

Prologue

- [Bianca You Animal, Shut Up!](#)
- [I Quit, I Think](#)
- [The New Individualism](#)
- [School As Religion](#)
- [He Was Square Inside And Brown](#)
- [The New Dumbness](#)
- [Putting Pedagogy To The Question](#)
- [Author's Note](#)

Bianca, You Animal, Shut Up!

Our problem in understanding forced schooling stems from an inconvenient fact: that the wrong it does from a human perspective is right from a systems perspective. You can see this in the case of six-year-old Bianca, who came to my attention because an assistant principal screamed at her in front of an assembly, "BIANCA, YOU ANIMAL, SHUT UP!" Like the wail of a banshee, this sang the school doom of Bianca. Even though her body continued to shuffle around, the voodoo had poisoned her.

Do I make too much of this simple act of putting a little girl in her place? It must happen thousands of times every day in schools all over. I've seen it many times, and if I were painfully honest I'd admit to *doing* it many times. Schools are *supposed* to teach kids their place. That's why we have age-graded classes. In any case, it wasn't your own little Janey or mine.

Most of us tacitly accept the pragmatic terms of public school which allow every kind of psychic violence to be inflicted on Bianca in order to fulfill the prime directive of the system: putting children in their place. It's called "social efficiency." But I get this precognition, this flash-forward to a moment far in the future when your little girl Jane, having left her comfortable home, wakes up to a world where Bianca is her enraged meter maid, or the passport clerk Jane counts on for her emergency ticket out of the country, or the strange lady who lives next door.

I picture this animal Bianca grown large and mean, the same Bianca who didn't go to school for a month after her little friends took to whispering, "Bianca is an animal, Bianca is an animal," while Bianca, only seconds earlier a human being like themselves, sat choking back tears, struggling her way through a reading selection by guessing what the words meant.

In my dream I see Bianca as a fiend manufactured by schooling who now regards Janey as a vehicle for vengeance. In a transport of passion she:

Gives Jane's car a ticket before the meter runs out.

Throws away Jane's passport application after Jane leaves the office.

Plays heavy metal music through the thin partition which separates Bianca's apartment from Jane's while Jane pounds frantically on the wall for relief.

All the above.

You aren't compelled to loan your car to anyone who wants it, but you are compelled to surrender your school-age child to strangers who process children for a livelihood, even though one in every nine schoolchildren is terrified of physical harm happening to them in school, terrified with good cause; about thirty-three are murdered there every year. From 1992 through 1999, 262 children were murdered in school in the United States. Your great-great-grandmother didn't have to surrender her children. What happened?

If I demanded you give up your television to an anonymous, itinerant repairman who needed work you'd think I was crazy; if I came with a policeman who forced you to pay that repairman even after he broke your set, you would be outraged. Why are you so docile when you give up your child to a government agent called a schoolteacher?

I want to open up concealed aspects of modern schooling such as the deterioration it forces in the morality of parenting. You have no say at all in choosing your teachers. You know nothing about their backgrounds or families. And the state knows little more than you do. This is as radical a piece of social engineering as the human imagination can conceive. What does it mean?

One thing you do know is how unlikely it will be for any teacher to understand the personality of your particular child or anything significant about your family, culture, religion, plans, hopes, dreams. In the confusion of school affairs even teachers so disposed don't have opportunity to know those things. How did this happen?

Before you hire a company to build a house, you would, I expect, insist on detailed plans showing what the finished structure was going to look like. Building a child's mind and character is what public schools do, their justification for prematurely breaking family and neighborhood learning. Where is documentary evidence to prove this assumption that trained and certified professionals do it better than people who know and love them can? There isn't any.

The cost in New York State for building a well-schooled child in the year 2000 is \$200,000 per body when lost interest is calculated. That capital sum invested in the child's name over the past twelve years would have delivered a million dollars to each kid as a nest egg to compensate for having no school. The original \$200,000 is more than the average home in New York costs. You wouldn't build a home without some idea what it would look like when finished, but you are compelled to let a corps of perfect strangers tinker with your child's mind and personality without the foggiest idea what they want to do with it.

Law courts and legislatures have totally absolved school people from liability. You can sue a doctor for malpractice, not a schoolteacher. Every homebuilder is accountable to customers years after the home is built; not schoolteachers, though. You can't sue a priest, minister, or rabbi either; that should be a clue.

If you can't be guaranteed even minimal results by these institutions, not even physical safety; if you can't be guaranteed *anything* except that you'll be arrested if you fail to surrender your kid, just what does the public in *public* schools mean?

What exactly is public about public schools? That's a question to take seriously. If schools were public as libraries, parks, and swimming pools are public, as highways and sidewalks are public, then the public would be satisfied with them most of the time. Instead, a situation of constant dissatisfaction has spanned many decades. Only in Orwell's Newspeak, as perfected by legendary spin doctors of the twentieth century such as Ed Bernays or Ivy Lee or great advertising combines, is there anything public about public schools.

I Quit, I Think

In the first year of the last decade of the twentieth century during my thirtieth year as a school teacher in Community School District 3, Manhattan, after teaching in all five secondary schools in the district, crossing swords with one professional administration after another as they strove to rid themselves of me, after having my license suspended twice for insubordination and terminated covertly once while I was on medical leave of absence, after the City University of New York borrowed me for a five-year stint as a lecturer in the Education Department (and the faculty rating handbook published by the Student Council gave me the highest ratings in the department my last three years), after planning and bringing about the most successful permanent school fund-raiser in New York City history, after placing a single eighth-grade class into 30,000 hours of volunteer community service, after organizing and financing a student-run food cooperative, after securing over a thousand apprenticeships, directing the collection of tens of thousands of books for the construction of private student libraries, after producing four talking job dictionaries for the blind, writing two original student musicals, and launching an armada of other initiatives to reintegrate students within a larger human reality, I quit.

I was New York State Teacher of the Year when it happened. An accumulation of disgust and frustration which grew too heavy to be borne finally did me in. To test my resolve I sent a short essay to *The Wall Street Journal* titled "I Quit, I Think." In it I explained my reasons for deciding to wrap it up, even though I had no savings and not the slightest idea what else I might do in my mid-fifties to pay the rent. In its entirety it read like this:

Government schooling is the most radical adventure in history. It kills the family by monopolizing the best times of childhood and by teaching disrespect for home and parents. The whole blueprint of school procedure is Egyptian, not Greek or Roman. It grows from the theological idea that human value is a scarce thing, represented symbolically by the narrow peak of a pyramid.

That idea passed into American history through the Puritans. It found its "scientific" presentation in the bell curve, along which talent supposedly apportions itself by some Iron Law of Biology. It's a religious notion, School is its church. I offer rituals to keep heresy at bay. I provide documentation to justify the heavenly pyramid.

Socrates foresaw if teaching became a formal profession, something like this would happen. Professional interest is served by making what is easy to do seem hard; by subordinating the laity to the priesthood. School is too vital a jobs-project, contract giver and protector of the social order to allow itself to be "re-formed." It has political allies to guard its marches, that's why reforms come and go without changing much. Even reformers can't imagine school much different.

David learns to read at age four; Rachel, at age nine: In normal development, when both are 13, you can't tell which one learned first—the five-year spread means nothing at all. But in school I label Rachel "learning disabled" and slow David down a bit, too. For a paycheck, I adjust David to depend on me to tell him when to go and stop. He won't outgrow that dependency. I identify Rachel as discount merchandise, "special education" fodder. She'll be locked in her place forever.

In 30 years of teaching kids rich and poor I almost never met a learning disabled child; hardly ever met a gifted and talented one either. Like all school categories, these are sacred myths, created by human imagination. They derive from questionable values we never examine because they preserve the temple of schooling.

