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JET

**JEANNE BELL:
PIN-UP MODEL
TO FILM STAR**





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Elaine Brown, executive director of the Educational Opportunities Corp., is guiding light of school.

East Oakland Ghetto Blooms With Growth Of Black Panther School

By Bob Lucas

Joe Abron, one of 27 full-time teachers at the school, goes over a science lesson. Abron, like other instructors, is accredited. Most instructors are volunteers, some of whom receive money according to need.



The Oakland Community School (OCS) is situated smack in the middle of the East Oakland ghetto, blooming like an oasis in the asphalt desert of that Northern California city.

An outgrowth of the social programs of the Black Panther Party in 1971, the unique school started out in private homes, moved into storefronts, and now occupies the Oakland Community Learning Center on East 11th Street.

In five short years this free private elementary school has:

- won the enduring loyalty of the Black and Chicano community it serves,
- earned the grudging admiration of former critics, and
- captured the attention of California's educational establishment.

The parent organization of the OCS since 1973 has been the non-profit, tax-exempt Educational Opportunities Corporation (EOC), whose executive director is Elaine Brown. Ms. Brown is the Black Panther Party chairperson who last year narrowly missed being



Donna Howell (l) aids Eric Smith and Djamila Reed with concentrated reading while instructor Jackie Buist (r) teaches a language class.

elected to the Oakland City Council.

"But this is not a Black Panther Party school, per se," Ms. Brown explained to JET, "and it's not a 'freedom school' or 'liberation school' in the sense that we teach the children rhetoric.

"The idea is to produce a model along the lines of showing that Black, poor children are 'educable'."

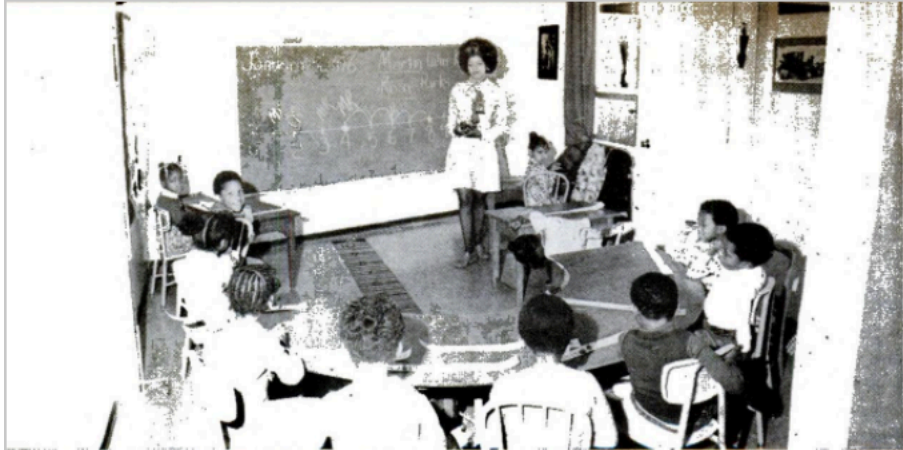
She pointed out that a number of other community organizations are involved with the school and have members sitting on the board of the EOC.

The center also contains individual classrooms, an auditorium, a lunchroom and meeting rooms for the various cultural and social programs carried on there. However, the major focus is on the school and the youngsters who attend.

Said Ericka Huggins, school di-

rector and also a member of the Black Panther Party, "We're unique in that we serve all children, but still are concerned with
Volunteer Ruth Robinson teaches math to a group of youngsters.





Instructor Vonetta Molson gives math lesson by corresponding numbers to letters from names of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mrs. Rosa Parks.

School Does Not Teach Students Viewpoints Of Panthers

the individual child."

"We have been given all kinds of citations from educators, saying we have a fine school," Ms. Brown offered, "because we emphasize the basic skills—reading, writing, speech and language, and math concepts. We try to teach the children, in essence, how to think as opposed to what to think.

"So therefore we don't try to impose Panther thinking, or anybody else's, on the board or in the classroom. Whatever their philosophies of life might be, we try to create an arena whereby children who are so alienated and disenfranchised by the most basic social unit—their own families, their own communities—can at least

Donna Howell (l) watches a group of her children rehearse a school play. Purpose of school is not to teach what to think but how to think.





Instructor Tommye Williams (l) serves lunch to her children while Vivette Miller (r) stresses basic grooming and health care.

have some space in this life where they can develop and grow and mature, and not go through the same cycles in life that so many of our people have gone through.”

“The Temple of Man” is the sign on the front of the large white building that dominates a square block, but that name is being changed to something more appropriate, according to center officials. The OCS has for the past 2½ years occupied the structure which was purchased outright from a white Baptist church for \$250,000.

A tour of the classrooms, staffed by 27 full-time teachers, revealed several differences from those in public schools. There were no more than 10 pupils per teacher. And there appeared to be none of the disciplinary problems one encounters in most ghetto public schools, where teachers are continually yelling for order rather than imparting knowledge.

Pupils at OCS range in age

from 2½ to 11 years and all are well groomed, well mannered and attentive. Their performance in reading and math is outstanding. The curriculum includes art, music, science, physical education, martial arts, environmental studies and Spanish.

A dedicated community leader, Ms. Huggins is director of the school.





Rod Gillead teaches three- and four-year-olds basic English—not “Black English” or “Ghetto English.”

Teach Students How To Cope

All of the instructors are accredited and most are volunteers, a few receiving money for expenses according to need. Significantly, they do much more than teach the “ABCs.” As each class goes to the

lunchroom—pupils receive three meals a day at the school—the teacher goes along and helps serve the well-balanced meal. The teachers, male, female, Black, white and Oriental, also make sure the pupils are properly groomed and accompany them on field trips. Pupils also get complete medical care.

Although there is no tuition charge, parents are asked to give \$25 a month. Those who cannot afford that modest sum contribute personal services to the school, such as cooking for fund-raising parties, filling in as teacher aides, and transporting youngsters to various outings.

Somewhat surprisingly, older pupils at OCS are reading such modern classics as *Animal Farm* and *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, and give intelligent analyses of the books. As Ms. Brown said, “We don’t concentrate on Black things or white things. The youngsters can make a decision about those themselves.

“They really know who they are and they like who they are.”

Ms. Brown holds staff meeting with (l to r) James Mott, Carol Granison, Abron, Amar Casey, Howell, Gillead, Ericka Huggins and Phyllis Jackson.

