**Blindness: That's How it is at the Top of the Stairs**

An Address Delivered By Kenneth Jernigan  
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The noted British historian Arnold Toynbee has a sweeping theory of human development called "The Cycle of Challenge and Response." According to this theory every civilization faces a constant succession of challenges and confrontations, and its viability and soundness can be measured by the vigor and nature of the response. It may meet the challenge head on, emerging stronger and healthier for the encounter; it may react defensively, desperately, leaving the struggle exhausted; or it may, at the first sign of threat, simply lie down and die. As it is with civilizations, so it may be with movements. For that matter, so it may be with individuals. Our vitality, our spirit, and our very capacity for survival can likely be measured not only by the vigor of our response to challenge and confrontation but also by the pattern and the nature of that response.

When the National Federation of the Blind came into being in 1940, there were certainly both challenge and confrontation; but neither the professionals in the field nor the public-at-large understood the full implications of the challenge or anticipated the ultimate fury of the coming confrontation. 1940 was another time and a different climate. Barely a scattering had the faith to believe and the courage to hope. They were the founders of the National Federation of the Blind. Those original Federationists were not the powerful force of concerted action which we know today, not the united voice of the nation's blind. All of that was still a generation ahead, in the promise of the future and the fullness of the years.

It is only when we look back that we realize how far we have come. In 1940 the blind were universally regarded as inferiors, and there was a general feeling that it was inappropriate for them to organize and take a hand in their own affairs. It was an atmosphere which broke the spirit and quenched the hope and killed the dream. But the resistance to the notion that the blind should organize (the challenges and the confrontations) did not, for the most part, come from hatred or viciousness or a wish to hurt. It came, instead, from pity, misunderstanding, misplaced kindness, or (at worst) apathy and a desire to maintain the status quo.

That was 1940. This is 1979. What has happened to us in the intervening years? What challenges and confrontations do we face today? How do these challenges and confrontations differ from those of 1940? In short, as a movement and a people, where are we—and where are we going?

In broad outline the story of the past four decades is easy to read and quickly told. At first the Federation was small and largely ignored. It had few members and little influence. The governmental and private agencies tried to treat it as if it were not unique at all but simply another provider of services (one among many), a miniature duplicate of what already was—in other words, a newcomer but one of themselves. The public (to the extent that the public knew about the Federation at all) took its lead from the professionals.

But the blind knew otherwise. They knew of the need which only the Federation could fill. They knew it in the yearning for freedom, in the lack of opportunity, in the rejection by society, and in the exclusion from the rights and privileges of full participation and equal status. They knew that the Federation was theirs. For whatever successes it might achieve or whatever failures it might make, it was theirs. Its primary purpose was not to provide services but to monitor and hold to account those who did provide services. And there were other purposes: to change social attitudes, fight discrimination, eliminate prejudice, create self- awareness, instill hope, touch the conscience, and (above all) establish a means by which the blind could discuss common problems, reach decisions, and make their voices heard. The Federation was unique. It was (and is) the collective voice of the nation's blind—the blind thinking for themselves, speaking for themselves, and acting for themselves.

Our battle for freedom and recognition parallels to a striking degree that experienced by the blacks, for we are (in every modern sense of that term) a minority. We have our ghettos, our unemployment, our underemployment, and our Uncle Toms. We have our establishment (composed of society as a whole and, particularly, of many of the professionals in the governmental and private agencies). That establishment condescendingly loves us if we stay in our places, and bitterly resents us if we strive for equality. Above all (through our own organization, the National Federation of the Blind) we have discovered our collective conscience and found our true identity. We have learned that it is not our blindness which has put us down and kept us out, but what we and others have thought about our blindness. Yet, they tell us that there is no discrimination and that we are not a minority. We want no strife or confrontation, but we will do what we have to do. We are simply no longer willing to be second-class citizens. We have said it before, and we say it again: We know who we are, and we will never go back!

No group ever goes from second-class status to first-class citizenship without passing through a period of hostility. Several years ago I made the statement that we had not even come far enough up the stairway of independence for anybody to hate us. I believe I can safely say that that problem has now been solved. We have enemies enough to satisfy even the most militant among us. We have actually progressed to the point of creating a backlash.