That's the secret behind short-answer tests, bells, uniform time blocks, age grading, standardization, and all the rest of the school religion punishing our nation. There isn't a right way to become educated; there are as many ways as fingerprints. We don't need state-certified teachers to make education happen—that probably guarantees it won't. How much more evidence is necessary? Good schools don't need more money or a longer year; they need real free-market choices, variety that speaks to every need and runs risks. We don't need a national curriculum or national testing either. Both initiatives arise from ignorance of how people learn or deliberate indifference to it. I can't teach this way any longer. If you hear of a job where I don't have to hurt kids to make a living, let me know. Come fall I'll be looking for work.

The New Individualism

The little essay went off in March and I forgot it. Somewhere along the way I must have gotten a note saying it would be published at the editor's discretion, but if so, it was quickly forgotten in the press of turbulent feelings that accompanied my own internal struggle. Finally, on July 5, 1991, I swallowed hard and quit. Twenty days later the *Journal* published the piece. A week later I was studying invitations to speak at NASA Space Center, the Western White House, the Nashville Center for the Arts, Columbia Graduate Business School, the Colorado Librarian's Convention, Apple Computer, and the financial control board of United Technologies Corporation. Nine years later, still enveloped in the orbit of compulsion schooling, I had spoken 750 times in fifty states and seven foreign countries. I had no agent and never advertised, but a lot of people made an effort to find me. It was as if parents were starving for someone to tell them the truth.

My hunch is it wasn't so much what I was saying that kept the lecture round unfolding, but that a teacher was speaking out at all and the curious fact that I represented nobody except myself. In the great school debate, this is unheard of. Every single voice allowed regular access to the national podium is the mouthpiece of some association, corporation, university, agency, or institutionalized cause. The poles of debate blocked out by these ritualized, figurehead voices are extremely narrow. Each has a stake in continuing forced schooling much as it is.

As I traveled, I discovered a universal hunger, often unvoiced, to be free of managed debate. A desire to be given untainted information. Nobody seemed to have maps of where this thing had come from or why it acted as it did, but the ability to smell a rat was alive and well all over America.

Exactly what John Dewey heralded at the onset of the twentieth century has indeed happened. Our once highly individualized nation has evolved into a centrally managed village, an agora made up of huge special interests which regard individual voices as irrelevant. The masquerade is managed by having collective agencies speak through particular human beings. Dewey said this would mark a great advance in human affairs, but the net effect is to reduce men and women to the status of functions in whatever subsystem they are placed. Public opinion is turned on and off in laboratory fashion. All this in the name of social efficiency, one of the two main goals of forced schooling.

Dewey called this transformation "the new individualism." When I stepped into the job of schoolteacher in 1961, the new individualism was sitting in the driver's seat all over urban America, a far cry from my own school days on the Monongahela when the Lone Ranger, not Sesame Street, was our nation's teacher, and school things weren't nearly so oppressive. But gradually they became something else in the euphoric times following WWII. Easy money and easy travel provided welcome relief from wartime austerity, the advent of television, the new nonstop theater, offered easy laughs, effortless entertainment. Thus preoccupied, Americans failed to notice the deliberate conversion of formal education that was taking place, a transformation that would turn school into an instrument of the leviathan state. Who made that happen and why is part of the story I have to tell.

School As Religion

Nothing about school is what it seems, not even boredom. To show you what I mean is the burden of this long essay. My book represents a try at arranging my own thoughts in order to figure out what fifty years of classroom confinement (as student and teacher) add up to for me. You'll encounter a great deal of speculative history here. This is a personal investigation of why school is a dangerous place. It's not so much that anyone there sets out to hurt children; more that all of us associated with the institution are stuck like flies in the same great web your kids are. We buzz frantically to cover our own panic but have little power to help smaller flies.

Looking backward on a thirty-year teaching career full of rewards and prizes, somehow I can't completely believe that I spent my time on earth institutionalized; I can't believe that centralized schooling is allowed to exist at all as a gigantic indoctrination and sorting machine, robbing people of their children. Did it really happen? Was this my life?

God help me.

School is a religion. Without understanding the holy mission aspect you're certain to misperceive what takes place as a result of human stupidity or venality or even class warfare. All are present in the equation, it's just that none of these matter very much—even without them school would move in the same direction. Dewey's *Pedagogic Creed* statement of 1897 gives you a clue to the zeitgeist:

Every teacher should realize he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of the proper social order and the securing of the right social growth. In this way the teacher is always the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of heaven.

What is "proper" social order? What does "right" social growth look like? If you don't know you're like me, not like John Dewey who did, or the Rockefellers, his patrons, who did, too.

Somehow out of the industrial confusion which followed the Civil War, powerful men and dreamers became certain what kind of social order America needed, one very like the British system we had escaped a hundred years earlier. This realization didn't arise as a product of public debate as it should have in a democracy, but as a distillation of private discussion. Their ideas contradicted the original American charter but that didn't disturb them. They had a stupendous goal in mind—the rationalization of everything. The end of unpredictable history; its transformation into dependable order.

From mid-century onwards certain utopian schemes to retard maturity in the interests of a greater good were put into play, following roughly the blueprint Rousseau laid down in the book *Emile*. At least rhetorically. The first goal, to be reached in stages, was an orderly, scientifically managed society, one in which the best people would make the decisions, unhampered by democratic tradition. After that, human breeding, the evolutionary destiny of the species, would be in reach. Universal institutionalized formal forced schooling was the prescription, extending the dependency of the young well into what had traditionally been early adult life. Individuals would be prevented from taking up important work until a relatively advanced age. Maturity was to be retarded.

During the post-Civil War period, childhood was extended about four years. Later, a special label was created to describe very old children. It was called *adolescence*, a phenomenon hitherto unknown to the human race. The infantilization of young people didn't stop at the beginning of the twentieth century; child labor laws were extended to cover more and more kinds of work, the age of school leaving set higher and higher. The greatest victory for this utopian project was making school the only avenue to certain occupations. The intention was ultimately to draw all work into the school net. By the 1950s it wasn't unusual to find graduate students well into their thirties, running errands, waiting to start their lives.

He Was Square Inside And Brown

Barbara Whiteside showed me a poem written by a high school senior in Alton, Illinois, two weeks before he committed suicide:

He drew... the things inside that needed saying. Beautiful pictures he kept under his pillow.
When he started school he brought them...
To have along like a friend.
It was funny about school, he sat at a square brown desk Like all the other square brown desks... and his room
Was a square brown room like all the other rooms, tight And close and stiff.

He hated to hold the pencil and chalk, his arms stiff
His feet flat on the floor, stiff, the teacher watching
And watching. She told him to wear a tie like

All the other boys, he said he didn't like them.
She said it didn't matter what he liked. After that the class drew.
He drew all yellow. It was the way he felt about Morning. The Teacher came and smiled, "What's this?
Why don't you draw something like Ken's drawing?"
After that his mother bought him a tie, and he always Drew airplanes and rocketships like everyone else.
He was square inside and brown and his hands were stiff. The things inside that needed saying didn't need it
Anymore, they had stopped pushing... crushed, stiff
Like everything else.

After I spoke in Nashville, a mother named Debbie pressed a handwritten note on me which I read on the airplane to Binghamton, New York:

We started to see Brandon flounder in the first grade, hives, depression, he cried every night after he asked his father, "Is tomorrow school, too?" In second grade the physical stress became apparent. The teacher pronounced his problem Attention Deficit Syndrome. My happy, bouncy child was now looked at as a medical problem, by us as well as the school.

A doctor, a psychiatrist, and a school authority all determined he did have this affliction. Medication was stressed along with behavior modification. If it was suspected that Brandon had not been medicated he was sent home. My square peg needed a bit of whittling to fit their round hole, it seemed.

