pruitt. "They should be too busy studying to be involved in politics."

The students like to echo Carpenter's slogan: "If you forget 'we go,' you're involved in ego." Says Damian Carpenter, a student who intends to become a veterinarian: "Before, I thought you were supposed to beat out the guy next to you. Here you feel guilty if a brother has a problem and you don't help."

Such goodwill even exists between students and faculty. For one thing, Harris points out, "Experiments always attract the most interested teachers. For them, there is a real excitement about creating a course." And, observes a teacher, "some dropouts are gifted; they were smart enough to get out of the system."

"I wasn't getting anything out of school before," explains 19-year-old Stefan Hamilton, who recently attended the White House Conference on Children. "The teachers were overbearing authoritarians. This is an institution where everybody learns. The teacher doesn't know it all."

**Hanging on.** But if, as Joshua Smith of the Ford Foundation states, Harlem Prep is "built on an atmosphere of psychological nurturing," it is also dependent on dollars. Mrs. Mosler says: "The new board has reestablished credibility—and is ready to beg." But Harvey Spear, chairman of the executive committee, points out: "You need the commitment of half of your budget by April to sign teachers' contracts. We always gamble on picking up small grants later."

With habitual fight, the school is trying any venture to attract funds. Last week, it sponsored a fashion show, and this week it is readying a grant proposal for the Ford Foundation while Carpenter is sending out a volley of SOS requests to business. The new chairman of the board, Robert Mangum, Commissioner of the New York State Division of Human Rights, maintains that if he can get a year's grace to institute an accounting system, management controls, and a fund-raising body, the school can be viable. But while his backers agree that the school should not fold, no one can guarantee that it will not. "It's been tight before," says Carpenter, "but never like this."



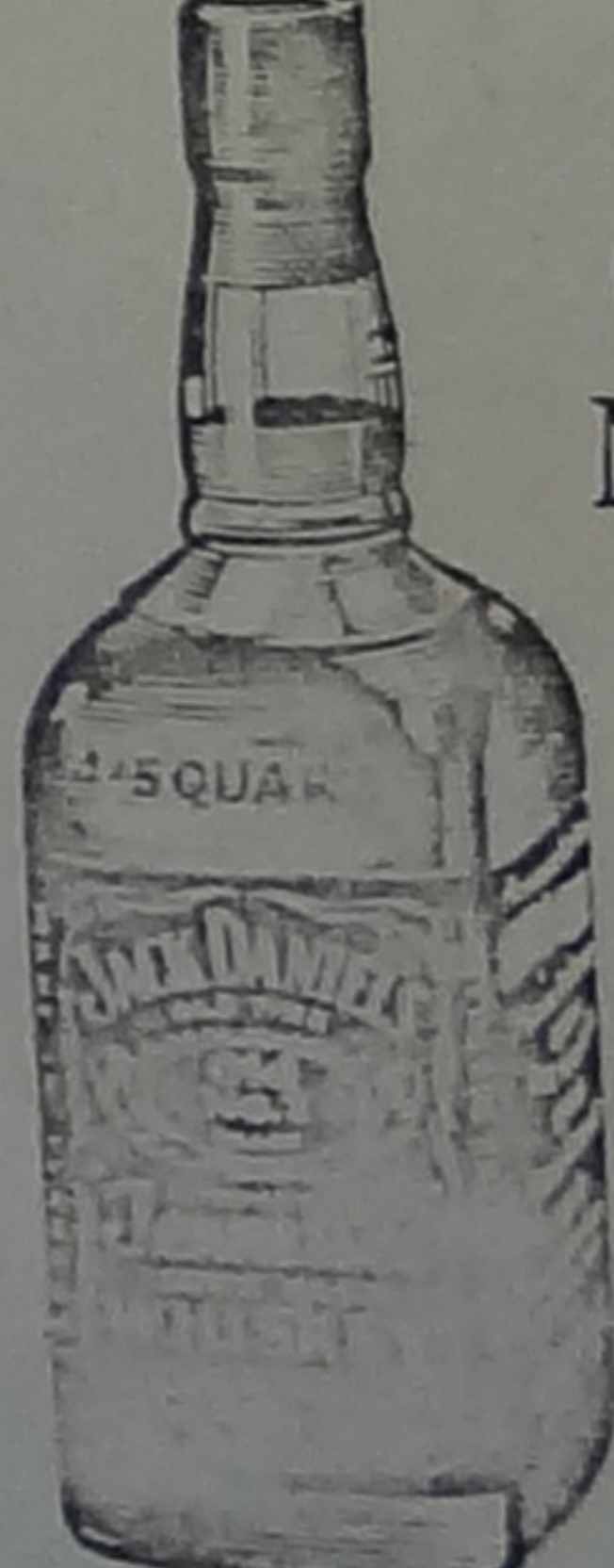
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