However, we must see the situation in perspective. The hostility and backlash which we are experiencing are not due to mistakes on our part or to radical behavior or to over aggressiveness or to any of the other trumped-up charges which have been made against us. Just as with the black civil rights movement and Martin Luther King, the hostile reactions and backlash are an inevitable step on the stairs which lead from the depths of rejection and custody to the upper level of freedom and first-class status. The bottom steps of that stairway are often paved with condescension and pity; the middle steps are sometimes paved with goodwill and the beginnings of acceptance; but the top steps are always paved with resentment and fear. We have come a long way up. We are approaching the top of the stairs, and we are experiencing our full measure of fear and resentment.

The fear and resentment come from those who have a vested interest in keeping us down: the sheltered shops, with their subminimum wages, which were the subject of the recent Wall Street Journal articles;1 the New York agencies, which we have helped expose through damning audits; the National Accreditation Council for Agencies Serving the Blind and Visually Handicapped (NAC), which we oppose for its phony standards, its meaningless accreditation, its lust to manage our lives, and its desperate effort to gain public support and respectability; the Cleveland Society for the Blind, which we have taken to court because of its wrongful seizure of the earnings of blind food service operators and its attempt to control the smallest details of their daily existence; the American Foundation for the Blind, which we call to task for its drippy publicity and pseudo-professionalism; the insurance companies, which (by court action and administrative regulation) we seek to prevent from charging us extra rates and denying us coverage; the airlines, against whom we demonstrate for trying to tell us where we can sit, that we cannot keep our canes during flight, that we must travel with an attendant, and sometimes that we cannot even board the plane at all; and all of those other public officials and private individuals who have an economic interest in keeping us from achieving independence or who boost their egos and show their insecurity by the need to feel superior, to custodialize, to condescend, and to treat us as wards.

Whether we finish the climb up the stairway to freedom and social acceptance (leaving behind the hostility and backlash) will be determined not by the actions of others but by our own behavior. This is our challenge and our confrontation. It is also the strongest possible proof of how far we have come. For the first time in history, the choice is ours. As other minorities have discovered, the final steps are the hardest.

There are several reasons why this is so: For one thing, the degradations and deprivations at the bottom of the stairs are (once they are pointed out and clearly delineated) so obvious and unjust that they are easily understood; and large groups of the general public can be touched in their conscience and enlisted to help, still keeping intact their sense of superior worth and special status. The minority is a long way down and poses no apparent threat, even by climbing a few steps up. At the top of the stairs things are different. The discrimination is more complex and subtle, the prejudice less obvious, the threat to vested interest more real, and the violations of tradition more imminent.

There is also the fact that the members of the minority group are part of the larger society. They tend to see themselves as others see them. They tend to accept the false views of their limitations and, thus, do much to make those limitations a reality.

I can offer a personal example. On February 11, 1979, an article written by R. H. Gardner appeared in the Baltimore Sun. It was headlined: "'Ice Castles' a little hard to swallow," and this is what it said:

Several years ago, I was at a party when a friend, for reasons I cannot recall, bet me I could not stand on one foot 15 seconds with my eyes closed. I had been quite an athlete in my youth (10 years old), during which period I could stand on practically any part of my anatomy—head, hands, ears or toes—for an indefinite length of time.

I accepted the bet.

To my astonishment, at the count of five I began to waver. At seven, the waver turned into a stagger; and at ten I was lost. It was a great shock for a former athlete (even a 10-year-old one), and I have never forgotten it.

For something happens to your balance when you close your eyes. And how much worse it must be if you're blind!

Being blind, a scientist-friend once pointed out to me, cannot be compared to closing your eyes. When you close your eyes, you still see. You see the undersides of the lids with the light behind them.

But what you see when you're blind is what you see out of the back of your head. There's neither light nor sight of any kind.

I was reminded of all this while watching 'Ice Castles,' a film about a blind figure-skater .... I'm told there is a blind figure-skater upon whose career the film is loosely based. But it's hard to believe, in view of my experience trying to stand on one leg...

When I read that article I pooh-poohed it and laughed it to scorn. So did one of my sighted associates. Then, just to show how silly it was, she closed her eyes and stood on one foot. But the laughter stopped, for she wobbled and fell. Then, she opened her eyes and tried it again. There was no problem. She kept her balance without difficulty.

"Nonsense!" I said. "Let me show you"—whereupon, I stood on one foot—and immediately lost my balance. That was three months ago. Was I shaken? I certainly was.