I cried as I watched my parenting choices stripped away. My ignorance of options allowed Brandon to be medicated through second grade. The tears and hives continued another full year until I couldn't stand it. I began to homeschool Brandon. It was his salvation. No more pills, tears, or hives. He is thriving. He never cries now and does his work eagerly.

The New Dumbness

Ordinary people send their children to school to get smart, but what modern schooling teaches is dumbness. It's a religious idea gone out of control. You don't have to accept that, though, to realize this kind of economy would be jeopardized by too many smart people who understand too much. I won't ask you to take that on faith. Be patient. I'll let a famous American publisher explain to you the secret of our global financial success in just a little while. Be patient.

Old-fashioned dumbness used to be simple ignorance; now it is transformed from ignorance into permanent mathematical categories of relative stupidity like "gifted and talented," "mainstream," "special ed." Categories in which learning is rationed for the good of a system of order. Dumb people are no longer merely ignorant. Now they are indoctrinated, their minds conditioned with substantial doses of commercially prepared disinformation dispensed for tranquilizing purposes.

Jacques Ellul, whose book *Propaganda* is a reflection on the phenomenon, warned us that prosperous children are more susceptible than others to the effects of schooling because they are promised more lifelong comfort and security for yielding wholly:

Critical judgment disappears altogether, for in no way can there ever be *collective* critical judgment....The individual can no longer judge for himself because he inescapably relates his thoughts to the entire complex of values and prejudices established by propaganda. With regard to political situations, he is given ready-made value judgments invested with the power of the truth by...the word of experts.

The new dumbness is particularly deadly to middle- and upper-middle-class kids already made shallow by multiple pressures to conform imposed by the outside world on their usually lightly rooted parents. When they come of age, they are certain they must know something because their degrees and licenses say they do. They remain so convinced until an unexpectedly brutal divorce, a corporate downsizing in midlife, or panic attacks of meaninglessness upset the precarious balance of their incomplete humanity, their stillborn adult lives. Alan Bullock, the English historian, said Evil was a state of incompetence. If true, our school adventure has filled the twentieth century with evil.

Ellul puts it this way:

The individual has no chance to exercise his judgment either on principal questions or on their implication; this leads to the atrophy of a faculty not comfortably exercised under [the best of] conditions...Once personal judgment and critical faculties have disappeared or have atrophied, they will not simply reappear when propaganda is suppressed...years of intellectual and spiritual education would be needed to restore such faculties. The propagandee, if deprived of one propaganda, will immediately adopt another, this will spare him the agony of finding himself *vis a vis* some event without a ready-made opinion.

Once the best children are broken to such a system, they disintegrate morally, becoming dependent on group approval. A National Merit Scholar in my own family once wrote that her dream was to be "a small part in a great machine." It broke my heart. What kids dumbed down by schooling can't do is to think for themselves or ever be at rest for very long without feeling crazy; stupefied boys and girls reveal dependence in many ways easily exploitable by their knowledgeable elders.

According to all official analysis, dumbness isn't *taught* (as I claim), but is *innate* in a great percentage of what has come to be called "the workforce." *Workforce* itself is a term that should tell you much about the mind that governs modern society. According to official reports, only a small fraction of the population is capable of what you and I call mental life: creative thought, analytical thought, judgmental thought, a trio occupying the three highest positions on Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Just how small a fraction would shock you. According to experts, the bulk of the mob is hopelessly dumb, even dangerously so. Perhaps you're a willing accomplice to this social coup which revived the English class system. Certainly you are if your own child has been rewarded with a "gifted and talented" label by your local school. This is what Dewey means by "proper" social order.

If you believe nothing can be done for the dumb except kindness, because it's biology (the bell-curve model); if you believe capitalist oppressors have ruined the dumb because they are bad people (the neo-Marxist model); if you believe dumbness reflects depraved moral fiber (the Calvinist model); or that it's nature's way of disqualifying

boobies from the reproduction sweepstakes (the Darwinian model); or nature's way of providing someone to clean your toilet (the pragmatic elitist model); or that it's evidence of bad karma (the Buddhist model); if you believe any of the various explanations given for the position of the dumb in the social order we have, then you will be forced to concur *that a vast bureaucracy is indeed necessary to address the dumb*. Otherwise they would murder us in our beds.

The shocking possibility that dumb people don't exist in sufficient numbers to warrant the careers devoted to tending to them will seem incredible to you. Yet that is my proposition: Mass dumbness first had to be imagined; it isn't real.

Once the dumb are wished into existence, they serve valuable functions: as a danger to themselves and others they have to be watched, classified, disciplined, trained, medicated, sterilized, ghettoized, cajoled, coerced, jailed. To idealists they represent a challenge, reprobates to be made socially useful. Either way you want it, hundreds of millions of perpetual children require paid attention from millions of adult custodians. An ignorant horde to be schooled one way or another.

Putting Pedagogy To The Question

More than anything else, this book is a work of intuition. The official story of why we school doesn't add up today any more than it did yesterday. A few years before I quit, I began to try to piece together where this school project came from, why it took the shape it took, and why every attempt to change it has ended in abysmal failure.

By now I've invested the better part of a decade looking for answers. If you want a conventional history of schooling, or education as it is carelessly called, you'd better stop reading now. Although years of research in the most arcane sources are reflected here, throughout it's mainly intuition that drives my synthesis.

This is in part a private narrative, the map of a schoolteacher's mind as it tracked strands in the web in which it had been wrapped; in part a public narrative, an account of the latest chapter in an ancient war: the conflict between systems which offer physical safety and certainty at the cost of suppressing free will, and those which offer liberty at the price of constant risk. If you keep both plots in mind, no matter how far afield my book seems to range, you won't wonder what a chapter on coal or one on private hereditary societies has to do with schoolchildren.

What I'm most determined to do is start a conversation among those who've been silent up until now, and that includes schoolteachers. We need to put sterile discussions of grading and testing, discipline, curriculum, multiculturalism and tracking aside as distractions, as mere symptoms of something larger, darker, and more intransigent than any problem a problem-solver could tackle next week. Talking endlessly about such things encourages the bureaucratic tactic of talking around the vital, messy stuff. In partial compensation for your effort, I promise you'll discover what's in the mind of a man who spent his life in a room with children.

Give an ear, then, to what follows. We shall cross-examine history together. We shall put pedagogy to the question. And if the judgment following this *auto da fe* is that only pain can make this monster relax its grip, let us pray together for the courage to inflict it.

Reading my essay will help you sort things out. It will give you a different topological map upon which to fix your own position. No doubt I've made some factual mistakes, but essays since Montaigne have been about locating truth, not about assembling facts. Truth and fact aren't the same thing. My essay is meant to mark out crudely some ground for a scholarship of schooling, my intention is that you not continue to regard the official project of education through an older, traditional perspective, but to see it as a frightening chapter in the administrative organization of knowledge—a text we must vigorously repudiate as our ancestors once did. We live together, you and I, in a dark time when all official history is propaganda. If you want truth, you have to struggle for it. This is my struggle. Let me bear witness to what I have seen.

Author's Note

With conspiracy so close to the surface of the American imagination and American reality, I can only approach with trepidation the task of discouraging you in advance from thinking my book the chronicle of some vast diabolical conspiracy to seize all our children for the personal ends of a small, elite minority.

Don't get me wrong, American schooling has been replete with chicanery from its very beginnings.*

Indeed, it isn't difficult to find various conspirators *boasting* in public about what they pulled off. But if you take that tack you'll miss the real horror of what I'm trying to describe, that what has happened to our schools was inherent in the original design for a planned economy and a planned society laid down so proudly at the end of the nineteenth century. I think what happened would have happened anyway—without the legions of venal, half-mad men and women who schemed so hard to make it as it is. If I'm correct, we're in a much worse position than we would be if we were merely victims of an evil genius or two.

