

# The Passy Press

## Letter to the Editor

**From:** [cotes.pinckney@undisclosed.com](mailto:cotes.pinckney@undisclosed.com)  
**To:** Nick Gardiner [enpg@thepassypress.com](mailto:enpg@thepassypress.com)  
**Date:** September 27, 2014 1:05PM EST  
**Subject:** Comments re: John MacMurray's Essay on US Education

Dear Sir,

I have had several eye opening experiences this summer. I signed up to serve for a week as a classroom assistant in what is probably called a summer enrichment program at the Peter Paul Development Center, a neighborhood center sponsored by a number of Episcopal churches and related Episcopal organizations. This was the third summer I have volunteered for this project. The teacher for the rising fourth graders was a retired public school teacher and we hit it off so well that I went back for two more weeks. It was a very rewarding experience; sometimes frightening and sometimes wonderfully encouraging. All 13 of the children were black. I think most live in a project. To my great chagrin, one of them did not know her left hand from her right hand. I wondered how many of them had been advanced by the city schools to the fourth grade, but a few of them were quite bright and imaginative. They appear to have a good opportunity to advance. Everyone seems to recognize the disadvantages arising from these children's home life. The teacher pointed out again and again to me that in many cases, the children had inadequate sleep. The parents stay up partying and/or watching television, and the quarters are so cramped that the children cannot sleep in those surroundings.

One big lesson I came away with is that we badly need these summer and after school enrichment programs. In my opinion, they make a huge difference. People like you and I are not qualified to teach a class, but we can make significant contributions with a little bit of effort.

I am wrestling with the plans of the eighth grader that I have tutored for four years. He lives now with his aunt because his mother is mentally unstable, and we are trying to figure out the transportation for him to continue at the free private school he attended last year. His aunt lives about three blocks from a fairly new public school, and I am concerned that she does not see the value in the other school. One of the many values is that he has a good shot at winning a scholarship to Woodbery Forest School. He has been to their sports camp on scholarships the past two summers and they are apparently very interested in him – if they conclude he can do the work. The private school will work to help him get to Woodberry.

Two weeks ago we visited Montpelier, which is James Madison's home. Among other things they shared with us some frightening information about the ignorance of Americans about the Constitution. One has to wonder if a democratic system can work if the populace is so uninformed.

Cotes Pinckney

A graduate of Yale University, Pinckney served as an officer in the US Navy for three years before attending University of Virginia Law School. He practiced law in Richmond, Virginia.