

Vale, Harlem Prep

Monday, Oct. 01, 1973

It was opening day last week at the rehabilitated supermarket known as Harlem Prep, and some 400 would-be students gathered in the auditorium beneath a large sign bearing their African motto: Moja, Logo (brotherhood, unity).

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Headmaster Edward F. Carpenter greeted them with a somber announcement—they had come for nothing, no new students would be accepted. "We thought we were producing here, and we thought we would be rewarded," said Carpenter. "But we have no money. We can't take you."

So ended, apparently, one of the nation's most enterprising experiments in private schooling for the dropouts of the ghetto. Harlem Prep was born in 1967 out of a mixture of inner-city violence, white guilt and black hope. At a time when 65% of New York's black and Puerto Rican students were dropping out before finishing high school, not even the vast promises of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society legislation seemed to be providing enough immediate help. So Eugene Callender, a Harlem minister and local executive director of the Urban League, recruited a white college dropout and three nuns and opened his school in a vacant armory. Within a year, aided by \$350,000 given to the Urban League by six corporations and foundations (which later grew to some 50), Callender had organized 49 students into Harlem's own tuition-free Exeter, complete with blue blazers.

Those were symbols, but the whole idea of Harlem Prep was to alter the basic prospects of ghetto dropouts. Instead of routine vocational courses, half-heartedly taught, Harlem

Prep stressed college-level math and English, economics and biology. It did not grant a diploma until a student had been accepted into college.

"We'll help anyone as long as he's not an addict," said Callender's successor, Edward Carpenter, 43, a veteran math teacher. He alternately cajoled, encouraged and threatened his pupils.

"Nobody hears the word dropout or delinquent around here," he told them, "but this is a workshop, not a picture gallery. If you don't want to work, don't come."

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"discharged" from her public school, because, she explains, "I talked back to teachers.

Here you don't get suspended if you don't work, but somehow, when it's up to you, you feel a real push to learn and get on." According to Math Teacher Erskine Keary: "We don't give our kids just one chance. We give them three and four—as many as they need."

In six years, 637 of the 1,100 students who attended Harlem Prep went on to college, some to Harvard, Radcliffe, Vassar, Brown and the University of California. But in those same years, the anxiety over ghetto upheavals has also decreased, and so has the concern of private donors. About half of Harlem Prep's supporters have turned to other programs. Says Exxon's Spokesman Richard F. Neblett: "Most corporations structure their grants to demonstrate innovation. They can't fund an independent program ad infinitum."

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