If you obsess about conspiracy, what you'll fail to see is that we are held fast by a form of highly abstract thinking fully concretized in human institutions which has grown beyond the power of the managers of these institutions to control. If there is a way out of the trap we're in, it won't be by removing some bad guys and replacing them with good guys.

Who are the villains, really, but ourselves? People can change, but systems cannot without losing their structural integrity. Even Henry Ford, a Jew-baiter of such colossal proportions he was lionized by Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, made a public apology and denied to his death he had ever intended to hurt Jews—a too strict interpretation of Darwin made him do it! The great industrialists who gave us modern compulsion schooling inevitably found their own principles subordinated to systems-purposes, just as happened to the rest of us.

Take Andrew Carnegie, the bobbin boy, who would certainly have been as appalled as the rest of us at the order to fire on strikers at his Homestead plant. But the system he helped to create was committed to pushing men until they reacted violently or dropped dead. It was called "the Iron Law of Wages." Once his colleagues were interested in the principles of the Iron Law, they could only see the courage and defiance of the Homestead strikers as an opportunity to provoke a crisis which would allow the steel union to be broken with state militia and public funds. Crushing opposition is the obligatory scene in the industrial drama, whatever it takes, and no matter how much individual industrial leaders like Carnegie might be reluctant to do so.

My worry was about finding a prominent ally to help me present this idea that inhuman anthropology is what we confront in our institutional schools, not conspiracy. The hunt paid off with the discovery of an analysis of the Ludlow Massacre by Walter Lippmann in the *New Republic* of January 30, 1915. Following the Rockefeller slaughter of up to forty-seven, mostly women and children, in the tent camp of striking miners at Ludlow, Colorado, a congressional investigation was held which put John D. Rockefeller Jr. on the defensive. Rockefeller agents had employed armored cars, machine guns, and fire bombs in his name. As Lippmann tells it, Rockefeller was charged with having the only authority to authorize such a massacre, but also with too much indifference to what his underlings were up to. "Clearly," said the industrial magnate, "both cannot be true."

As Lippmann recognized, this paradox is the worm at the core of all colossal power. *Both indeed could be true.* For ten years Rockefeller hadn't even seen this property; what he knew of it came in reports from his managers he scarcely could have read along with mountains of similar reports coming to his desk each day. He was compelled to rely on the word of others. Drawing an analogy between Rockefeller and the czar of Russia, Lippmann wrote that nobody believed the czar himself performed the many despotic acts he was accused of; everyone knew a bureaucracy did so in his name. But most failed to push that knowledge to its inevitable conclusion: If the czar tried to change what was customary he would be undermined by his subordinates. He had no defense against this happening because it was in the best interests of all the divisions of the bureaucracy, including the army, that it—not the czar—continue to be in charge of things. The czar was a prisoner of his own subjects. In Lippmann's words:

This seemed to be the predicament of Mr. Rockefeller. I should not believe he personally hired thugs or wanted them hired. It seems far more true to say that his impersonal and half-understood power has delegated itself into unsocial forms, that it has assumed a life of its own which he is almost powerless to control...His intellectual helplessness was the amazing part of his testimony. Here was a man who represented wealth probably without parallel in history, the successor to a father who has, with justice, been called the high priest of capitalism.... Yet he talked about himself on the commonplace moral assumptions of a small businessman.

The Rockefeller Foundation has been instrumental through the century just passed (along with a few others) in giving us the schools we have. It imported the German research model into college life, elevated service to business and government as the goal of higher education, not teaching. And Rockefeller-financed University of Chicago and Columbia Teachers College have been among the most energetic actors in the lower school tragedy. There is

more, too, but none of it means the Rockefeller family "masterminded" the school institution, or even that his foundation or his colleges did. All became in time submerged in the system they did so much to create, almost helpless to slow its momentum even had they so desired.

Despite its title, *Underground History* isn't a history proper, but a collection of materials toward a history, embedded in a personal essay analyzing why mass compulsion schooling is unreformable. The history I have unearthed is important to our understanding; it's a good start, I believe, but much remains undone. The burden of an essay is to reveal its author so candidly and thoroughly that the reader comes fully awake. You are about to spend twenty-five to thirty hours with the mind of a schoolteacher, but the relationship we should have isn't one of teacher to pupil but rather that of two people in conversation. I'll offer ideas and a theory to explain things and you bring your own experience to bear on the matters, supplementing and arguing where necessary. Read with this goal before you and I promise your money's worth. It isn't important whether we agree on every detail.

A brief word on sources. I've identified all quotations and paraphrases and given the origin of many (not all) individual facts, but for fear the forest be lost in contemplation of too many trees, I've avoided extensive footnoting. So much here is my personal take on things that it seemed dishonest to grab you by the lapels that way: of minor value to those who already resonate on the wavelength of the book, useless, even maddening, to those who do not.

This is a workshop of solutions as well as an attempt to frame the problem clearly, but be warned: they are perversely sprinkled around like raisins in a pudding, nowhere grouped neatly as if to help you study for a test—except for a short list at the very end. The advice there is practical, but strictly limited to the world of compulsion schooling as it currently exists, not to the greater goal of understanding how education occurs or is prevented. The best advice in this book is scattered throughout and indirect, you'll have to work to extract it. It begins with the very first sentence of the book where I remind you that what is right for systems is often wrong for human beings. Translated into a recommendation, that means that to avoid the revenge of Bianca, we must be prepared to insult systems for the convenience of humanity, not the other way around.

END

*For instance, for those of you who believe in testing, school superintendents *as a class* are virtually the stupidest people to pass through a graduate college program, ranking fifty-one points below the elementary school teachers they normally "supervise," (on the Graduate Record Examination), and about eighty points below secondary-school teachers, while teachers themselves as an aggregate finish seventeenth of twenty occupational groups surveyed. The reader is of course at liberty to believe this happened accidentally, or that the moon is composed of blue, not green, cheese as is popularly believed. It's also possible to take this anomaly as conclusive evidence of the irrelevance of standardized testing. Your choice.

Prologue

The shocking possibility that dumb people don't exist in sufficient numbers to warrant the millions of careers devoted to tending them will seem incredible to you. Yet that is my central proposition: the mass dumbness which justifies official schooling first had to be dreamed of; it isn't real.

- [Bianca, You Animal, Shut Up!](#)
- [I Quit, I Think](#)
- [The New Individualism](#)
- [School As Religion](#)
- [He Was Square Inside And Brown](#)
- [The New Dumbness](#)
- [Putting Pedagogy To The Question](#)
- [Author's Note](#)

PART ONE

Of Schooling, Education, And Myself

Chapter One

The Way It Used To Be

Our official assumptions about the nature of modern childhood are dead wrong. Children allowed to take responsibility and given a serious part in the larger world are always superior to those merely permitted to play and be passive. At the age of twelve, Admiral Farragut got his first command. I was in fifth grade when I learned of this. Had Farragut gone to my school he would have been in seventh.

- [A Nation From The Bottom Up](#)
- [You Had To Do It Yourself](#)
- [No Limit To Pain For Those Who Allow It](#)
- [The Art Of Driving](#)
- [Two Approaches To Discipline](#)
- [The Schools Of Hellas](#)
- [The Fresco At Herculaneum](#)
- [The Seven Liberal Arts](#)

- [The Platonic Ideal](#)
- [Oriental Pedagogy](#)
- [Counter-Attack On Democracy](#)
- [How Hindu Schooling Came To America \(I\)](#)
- [How Hindu Schooling Came To America \(II\)](#)
- [How Hindu Schooling Came To America \(III\)](#)
- [Braddock's Defeat](#)
- [Farragut](#)

- [Ben Franklin](#)
- [George Washington](#)
- [Montaigne's Curriculum](#)

Chapter Two

An Angry Look At Modern Schooling

The secret of American schooling is that it doesn't teach the way children learn and it isn't supposed to. It took seven years of reading and reflection to finally figure out that mass schooling of the young by force was a creation of the four great coal powers of the nineteenth century. Nearly one hundred years later, on April 11, 1933, Max Mason, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, announced to insiders that a comprehensive national program was underway to allow, in Mason's words, "the control of human behavior."

