

Street culture

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the 1960s, many poor blacks wore their best clothes to demonstration marches to signify their desire to be treated seriously. In contrast, he said, many white civil-rights workers dressed sloppily, in a misguided attempt to "relate" to the poor blacks.

In the same way, instructors need to dress neatly every day if they are to make an impression on their students, Foster stressed. Otherwise poor students, in particular, will ask themselves, "What can he or she teach me when they can't take care of themselves."

Foster said most city schools contain four groups of students: youngsters who like entertainment, sports, politics or religion; students who are physically and/or emotionally handicapped; youngsters with middle-class lifestyles and behaviors; and youngsters who have adopted street-corner behavior, but could potentially act like middle-class students.

The last two groups especially mingle and influence one another, he noted, with some lower-income youths emulating middle-class students, and some affluent students mimicking their less-affluent counterparts.

Foster also observed that teachers must learn all they can about the ethnic groups that populate their schools. When one conference participant asked him why students should be labeled "African-American" or "Irish-American," instead of just "American," Foster responded by saying: "Those who come from a religious or cultural background seem to have their

heads together better than those who have nothing."

In a panel discussion following Foster's talk, Paula Miller, a black senior from Nazareth Academy, agreed with Foster's contention that a sense of ethnic identity is crucial to students.

"I have pride in where I come from, and therefore I would like recognition from both sides," she said, adding as the audience applauded, "I am an African and an American."

Miller also agreed that a teacher should learn his students' lingo because "it shows that he cares enough about where we're coming from."

She lamented the fact that her school has no African-American teachers. "We have no role models," she said of the school's black students. Miller concluded by saying: "My experience in Catholic schools has been positive, but there's room for improvement."

Miller's hope for improvement may come about through the efforts of a multicultural task force that met for the first time on Friday, July 13. The task force is an offshoot of the commission that has been overseeing reorganization of Monroe County's Catholic schools for the last two years, according to Irene Rivera de Royston, a counselor at Monroe Community College and a member of the Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools.

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The diocesan task force echoes similar efforts by the Rush-Henrietta School District, where panelist Ken Hilton directs the district's multicultural education program.

During the panel discussion, Hilton noted that circumstances will soon force school districts across the country to invest in multicultural studies.

"In the year 2010 ..., almost half of the (public school) youngsters will be minority or disadvantaged or poor kids," he said, adding that such a population will challenge the mostly middle-class and white faculties in U.S. schools.

De Royston's task force will set out to meet similar challenges facing Monroe County's Catholic schools, but at least one panelist remained somewhat skeptical of educators' commitment to multicultural approaches.

David Hursh, a UR professor of education, noted the sincerity of the workshop panelists and the audience, but asked whether their words would become actions.

"If we're serious about the things that we're talking about today, it's not going to be simple," he said. "It's going to take the rest of our lives."

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