Then, I began doing some thinking. We know that the tests which are made by blindfolding sighted people to determine what the blind can do are totally invalid. I have been among the most vocal in pointing that out. I knew (or, at least I thought I knew) that balance is a matter of the inner ear, not the eye. Why, then, did my associate fall when her eyes were closed but keep her balance when they were open? Perhaps the fact that she was accustomed to seeing things around her as part of her daily life made the difference, or perhaps (even though she is well versed in our philosophy) the matter went deeper. Perhaps (reacting to social conditioning) she subconsciously expected to fall and was tense. I suggested that she practice a few times with her eyes closed. And what do you know? It worked. In four or five times she could stand on one foot as easily with her eyes closed as open.

But what about me? I have never had any problem with balance. So I tried it again—and I could do it with perfect ease. If anybody doubts it, I will be glad to demonstrate. Then why did I fall the first time? I reluctantly conclude that (despite all of my philosophy and knowledge to the contrary, despite all of my experience with this very sort of situation dressed out in other forms) I fell into the trap of social conditioning. I hope I won't do it again, but I can't be sure. There is probably not a blind person alive in the world today who has not, at one time or another, sold himself or herself short and accepted the public misconceptions, usually without ever knowing it. Prejudice is subtle, and tradition runs deep. That's how it is at the top of the stairs.

Which brings me back to Mr. Gardner and his newspaper article. He was not trying to hurt us, but just make a living. Nevertheless, based on his single false experience as a simulated blind man, he makes sweeping generalizations about our lacks and losses. Do you think he would believe we are capable of equality—that we can travel alone, get off an airplane in time of emergency, or compete with others for a regular job—that we deserve insurance at the same rate as the sighted—that we are capable of full and normal lives? Of course not. And his opinions count. He is a member of the press, a molder of thought. And how do you think he will react if one of us brings all of this to his attention?

Probably with defensiveness and resentment—probably as part of the backlash. Perhaps he will even help stimulate unfavorable publicity against us, not realizing or admitting why he is doing it—or even, for that matter, that he is doing it. But we have no choice. The alternative is to slide back toward the bottom of the stairs. We will say it as gently and as courteously as we can—but we will say it. We want no strife or confrontation, but we are simply no longer willing to be second-class citizens. We will do what we have to do. We intend to take the final step on the stairs.

You will remember that Ralph Sanders in his banquet speech2 last year quoted as follows from a gimmicky ad by a company employing blind persons to smell its perfumes: "Why," the ad asks, "do people close their eyes when they kiss? Because by cutting off one sense, they heighten the other four. They are completely immersed in the taste, smell, sound, and touch of the kiss.

Blind people have the "most highly attuned sense of smell possessed by man."

What an ad! Such beliefs are widely held, but even a moment's reflection will demonstrate their absolute insanity. If a kiss is really made better by closing the eyes, think what a charge you could get if you put corks in your nose and plugs in your ears. The taste would go all the way to your toes, and the touch would drive you right up the wall. I would not expect the perfume company to appreciate our objection to its ad, but that will not keep us from objecting. That's how it is at the top of the stairs.

Sometimes the public misconceptions about blindness are used as a shield to avoid responsibility or hide from punishment. Consider, for instance, an article which appeared in the March 8, 1979 Minneapolis Star. It reads:

Jerome M. Bach, Minneapolis psychiatrist and a founder of the Bach Institute, a psychotherapy center, has been placed on probation by the Minnesota Board of Medical Examiners for engaging in sexual activities with four of his female patients. . . .

The board's ruling reversed the finding of a state hearing examiner, Howard L. Kaibel, Jr. Kaibel recommended no action be taken against the doctor....

Bach, who suffers from tunnel vision from a degenerative condition of the retina, is legally blind. Because of this, Kaibel said, Bach 'depends on physical contact as an additional means of communication and of obtaining information about his patients'. . . .

Bach had become widely known among patients and other therapists for an unusual ability to diagnose emotional problems and for his use of physical contact in therapy.

According to Kaibel's findings, Bach's use of 'physical psychotherapeutic intervention...(is) widely known, accepted by literally hundreds of his colleagues and even coveted by some who ... are unable to utilize them as effectively.'