- [A Change In The Governing Mind](#)
- [Extending Childhood](#)
- [The Geneticist's Manifesto](#)
- [Participatory Democracy Put To The Sword](#)
- [Bad Character As A Management Tool](#)
- [An Enclosure Movement For Children](#)
- [The Dangan](#)

- [Occasional Letter Number One](#)
- [Change Agents Infiltrate](#)
- [Bionomics](#)
- [Waking Up Angry](#)

Chapter Three

Eyeless In Gaza

Something strange has been going on in government schools, especially where the matter of reading is concerned. Abundant data exist to show that by 1840 the incidence of complex literacy in the United States was between 93 and 100 percent, wherever such a thing mattered. Yet compulsory schooling existed nowhere. Between the two world wars, schoolmen seem to have been assigned the task of terminating our universal reading proficiency.

- [The School Edition](#)
- [Intellectual Espionage](#)
- [Looking Behind Appearances](#)
- [The Sudbury Valley School](#)
- [Bootie Zimmer](#)
- [False Premises](#)
- [A System Of State Propaganda](#)
- [The Ideology Of The Text](#)
- [The National Adult Literacy Survey](#)
- [Name Sounds, Not Things](#)
- [The Meatgrinder Classroom](#)
- [The Ignorant Schoolmaster](#)
- [Frank Had A Dog; His Name Was Spot](#)
- [The Pedagogy of Literacy](#)
- [Dick And Jane](#)

Chapter Four

I Quit, I Think

I lived through the great transformation which turned schools from often useful places into laboratories of state experimentation with the lives of children, a form of pornography masquerading as pedagogical science. All theories of child-rearing talk in averages, but the evidence of your own eyes and ears tells you that average men and women don't really exist except as a statistical conceit.

- [Wadleigh, The Death School](#)
- [Dr. Caleb Gattegno, Expert](#)
- [Intimidation](#)
- [Hector Of The Feeble-Mind](#)
- [Hector Isn't The Problem](#)
- [One Lawyer Equals 3,000 Reams of Paper](#)
- [The Great Transformation](#)
- [Education As A Helix Sport](#)
- [I'm Outta Here!](#)

PART TWO

The Foundations Of Schooling

Chapter Five

True Believers And The Unspeakable Chautauqua

From start to finish, school as we know it is a tale of true believers and how they took the children to a land far away. All of us have a tiny element of true believer in our makeups. You have only to reflect on some of your own wild inner urges and the lunatic gleam that comes into your own eyes on those occasions to begin to understand what might happen if those impulses were made a permanent condition.

- [Munsterberg And His Disciples](#)
- [The Prototype Is A Schoolteacher](#)
- [Teachers College Maintains The Planet](#)
- [A Lofty, Somewhat Inhuman Vision](#)
- [Rain Forest Algebra](#)

- [Godless, But Not Irreligious](#)
- [An Insider's Insider](#)
- [Compulsion Schooling](#)
- [De-Moralizing School Procedure](#)
- [William Torrey Harris](#)
- [Cardinal Principles](#)
- [The Unspeakable Chautauqua](#)

Chapter Six

The Lure Of Utopia

Presumably humane utopian interventions like compulsion schooling aren't always the blessing they appear to be. For instance, Sir Humphrey Davy's safety lamp saved thousands of coalminers from gruesome death, but it wasted many more lives than it rescued. That lamp alone allowed the coal industry to grow rapidly, exposing miners to mortal danger for which there is no protection. What Davy did for coal producers, forced schooling has done for the corporate economy.

- [So Fervently Do We Believe](#)
- [The Necessity Of Detachment](#)
- [Enlarging The Nervous System](#)
- [Producing Artificial Wants](#)
- [The Parens Patriae Powers](#)
- [The Plan Advances](#)
- [Children's Court](#)
- [Mr. Young's Head Was Pounded To Jelly](#)
- [William Rainey Harper](#)
- [Death Dies](#)
- [The Three Most Popular Books](#)
- [No Place To Hide](#)
- [The Irony Of The Safety Lamp](#)

Chapter Seven

The Prussian Connection

In 1935, at the University of Chicago's experimental school where John Dewey had once held sway, Howard C. Hill, head of the social science department, published an inspirational textbook called *The Life and Work of the Citizen*. The title page clearly shows four cartoon hands symbolizing law, order, science, and the trades interlocked to form a perfect swastika. By 1935, Prussian pattern and Prussian goals had embedded themselves so deeply into the vitals of institutional schooling that hardly a soul noticed the traditional purposes of the enterprise were being abandoned.

- [The Land Of Frankenstein](#)
- [The Long Reach Of The Teutonic Knights](#)
- [The Prussian Reform Movement](#)
- [Travelers' Reports](#)
- [Finding Work For Intellectuals](#)
- [The Technology Of Subjection](#)
- [The German/American Reichsbank](#)

Chapter Eight

A Coal-Fired Dream World

A dramatic shift to mass production and mass schooling occurred in the same heady rush. Mass production could not be rationalized unless the population accepted massification. In a democratic republic, school was the only reliable long-range instrument available to accomplish this. Older American forms of schooling would not have been equal to the responsibility which coal, steam, steel, and machinery laid upon the national leadership. Coal demanded the schools we have and so we got them—as an ultimate act of rationality.

- [Coal At The Bottom Of Things](#)
- [The Demon Of Overproduction](#)
- [The Quest For Arcadia](#)
- [Managerial Utopia](#)

- [The Positive Method](#)
- [Plato's Guardians](#)
- [Far-Sighted Businessmen](#)
- [Coal Gives The Coup De Grâce](#)
- [The Spectre Of Uncontrolled Breeding](#)
- [Global Associations Of Technique](#)
- [Labor Becomes Expendable](#)
- [Burying Children Alive](#)
- [The End Of Competition](#)
- [America Is Massified](#)
- [German Mind Science](#)

Chapter Nine

The Cult Of Scientific Management

"In the past," Frederick Taylor wrote, "Man has been first. In the future, System must be first." The thought processes of the standardized worker had to be standardized, too, in order to render him a dependable consumer. Scientific management spread rapidly from the factory into the schools to seek this goal.

- [Frederick W. Taylor](#)
- [The Adoption Of Business Organization By Schools](#)
- [The Ford System And The Kronstadt Commune](#)
- [The National Press Attack On Academic Schooling](#)
- [The Fabian Spirit](#)
- [The Open Conspiracy](#)
- [An Everlasting Faith](#)
- [Regulating Lives Like Machinery](#)
- [The Gary Plan](#)

- [The Jewish Student Riots](#)
- [The Rockefeller Report](#)
- [Obstacles On The Road To Centralization](#)

PART THREE

A Personal Interlude

Chapter Ten

My Green River

The great destructive myth of the twentieth century was the aggressive contention that a child could not grow up correctly in the unique circumstances of his own family. Forced schooling was the principal agency broadcasting this attitude.

The Character Of A Village Singing And Fishing Were Free The Greatest Fun Was Watching People Work
Sitting In The Dark I Hung Around A Lot In Monongahela Shooting Birds On Punishment Separations
Principles Frances "Bootie" Zimmer Walking Around Monongahela The College Of Zimmer And Hegel **PART
FOUR**

Metamorphosis

Chapter Eleven

The Crunch

The experience of global war gave official school reform a grand taste for what was possible. Government intervention was proclaimed the antidote for all dissent. In every nook and cranny of American life new social organizations flourished, all feeding on intervention into personal sovereignty and family life. A new republic was here at last just as Herbert Croly announced, and government school was its church.

