

# Teachin'

Jackie Gasson

1966

I load my briefcase (big gold stars, red marking pencils, paper clips, safety pins, string for cheerio necklaces, *Conscientious Objector Handbook*, *Fort Hood Three Newsletter*, *Substitute Directory*, lunch, throat lozenges, cigarettes) and wait for that damn phone call.

Where do I go today? X school—X world—X game to play. Usually I go in my district, referred to as culturally deprived. Deprived only of white middle-class bogusness.

Today it's elementary gym! Perfect! The Place for juggling power.

A fellow member of the teaching game greets me.

"We'll work together today. The lesson's first purpose, cultural improvement. The lesson's second purpose, wholesome fun. The lesson plan, square dancing."

Amid the Western drawing, "Doe Cee Doe," the kids lose gym shoes, chew gum, trip, punch each other out at every Grande-whatever-it's-called, react with horror at their partner, and totally despise the cultural exercise. In between these flippy cuts the kids freak out into some hippy change. Whereby my not so hip, ex-Green Beret colleague sends them to the corner for dancing! Isn't that great? Or he would shout, "Alright I said alamande left not right. I've had enough crap out of you. Shutup. Now, ladies and gentlemen, let's continue."

I look around. Is this real? Is this what's happening? Just kids screwing around? No, not just kids. Not the little anemic cougher on TV whose mommie hears every bodily emanation and runs to her bedside with Creomulsion (at least give her Romilar). Not the disgusting Aryan sweetie with no cavities. Not the darling M&M party set, whose clean hands stay in their pants not in their mouths.

You don't have to look close. No exaggerations are necessary for explanation. It's 100 years old and smells it. A play room the size of a small classroom, no baskets so no balls, no piano so no real music, no windows so no light. A gym with six poles crowding the center in an unheated basement.

More obvious are the kids. They already believe, they look alike but hope if they're bad enough you'll notice them. I notice...the ankle length skirt of an older sister, the torn sweater covering the ripped dress, the too tight over-washed levis.

Alright! That's what's happening. Let's call a spade a spade. Yes, there is black. Black power. Black Muslims. There's Patty Waters moaning, "Black is the color of my true love's hair.

B -L-A-C-K, ooh B-L-A-C-K. Black black black black Slack black—black."

It's happening and all the white, Texan square dancing in America can't make Black White.

# fifth Estate

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