That is what the article says—and the mind is boggled at the madness. Did Dr. Kaibel really mean it? Dr. Bach had never identified with the blind before, and so far as anybody knows, he has never done so since; but when the heat was on, he tried to hide behind the stereotypes. For once, we did not speak out alone. The medical profession, the women's movement, and others joined with us. We did what we could to make something positive out of the situation—attempting to educate the public and show unaligned blind persons why they should join us. Constant vigil, battle, hostility, and backlash--but also growing efforts to inform the public, achieve concerted action, and heighten self-awareness. That's how it is at the top of the stairs.

Blind vendors and food service operators constitute one of the largest groups of the employed blind. They work for their money and earn what they get, but some of them fail to recognize their common bond with the rest of us, their need for the organized blind movement. Those who have such attitudes should read a novel3 about the CIA published in 1978. It is called Ballet, and it is written by Tom Murphy. Although it speaks directly to blind vendors, it speaks just as falsely and just as insultingly to all of the rest of us. The following passage occurs on page 51 and introduces chapter three:

Dave Loughlin had the rough bulk of a longshoreman and the ambling shuffle of a geriatric bear. Dave was thirty pounds heavier and more than thirty years older than he'd been in the Army OSS days, the last happy time he could remember. And now, as Dave made his way down the long green-asphalt-tiled corridor that always reminded him of a hospital, of death, he felt every minute of those years, and every extra ounce weighing on him like an unserved sentence. And he felt the effects of last night's boozing, which didn't help any either. He passed the blind lunch counter and shuddered, even though he'd known it would be there, creepy as ever, even if it was the Old Man's idea, even if it did make some kind of perverted sense.

Where else in the world would you have blind men and women cheerfully handing out wrapped sandwiches and cartons of coffee so bad it could have been made only by the blind? Where else but in the ever-vigilant atmosphere of CIA headquarters out in dear old Langley, Virginia?

That book is circulating by the tens of thousands throughout the nation. It approaches genius in its ability to malign and misstate. It manages to lump almost all of the stereotypes into a couple of sentences. The blind are cheerful. We are creepy. It's perverted to have us about. We can't make sandwiches but must get them prewrapped. We can't even make a decent cup of coffee. Here is no kindness (or even condescending pity)—only meanness and contemptuous dismissal. Each one of us (vendor and non-vendor alike) should think carefully about this book and the others like it which blight our opportunities and poison the public mind. We have no choice. The alternative is to slide back toward the bottom of the stairs. We will say it as gently and as courteously as we can—but we will say it. We intend to take the final step on the stairs, and we must take it together. We know who we are, and we will never go back!

The meanness of the Murphy novel is by no means universal, but it is certainly a sign of the times—an evidence of backlash and a proof that we are close to the top of the stairs. Southwest Airlines, which proudly proclaims that it spreads "love around Texas," recently initiated a policy of refusing to transport the blind or the mentally retarded unless they are accompanied by an attendant; and a Southwest official a few months ago wrote the following bit of disgusting gibberish to our Texas President, Glenn Crosby: "In regard to your question about canes being taken away from passengers, this is a security measure. Obviously, we have no way of knowing what a passenger will do with such an object; therefore, as a precaution, all such articles are taken away during flight.

Not much love in that, is there? Nor are the Southwest officials likely to feel any kindness toward the Federation—especially since we are picketing their counters and exposing their behavior to the public. Backlash, yes. But also (hopefully) breakthroughs to reason and public understanding. That's how it is at the top of the stairs, and (regardless of the cost) we intend to take those final steps.

In Iowa (where the progress has probably been greatest and the backlash strongest) not only have we suffered sustained, vicious, unfounded, and unscrupulous attacks from the Des Moines newspaper; but we are also engaged in a battle in the courts. As the blind of the nation know, Herbert Anderson (Iowa's enlightened Insurance Commissioner) ruled a couple of years ago that insurance companies could not discriminate against the blind in rates or coverage. As could have been predicted, the insurance companies (even those which had always claimed that they were, as they put it, most "sympathetic to the blind") suddenly turned hostile. When one of them (Federal Kemper) was fined a thousand dollars and ordered to mend its ways, it decided that the blind were ungrateful and unreasonable and took the matter to court.

On March 23, 1979, Judge Theodore Miller, who will not be remembered as one of the more enlightened spirits of the age, stated as follows in his "Findings of Fact":

9. The Court takes judicial notice of the fact that the blind have only four of the five senses, consisting of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. Common knowledge provides that one with less than all the common senses operates at a disadvantage and is more susceptible to be unable to function as an able-bodied person than one with all his senses. Federal statutes recognize by implication the disabilities which blind people suffer and have provided tax exemptions for them.