The Struggle For Homogeneity Eugenics Arrives Mr. Hitler Reads Mr. Ford Racial Suicide The Passing Of The
Great Race The Poison Of Democracy The American Protective League Guaranteed Customers Industrial
Efficiency High Pressure Salesmanship A New Collectivism

Chapter Twelve

Daughters Of The Barons
of Runnemedede

The new compulsion-school institution was assigned the task of fixing the social order into place, albeit with the cautions of Pareto and Mosca kept in mind. Society was to reflect the needs of modern corporate organization and the requirements of rational evolution. The best breeding stock had to be protected and displayed. The supreme challenge was to specify who was who in the new hierarchical order.

The Scientifically Humane Future Exclusive Heredity Divinely Appointed Intelligence The Paxton Boys Soldiers For Their Class Organizing Caste Your Family Tree The Fatal Sound Shift Our Manifest Destiny The Lost Tribes Unpopular Government Kinship Is Mythical The Machine Gun Builds Hotchkiss Fountains Of Business Wealth The General Education Board And Friends

Chapter Thirteen

The Empty Child

The basic hypothesis of utopia-building is that the structure of personhood can be broken and reformed again and again. The notion of empty children was the most important concept which inspired social architects and engineers to believe that schools could indeed be remade into socialization laboratories.

Miss Skinner Sleeps Scientifically Behaviorists Plasticity Elasticity Emptiness: The Master Theory A Metaphysical Commitment The Limits Of Behavioral Theory Reality Engages The Banana Programming The Empty Child Dr. Watson Presumes Cleaning The Canvas Therapy As Curriculum The New Thought Tide To Abolish Thinking Wundt! Napoleon Of Mind Science What Is Sanity? Bending The Student To Reality Paying Children To Learn

Chapter Fourteen

Absolute Absolution

God was pitched out of forced schooling on his ear after WWII. This wasn't because of any constitutional

proscription—there was none that anyone had been able to find in over a century and a half—but because the political state and corporate economy considered the Western spiritual tradition too dangerous a competitor. And it is.

The Problem Of God Spirits Are Dangerous Foundations Of The Western Outlook Codes Of Meaning The Scientific Curriculum Everson v. Board of Education (1947) Judaism The Dalai Lama And The Genius Of The West Religion And Rationality The Illusion Of Punishment

Chapter Fifteen

The Psychopathology Of Everyday Schooling

None of the familiar school sequences is defensible according to the rules of evidence, all are arbitrary; most grounded in superstition or aesthetic prejudice of one sort or another. Pestalozzi's basic "Simple to Complex" formulation, for instance, is a prescription for disaster in the classroom.

An Arena Of Dishonesty The Game Is Crooked Psychopathic Programming What Really Goes On Pathology As A Natural Byproduct A Critical Appraisal Vox Populi The Systems Idea In Action

PART FIVE

The Problem Of Modern Schooling

Chapter Sixteen

A Conspiracy Against Ourselves

Spare yourself the anxiety of thinking of this school thing as a conspiracy, even though the project is indeed riddled with petty conspirators. It was and is a fully rational transaction in which all of us play a part. We trade the liberty of our kids and our free will for a secure social order and a very prosperous economy. It's a bargain in which most of us agree to become as children ourselves, under the same tutelage which holds the young, in exchange for food, entertainment, and safety. The difficulty is that the contract fixes the goal of human life so low that students go mad trying to escape it.

- Two Social Revolutions Become One

- The Fear Of Common Intelligence
- The Cult Of Forced Schooling
- Disinherited Men And Women
- Serving The Imperial Virus
- Quill-Driving Babus
- The Release From Tutelage

Chapter Seventeen

The Politics Of Schooling

At the heart of the durability of mass schooling is a brilliantly designed power fragmentation system which distributes decision-making so widely among so many warring interests that large-scale change is impossible without a guidebook. Few insiders understand how to steer this ship and the few who do may have lost the will to control it.

- Three Holes In My Floor
- Power ÷ 22
- Valhalla
- I'm A Flunky, So's My Kid
- It's Not Your Money
- A Billion, Six For KC
- Education's Most Powerful Voice
- Letter To The Editor
- Letter To The Principal
- Who Controls American Education?
- The Logical Tragedy Of Benson, Vermont Natural Selection
- The Great Transformation
- Propaganda
- Freud's Nephew

- Magic At Work
- The Culture Of Big Business
- Four Kinds Of Classroom
- The Planetary Management Corporation

Chapter Eighteen

Breaking Out Of The Trap

The only conceivable way to break out of this trap is to repudiate any further centralization of schooling in the form of national goals, national tests, national teaching licenses, school-to-work plans, and the rest of the utopian package which accompanies these. Schooling must be desystematized, the system must be put to death. Adam Smith has correctly instructed us for more than two centuries now that the wealth of nations is the product of freedom, not of tutelage. The connection between the corporate economy, national politics, and schooling is a disease of collectivism which must be broken if children are to become sovereign, creative adults, capable of lifting a free society to unimaginable heights. The rational management model has damaged the roots of a free society and the free market it claims to defend.

- Silicon Valley
- Selling From Your Truck
- Mudsill Theory
- Autonomous Technology
- The Bell Curve
- George Meegan
- Necking In The Guardhouse
- Tania Aebi
- A Fool's Bargain
- Roland Legiardi-Laura
- The Squeeze
- Wendy Zeigler/Amy Halpern
- A Magnificent Memory

- Prince Charles Visits Steel Valley High
- Empty Children
- Schoolbooks
- Almost The End
- I Would Prefer Not To
- Nuts And Bolts

Epilogue

What has happened in our schools was foreseen long ago by Jefferson. We have been recolonized silently in a second American Revolution. Time to take our script from this country's revolutionary start, time to renew traditional hostility toward hierarchy and tutelage. We became a unique nation from the bottom up, that is the only way to rebuild a worthy concept of education.

About The Books I Used

Index

Acknowledgments

About The Author

*Whoever controls the image and information of the past determines what and how future generations will think; whoever controls the information and images of the present determines how those same people will view the past.*¹

– George Orwell, 1984 (1949)

Take at hazard one hundred children of several educated generations and one hundred uneducated children of the people and compare them in anything you please; in strength, in agility, in mind, in the ability to acquire knowledge, even in morality—and in all respects you are startled by the vast superiority on the side of the children of the uneducated.

– Count Leo Tolstoy, "Education and Children" (1862)

A Nation From The Bottom Up

ESTABLISHING SHOT

Fifty children of different ages are teaching each other while the schoolmaster hears lessons at his desk from older students. An air of quiet activity fills the room. A wood stove crackles in the corner. What drove the nineteenth-century school world celebrated in Edward Eggleston's classic, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, was a society rich with concepts like duty, hard work, responsibility, and self-reliance; a society overwhelmingly local in orientation although never so provincial it couldn't be fascinated by the foreign and exotic. But when tent Chautauqua with its fanfare about modern marvels left town, conversation readily returned to the text of local society.

Eggleston's America was a special place in modern history, one where the society was more central than the national political state. Words can't adequately convey the stupendous radicalism hidden in our quiet villages, a belief that ordinary people have a right to govern themselves. A confidence that they can.

Most revolutionary of all was the conviction that personal rights can only be honored when the political state is kept weak. In the classical dichotomy between liberty and subordination written into our imagination by Locke and Hobbes in the seventeenth century, America struggled down the libertarian road of Locke for awhile while her three godfather nations, England, Germany, and France, followed Hobbes and established leviathan states through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Toward the end, America began to follow the Old World's lead.

