"BLACK BELT" MAGAZINE ON MARTIAL ARTS AT THE COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER

"READING, WRITING AND FIGHTIN' IN THE OAKLAND GHETTO"

By Jim Hoffman

The following article is reprinted from the August, 1975, issue of Black Belt magazine. Black Belt is the world's leading monthly of self-defense with a circulation of 600,000 in the U.S., Canada, Japan and Europe.

East Oakland, California, is not a place where you'd want to live unless you are a fighter. Most of what is bad about America is worse in East Oakland and most of what is good about America isn't there at all.

In East Oakland, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, crime, poverty and mortality are all on the heavy side of the nation's averages. There are few parks. For recreation there is only the street, a harsh terrain cluttered with the debris of a cruel and wasteful era - rows of deserted store-fronts, shattered glass, broken people.

ENVIRONMENT

Hardly the ideal environment for raising children. Much less the place you'd expect to find a school designed as a model of quality education for all communities - the poor and the privileged, the Black and the White. But thanks to a determined group of people, the school exists. In fact, it thrives, a beacon of hope in a wasteland of human and material despair.

The Intercommunal Youth Institute was founded in 1971 by the Black Panther Party, which was seeking an alternative to the inferior education being given their children by the Oakland public schools. In 1973, the school became legally independent and is now community-based, drawing most of its enrollment from outside Panther families.

In each of the four years since its birth, the school has added more students and more programs, always striving to create a model for those seeking an alternative to the deteriorating institution known as the public school. This year, the Intercommunal Youth Institute added a martial arts program to the curriculum for all its students.

While the martial arts program is still young, it is rapidly becoming a favorite of school officials, parents and students. It is an ideal program for the school in many ways. For one thing, the school doesn't have a lot of money for physical education. Martial arts, unlike many sports, require no special playing field, and, except for sparring gear, no special equipment. At a time when many U.S. school systems are cancelling sports programs for lack of cash, this is an important consideration.

Another reason the school offers martial arts is the immediate practical value of knowing self-defense. As instructor Steve McCutchen tells his students, "You can walk around the corner from here and get chased home. There will be many times when you will have to either fight or run. What you will learn here is that 'fight or run' doesn't mean the end of the world.'

But perhaps the most important reason for teaching martial arts at the Intercommunal Institute is the philosophy the school itself. Unlike traditional schools where 'discipline' means a lot of rules, punishments and rewards that are imposed by teachers and authority figures, the Institute emphasizes internal discipline. The children progress at their own rate, and it is not required for a seven-year-old student to learn math with 10-year-olds and reading with five-year-olds. Because the children are not automatically advanced from year to year, they must develop the discipline and confidence to arm themselves.

Martial arts instructors harmonize well with this for the school. Ericka, a former student, says: "All the children/* hire Bruce Lee," Ericka says. "We don't want to show them that what they are learning is a science teacher. 'The flowers that they really are.'" Ericka comments. "We have children here who were labelled hyperactive, educable retardates and all kinds of crazy things," Ericka says. "They come here and they just blossom into the flowers that they really are."

All this is accomplished without charging tuition and without financial support from government. A "strong parents' group" contributes $15 per month each, but this would not even cover the cost of salaries, unless many of the teachers worked for nothing, purely out of their sense of dedication and their knowledge that they are providing a service to the students. They hope these children and Erikka, "We would do a short of something criminal make this school survive."

One of the instructors, Steve McCutchen, was a noted martial arts teacher. McCutchen, Soon to be a black belt in karate, teaches 10 sessions a week, and two sessions after school. Last year Steve was a science teacher. When he decided to inaugurate a physical education program, he volunteered himself as a martial arts instructor.

Steve's class was an immediate success. "It's just beautiful," Ericka comments. "It's like thickening their thins. " Don't know about discipline - it's something they need. A way of helping them understand their lives."
Steve combines practical instruction with a generous helping of martial arts philosophy and scientific background. He is himself a student of kinesiology, the science of bodily movement as it relates to body structure, and he has applied this knowledge to martial arts.

There are certain laws in operation when the body is moving," he says. "The student has a right to know them.

When an instructor explains a technique, he should explain how and why it works. The student should learn that a kick or punch, demonstrated in a certain way, is not the only way the kick or punch can be executed, because structural mechanics differ from person to person. With a knowledge of the principles, the student can actualize the technique in his own body. As they go along, they learn the connection between one type of movement and the overall operation of the body.'

Steve believes this approach shows the instructor to accelerate the learning process, and he believes his method of teaching is prior to traditional instruction. The traditional instructor tries keep his student for a long time," says Steve. "In some cases, it's three to five years before you can keep them from being knocked on your head.'

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What has what is necessary to the kids want to have line, to learn," says Ericka, a senior. "The kids he works with are, on the average, older than the age group served by their Learning Center is full to the brim with kids," she says. "This building is the shining light in East Oakland where an come and feel free to do anything," she says. "The after-hours program is still in its infancy, to learn.' says Ericka, "This building is the shining light in East Oakland where an come and feel free to do anything,' she says. "The after-hours program is still in its infancy, to learn.'

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