When you sort out the garbled language, the Judge is clearly saying that no proof is necessary—that the blind can't "cut it" on terms of equality with others. It is a matter of "common knowledge" In number 17 of his "conclusions" Judge Miller takes the astounding position that if blind persons are denied insurance, no discrimination has occurred since they have all been denied to the same degree and, therefore, have received equal treatment. Not much love in that—and not much intelligence either. But that's how it is when you deal with vested interest, threats to tradition, and backlash. Commissioner Anderson and we are appealing this case to the Iowa Supreme Court. Whatever the cost or the backlash, we intend to take those final steps. That's how it is at the top of the stairs.

Today I have said very little about the professionals in the field of work with the blind, but the picture would not be complete without their inclusion. Increasing numbers of them are working with us and taking joy in our progress. But there are others: NAC,4 the American Foundation for the Blind, and their allies have tremendous wealth and broad contacts. They could do much, if they chose, to hasten the day of the liberation of the blind, but they seem to feel that they have a vested interest in our continued dependence and subjugation. Perhaps Louis Rives (blind himself and the President of the National Accreditation Council for Agencies Serving the Blind and Visually Handicapped) has summed up the philosophy of inferiority and defeatism as well as it has ever been put. It is certainly the opposite of everything we believe and have experienced. Last year at the NAC meeting he said that there are only two ways of making the blind and the sighted equal: either the blind can regain their sight, or the sighted can have their eyes plucked out. With such "professionals" in the field is it any wonder that the public is not yet informed? But (with or without the NAC professionals) we will take the final steps. We will reach the top of the stairs.

As President of the Federation I receive many letters. Some are encouraging; others heartrending. But I think I have never received a more expressive and revealing letter than the one I am about to share with you. It was written by Edgar Sammons, who lives in Mountain City, Tennessee, and speaks with the language and the clarity of Elizabethan prose. I have never met Edgar Sammons, but I have thought long about his letter and have come to feel a deep affection and a high respect for him. He is not a complainer, not a whiner—but he has known custody, terrible loneliness, blighted hope, and real deprivation. Yet, he has made a life for himself. His letter is as significant for what it does not say as for what it says. I have his permission to use it. Otherwise, I would not do it. Here it is:

I thought I would try to give you a little history of my life. I was born October 30, 1913. They said I lost my sight at three weeks old. I grew just like the rest of them. I think a blind person should be brought up just like a sighted person but most of them are not. Most of them would learn a lot more if they would let them. We just had an old boxt house and a little land. Not enough to make a living on. My father always rented corn ground for half of it. My mother put up a lot of stuff, and we always had plenty to eat.

My father worked on the first highway that come through here. They blacktopped it in 1924. [I interrupt the letter to point out that he is now eleven years old, and this is the first thing that has happened to him that he feels worth noting. But let me continue]:

My father rented a little farm, and we moved to it. It was not very far from here. We lived there a year and moved back.

My mother always wanted to send me to school, but my father never would give up for it. My grandmother and my mother and little baby sister all died in 1924. There were five of us children left. Some people wanted to put us in a home. We had a hard time, but we made out. If the family could have had their way I don't guess I would have been allowed to get off of the place without some of them with me. They couldn't watch me all of the time.

My grandmother Sammons was still living and they would send me down there when they would go to work in the corn. That suited me just fine. My grandmother would be doing her housework, and I would go down the road about half a mile to my aunt's and stay a while. Sometimes some of them would find it out and tell on me, but I didn't care what they done about it. I would run off every chance I got. There was just mud roads, but I got along. They would take me places with them at night. They went a lot of places at that that I would have like to have went, but they left me at my grandmothers. I think the blind should be allowed to to get out and learn to get around just like the sighted when they are growing up. A lot of us don't have that chance. My brother and father went to work in a cotton mill at Johnson City, and we moved down there in 1927. [He was born in 1913, so he is now fourteen years old.] The mill closed down in 1928, and we moved back. [Now, he's fifteen.] In 1933 [He's now twenty.] all of the children got off over at Ashville, North Carolina, and got jobs. (You notice that he didn't get a job.] My father married again in 1933. I stayed at home most of the time. After that my job in the summertime was pasturing the cows in the road. I had bells on them so I could tell where they was at. I set on the banks with the cows, wondering how I could get a little money to get me some tobacco. I was a young man then.