For Hobbes, social order depended upon state control of the inner life, a degree of mental colonization unknown to the tyrants of history whose principal concern had been controlling the *bodies* of their subjects. But the sheer size of an America without national roads or electronic networks ensured that liberty would be nurtured outside the ring of government surveillance. Then, too, many Americans came out of the dissenting religious sects of England, independent congregations which rejected church-state partnerships. The bulk of our population was socially suspect anyway. Even our gentry was second and third string by English standards, gentlemen without inheritances, the rest a raggle-taggle band of wastrels, criminals, shanghaied boys, poor yeomanry, displaced peasants.

Benet, the poet, describes our founding stock:

The disavouched, hard-bitten pack
Shipped overseas to steal a continent
with neither shirts nor honor to their back.

In *Last Essays*, George Bernanos observes that America, unlike other nations, was built from the bottom up. Francis Parkman made the same observation a century earlier. What America violently rejected in its early republic was the Anglican "Homily On Obedience" set down by English established-church doctrine in the Tudor state of 1562, a doctrine likening order in Heaven with the English social order on Earth—fixed and immutable:

The sun, moon, stars, rainbows, thunder, lightning, clouds, and all the birds of the air do keep their order.
The earth, trees, seeds, plants, herbs, corn, grass, and all manner of beasts keep themselves in order....

Every degree of people in their vocations, callings and office has appointed to them their duty and order.

By 1776 the theocratic utopia toward which such a principle moves, was well established in the Britain of the German Georges, as well as in the three North German states of Prussia, Saxony, and Hanover. Together with England, all three were to play an important role in twentieth-century forced schooling in America. The same divine clock, superficially secularized, was marking time in the interlude of Enlightenment France, the pre-revolutionary utopia which would also have a potent effect on American school thought. Hobbes and his doctrine of mental colonization eclipsed Locke everywhere else, but not in America.

You Had To Do It Yourself

CUT TO Abe Lincoln, by the fireplace in a log house. "An American," Francis Grund remarked in 1837, "is almost from his cradle brought up to reflect on his condition, and from the time he is able to act, employed with the means of improving it."

Lincoln, hardly a slouch as writer, speaker, or thinker, packed fifty weeks of formal schooling into his entire life over the twelve-year period between 1814 and 1826. Even that little seemed a waste of time to his relatives. Unless you want to argue that those few weeks made a decisive difference to Abe, we need to look elsewhere for his education. Clifton Johnson thinks it happened this way:

He acquired much of his early education at home. In the evening he would pile sticks of dry wood into the brick fireplace. These would blaze up brightly and shed a strong light over the room, and the boy would lie down flat on the floor before the hearth with his book in front of him. He used to write his arithmetic sums on a large wooden shovel with a piece of charcoal. After covering it all over with examples, he would take his jack-knife and whittle and scrape the surface clean, ready for more ciphering. Paper was expensive and he could not afford a slate. Sometimes when the shovel was not at hand he did his figuring on the logs of the house walls and on the doorposts, and other woodwork that afforded a surface he could mark on with his charcoal.

In Lincoln's Illinois and Kentucky, only reading, writing, and ciphering "to the Rule of Three" were required of teachers, but in New England the business often attracted ambitious young men like Noah Webster, confident and energetic, merely pausing on their way to greater things. Adam Gurowski, mid-nineteenth-century traveler in our land, took special notice of the superiority of American teachers. Their European brethren were, he said, "withered drifters" or "narrowed martinets."

Young people in America were expected to make something of themselves, not to prepare themselves to fit into a pre-established hierarchy. Every foreign commentator notes the early training in independence, the remarkable precocity of American youth, their assumption of adult responsibility. In his memoir, Tom Nichols, a New Hampshire schoolboy in the 1820s, recalls the electrifying air of expectation in early American schools:

Our teachers constantly stimulated us by the glittering prizes of wealth, honors, offices, and distinctions, which were certainly within our reach—there were a hundred avenues to wealth and fame opening fair before us if we only chose to learn our lessons.

Overproduction, overcapacity, would have been an alien concept to that America, something redolent of British mercantilism. Our virgin soil and forests undermined the stern doctrine of Calvinism by paying dividends to anyone willing to work. As Calvinism waned, contrarian attitudes emerged which represented a new American religion. First, the conviction that opportunity was available to all; second, that failure was the result of deficient character, not predestination or bad placement on a biological bell curve.

Character flaws could be remedied, *but only from the inside*. You had to do it yourself through courage,

determination, honesty, and hard work. Don't discount this as hot air; it marks a critical difference between Americans and everyone else. Teachers had a place in this process of self-creation, but it was an ambiguous one: anyone could teach, it was thought, just as anyone could self-teach. Secular schools, always a peripheral institution, were viewed with ambivalence, although teachers were granted some value—if only gratitude for giving mother a break. In the southern and middle colonies, teachers were often convicts serving out their sentences, their place in the social order caught in this advertisement of Washington's day:

RAN AWAY. A servant man who followed the occupation of Schoolmaster. Much given to drinking and gambling.

Washington's own schoolmaster, "Hobby," was just such a bondsman. Traditional lore has it that he laid the foundation for national greatness by whipping the devil out of Washington. Whipping and humiliation seem to have always been an eternal staple of schooling. Evidence survives from ancient Rome, Montaigne's France, Washington's Virginia—or my own high school in western Pennsylvania in the 1950s, where the teacher's personalized paddle hung prominently at the entrance to many a classroom, not for decoration but for use. The football coach and, if I recall correctly, the algebra teacher customized their paddles, using a dry cell battery to fashion devices similar to electrified cattle prods.

Something in the structure of schooling calls forth violence. While latter-day schools don't allow energetic physical discipline, certainly they are state-of-the-art laboratories in humiliation, as your own experience should remind you. In my first years of teaching I was told over and over that humiliation was my best friend, more effective than whipping. I witnessed this theory in practice through my time as a teacher. If you were to ask me now whether physical or psychological violence does more damage, I would reply that slurs, aspersion, formal ranking, insult, and inference are far and away the more deadly. Nor does law protect the tongue-lashed.

Early schools in America were quick with cuff or cane, but local standards demanded fairness. Despotism teachers were often quarry themselves, as Washington Irving's "Legend of Sleepy Hollow" warns us. Listen to the fate of schoolmaster Thomas Beveridge at the hands of the upper-class Latin School in Philadelphia, eleven years before the Revolution:

He arrives, enters the school, and is permitted to proceed until he is supposed to have nearly reached his chair at the upper end of the room, when instantly the door, and every window shutter is closed. Now shrouded in utter darkness the most hideous yells that can be conceived are sent forth from three score of throats; and Ovids and Virgils and Horaces, together with the more heavy metal of dictionaries, are hurled without remorse at the astonished preceptor, who, groping and crawling under cover of the forms, makes the best of his way to the door. When attained, a light is restored and a death-like silence ensues.

Every boy is at his lesson: No one has had a hand or a voice in the recent atrocity.²

In the humbler setting of rural Indiana recreated by Eggleston for *Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), we can easily see that passage of more than a century (and the replacement of rich kids by farmers' sons and daughters) hasn't altered classroom dynamics:

When Ralph looked round on the faces of the scholars—the little faces full of mischief and curiosity, the big faces full of an expression which was not further removed than second-cousin from contempt—when young Hartsook looked into these faces, his heart palpitated with stage fright. There is no audience so hard to face as one of schoolchildren, as many a man has found to his cost.

