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Disadvantaged children: health, nutrition and school failure.

Author(s) : [BIRCH, H. G.](#) ; [GUSSOW, J. D.](#)

Author Affiliation : New York, USA, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.; Grune & Stratton

Book : [Disadvantaged children: health, nutrition and school failure.](#) 1970 pp.xiv+:

Abstract : The authors of this book-Herbert Birch is Research Professor of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, and Miss Gussow has done research in psychology and education-were primarily concerned with educational backwardness among the children of the poor, and about the failure of educational reforms to provide a satisfactory remedy. Especially when, as in the USA, poor children with educational backwardness have an association with skin colour or ethnic origin, this may

ancient claim that these children were genetically inferior".

The authors believe, with Isabella Leitch, that: "If one has seen a plant or an animal in one environment, all one knows about its genetic constitution is what it can do in that environment and not what it may do or not do in any other". The environmental factor of educational backwardness is prominent is that of poverty, which is self-perpetuating and is associated with many kinds of disadvantage other than the educational. Malnutrition, rooted in poverty and ignorance, is a major cause of impaired health and of retarded physical and mental development, mental as well as physical. Furthermore, if retardation occurs during the prenatal and early post-natal life, the effect on the individual may be permanent. It is "romantic to think that serious problems of social dislocation and deficit can be cured by single programs or actions", and "Only by a massive investment of resources and concern will we begin the long process of providing a decent life and an equal opportunity for all our children".

That summary may make the book sound like a political tract written for Americans. Such an impression would be false. The arguments have been carefully made and are extensively documented: there are over 500 references, a high proportion of which are from the non-American and especially from the British scientific literature. This is a book that can be read with profit by all who are concerned with social welfare and who wish to keep it on one's shelf for reference. It is well-written, blessedly free from jargon, and beautifully produced at a reasonable price. A. M. Thomson.

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