The welfare started in 1937. [He's now twenty-four.] I got a little. A lot of the blind didn't get any. There wasn't very much work for the blind then. I would go to Ashville and stay a while and come back here and stay a while.

In 1944 [He's now thirty-one.] I went to Ashville and got me a job sorting mica. [Remember: This is his first job. It was the Second World War, and manpower was scarce. But back to his letter]: They said we could do that job better than the sighted people. I just got to work nine weeks, and our part of the job closed down. I stayed a while longer over there to see if it would start back up, but it never did.

That was a good job, but in one way I didn't like it. I stayed with my sister and her husband. They was as good to me as they could be, but they wanted me with them all the time. They would come after me at night and take me to work in the morning. I didn't want that. I wanted out on my own like other people. I wanted to get out and get me a girl just like other people.

Well, I come back home and stayed around here most of the time. My stepmother died in 1951. [Now, he's thirty-eight.] Grady Weaver started teaching me to read and write Braille in 1951. I can't spell very good, but that helped some. I stayed at home with my father until 1957. [His life is passing. He's now forty-four.] My father got so bad sick that they had to put him in a rest home, and I went to Morristown and got me a job in the sheltered workshop.

Mattie Ruth was working there at that time. She told someone, 'the Sammons has come; the bass will be here next.' Sure enough in a few days a man did come by the name of Bass. Just a little while after I went to work, Mattie Ruth got sick and went home. She like to have died. She didn't come back any more for about three years. She worked for a while, and her father got sick and she went home to take care of him. He died in 1962. [Now, he's forty-nine.]

After that, I went up and got Mattie Ruth. Her mother said she ought to have run me off the first time I ever come up there. She said I took the last girl she had.

I was forty-three years old before I got out on my own, but it has been the best part of my life. If I had stayed with my people, I don't guess I would have been living by now. I didn't have anything to live for.

That is the letter. It requires no comment, and it tells us what we have to do. In a very real sense Edgar Sammons speaks for us all. The imprisonment and lack of opportunity were just as cruel as if they had been deliberately imposed. They were just as degrading, just as blighting, and just as painful.

We must see that it never happens again. That is why we have to strengthen the Federation, why we have to speak out, and why we have to disregard the hostility and backlash.

Our climb up the stairs to freedom has been slow and difficult, but we are nearing the top. We carry with us a trust--for Dr. tenBroek, for Edgar Sammons, and for all of the others who went before us. We also carry a trust for those who will follow—for the blind of the decades ahead. Yesterday and tomorrow meet in this present time, and we are the ones who have the responsibility. Our final climb up the stairs will not be easy, but we must make it. The stakes are too high and the alternatives too terrible to allow it to be otherwise. If we fail to meet the challenge or dishonor our trust, we will fall far down the stairs, and the journey back up will be long and painful—probably as much as another generation.

But, of course, we will not fail. We will continue to climb. Our heritage demands it; our faith confirms it; our humanity requires it. Whatever the sacrifice, we will make it. Whatever the price, we will pay it. Seen from this perspective, the hostility and backlash (the challenges and confrontations) are hardly worth noticing. They are only an irritant. My brothers and my sisters, the future is ours. Come! Join me on the stairs, and we will finish the journey.

**FOOTNOTES**

1. Jonathan Kwitny and Jerry Landauer, "Sheltered Shops Pay of the Blind Often Trails Minimum Wage At Charity Workrooms," The Wall Street Journal, January 24, 1979, pp. 1 and 35 and "Sheltered Shops How a Blind Worker Gets $1.85 an Hour After 20 Years on Job," The Wall Street Journal, January 25, 1979, pp. 1 and 31.

2. Ralph Sanders, "The Continuing Challenge of Change," Braille Monitor, October 1978.

3. Tom Murphy, Ballet! (A Signet Book, New American Library, 1978), page 51.

4. National Accreditation Council for Agencies Serving the Blind and Visually Handicapped. NAC was the successor to and was appointed by the Commission on Standards and Accreditation. COMSTAC, in turn, was appointed by the American Foundation for the Blind, which has always provided more than one-half the budget—first for COMSTAC and now for NAC. In other words the so-called objective "Accreditation Council" is owned by the American Foundation for the Blind.

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