

# Teachers Seen Using Slums as Excuse

By Henry W. Pierce

PITTSBURGH, Nov. 18 — The Nation's schools are using lower-class children's "poverty culture" as an excuse for not educating them adequately, a leading social scientist charged here today.

Dr. Estelle Fuchs, anthropologist at New York's Hunter College and author of the controversial "Pickets at the Gates," said schools tend to freeze underprivileged children into a lower-class way of life.

Washington schools are a prime example of this, she said.

She also cited schools in Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, Boston and New York.

## Anthropologist Dissents

But a Washington University anthropologist, Dr. Charles A. Valentine, disagreed with her.

Dr. Valentine charged anthropologists with failure to live among underprivileged groups as a means of studying them.

"Anthropologists can study a South Seas culture and find order, but they go into Harlem and find nothing but disorder. They study our own slum-dwellers with questionnaires and interviews; they are apparently too afraid to go and live as one of them," he asserted.

He added: "It boils down to this: we are good anthropologists overseas and bad anthropologists at home."

Dr. Valentine said he intends to "live among the poor" as part of a study he is undertaking next year in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn.

## Four-Day Meeting

Dr. Fuchs and Dr. Valentine

were among more than 2500 persons attending the four-day American Anthropological Association meeting here.

Anthropologists, who traditionally have studied such things as tribal cultures and man's remote past, have shown a spurt of interest in poverty groups within the United States. A session on poverty drew a standing-room crowd here, while sessions on tribal customs and on baboon behavior drew only scattered attendance.

Dr. Fuchs, one of six speakers on "The Culture of Poverty," said schools are hardening many of the differences between middle-class Americans and lower-class groups.

"School administrators are using the 'culture of poverty' concept to absolve themselves from responsibility," she declared.

Teachers, she said, often use in such terms as "psychologically unready" and "culturally impoverished home life" to

excuse their own failure to teach the youngsters properly.

## Cites Example

She told about a New York City teacher in an underprivileged school district who took her students to the airport as part of a class project.

"It was the first time those children had been out of their own neighborhood," she declared, adding:

"They were amazed when they got their first glimpse of an escalator. One of them asked whether it tickled if you rode it. That teacher used the incident to prove her students hadn't the intelligence to learn."

Dr. Fuchs called this attitude "typical" among many teachers.

## Not Scheduled

At the end of the session, Dr. Valentine, who was not a scheduled speaker, stood up and declared:

"It seems to me there has been a common thread running through these discussions

which is incorrect. All the anthropologists here have maintained that the culture of poverty concept has been misused. But perhaps it's our own point of view that needs changing."

He charged that anthropologists are "very much involved in their own middle-class cultures."