While Ralph was applying to a trustee of the school committee for this job, a large ugly bulldog sniffed at his heels, causing a young girl to "nearly giggle her head off at the delightful prospect of seeing a new schoolteacher eaten up by the ferocious brute." Weary, discouraged, "shivering with fear," he is lectured:

You see, we a'n't none of your soft sort in these diggin's. It takes a man to boss this deestrick...if you git licked, don't come to us. Flat Crick don't pay no 'nsurance, you bet! ...it takes grit to apply for this school.

The last master had a black eye for a month.

No Limit To Pain For Those Who Allow It

One of the most telling accounts of schooling ever penned comes directly from the lips of a legendary power broker, Colonel Edward Mandel House, one of these grand shadowy figures in American history. House had a great deal to do with America's entry into WWI as a deliberate project to seize German markets in chemicals, armor plate and shipping, an aspect of our bellicosity rarely mentioned in scholastic histories. When peace came, House's behind-the-scenes maneuvering in the League of Nations contributed to repudiation of the organization. His management of President Wilson led to persistent stories that Wilson was little more than a puppet of the Colonel.

In his memoirs, *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House*, we get a glimpse of elite American schooling in the 1870s. House's early years were school-free. He grew up after the Civil War, near Houston, Texas:

My brother James, six years older than I, was the leader....We all had guns and pistols... there were no childish games excepting those connected with war. [House was nine at the time.] In the evening around the fireside there were told tales of daring deeds that we strove to emulate.... I cannot remember the time when I began to ride and to shoot.... I had many narrow escapes. Twice I came near killing one of my playmates in the reckless use of firearms. They were our toys and death our playmate.

At the age of fourteen House was sent to school in Virginia. The cruelty of the other boys made an indelible impression on his character, as you can sift from this account:

I made up my mind at the second attempt to haze me that I would not permit it. I not only had a pistol but a large knife, and with these I held the larger, rougher boys at bay. There was no limit to the lengths they would go in hazing those who would allow it. One form I recall was that of going through the pretense of hanging. They would tie a boy's hands behind him and string him up by the neck over a limb until he grew purple in the face. None of it, however, fell to me. What was done to those who permitted it is almost beyond belief.

At the Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven at the age of seventeen, during the Hayes-Tilden campaign of 1876, House began to "hang around" political offices instead of "attending to studies." He came to be recognized and was given small privileges. When the election had to be ultimately settled by an Electoral Commission he was allowed to "slip in and out of hearings at will." House again:

All this was educational in its way, though not the education I was placed in Hopkins Grammar School to get, and it is no wonder that I lagged at the end of my class. I had no interest in desk tasks, but I read much and was learning in a larger and more interesting school.

House's story was written over and over in the short, glorious history of American education before schooling took over. Young Americans were allowed close to the mechanism of things. This rough and tumble practice kept social class elastic and American achievement in every practical field superb.

The Art Of Driving

Now come back to the present while I demonstrate that the identical trust placed in ordinary people two hundred years ago still survives where it suits managers of our economy to allow it. Consider the art of driving, which I

learned at the age of eleven. Without everybody behind the wheel, our sort of economy would be impossible, so everybody *is* there, IQ notwithstanding. With less than thirty hours of combined training and experience, a hundred million people are allowed access to vehicular weapons more lethal than pistols or rifles. Turned loose without a teacher, so to speak. Why does our government make such presumptions of competence, placing nearly unqualified trust in drivers, while it maintains such a tight grip on near-monopoly state schooling?

An analogy will illustrate just how radical this trust really is. What if I proposed that we hand three sticks of dynamite and a detonator to anyone who asked for them. All an applicant would need is money to pay for the explosives. You'd have to be an idiot to agree with my plan—at least based on the assumptions you picked up in school about human nature and human competence.

And yet gasoline, a spectacularly mischievous explosive, dangerously unstable and with the intriguing characteristic as an assault weapon that it can flow under locked doors and saturate bulletproof clothing, is available to anyone with a container. Five gallons of gasoline have the destructive power of a stick of dynamite.³ The average tank holds fifteen gallons, yet no background check is necessary for dispenser or dispensee. As long as gasoline is freely available, gun control is beside the point. Push on. Why do we allow access to a portable substance capable of incinerating houses, torching crowded theaters, or even turning skyscrapers into infernos? We haven't even considered the battering ram aspect of cars—why are novice operators allowed to command a ton of metal capable of hurtling through school crossings at up to two miles a minute? Why do we give the power of life and death this way to everyone?

It should strike you at once that our unstated official assumptions about human nature are dead wrong. Nearly all people are competent and responsible; universal motoring proves that. The efficiency of motor vehicles as terrorist instruments would have written a tragic record long ago if people were inclined to terrorism. But almost all auto mishaps are accidents, and while there are seemingly a lot of those, the actual fraction of mishaps, when held up against the stupendous number of possibilities for mishap, is quite small. I know it's difficult to accept this because the spectre of global terrorism is a favorite cover story of governments, but the truth is substantially different from the tale the public is sold. According to the U.S. State Department, 1995 was a near-record year for terrorist murders; it saw three hundred worldwide (two hundred at the hand of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka) compared to four hundred thousand smoking-related deaths in the United States alone. When we consider our assumptions about human nature that keep children in a condition of confinement and limited options, we need to reflect on driving and things like almost nonexistent global terrorism.

Notice how quickly people learn to drive well. Early failure is efficiently corrected, usually self-corrected, because the terrific motivation of staying alive and in one piece steers driving improvement. If the grand theories of Comenius and Herbart about learning by incremental revelation, or those lifelong nanny rules of Owen, Maclure, Pestalozzi, and Beatrice Webb, or those calls for precision in human ranking of Thorndike and Hall, or those nuanced interventions of Yale, Stanford, and Columbia Teachers College were actually as essential as their proponents claimed, this libertarian miracle of motoring would be unfathomable.

Now consider the intellectual component of driving. It isn't all just hand-eye-foot coordination. First-time drivers make dozens, no, hundreds, of continuous hypotheses, plans, computations, and fine-tuned judgments every day they drive. They do this skillfully, without being graded, because if they don't, organic provision exists in the motoring universe to punish them. There isn't any court of appeal from your own stupidity on the road.⁴

I could go on: think of licensing, maintenance, storage, adapting machine and driver to seasons and daily conditions. Carefully analyzed, driving is as impressive a miracle as walking, talking, or reading, but this only shows the inherent weakness of analysis since we know almost everyone learns to drive well in a few hours. The way we used to be as Americans, learning everything, breaking down social class barriers, is the way we might be again without forced schooling. Driving proves that to me.

Two Approaches To Discipline

Rules of the Stokes County School November 10, 1848

Wm. A. Chaffin, Master

<i>OFFENSE</i>	<i>LASHES</i>
1. Boys & Girls Playing Together	4
2. Quarreling	4
3. Fighting	5
4. Fighting at School	5
5. Quarreling at School	3
6. Gambling or Betting at School	4
7. Playing at Cards at School	10
8. Climbing for every foot over three feet up a tree	1
9. Telling Lies	7
10. Telling Tales Out of School	8
11. Nick Naming Each Other	4
12. Giving Each Other ILL Names	3
13. Fighting Each Other in Time of Books	2
14. Swearing at School	8
15. Blackguarding Each Other	6
16. For Misbehaving to Girls	10
17. For Leaving School Without Leave of the Teacher	4
18. Going Home With Each Other without Leave of Teacher	4
19. For Drinking Spiritous Liquors at School	8
20. Making Swings & Swinging on Them	7
21. For Misbehaving when a Stranger is in the House	6
22. For Wearing Long Finger Nails	2
23. For not Making a Bow when a Stranger Comes in	3
24. Misbehaving to Persons on the Road	4
25. For not Making a Bow when you Meet a Person	4
26. For Going to Girl's Play Places	3

27. For Going to Boy's Play Places	4
28. Coming to School with Dirty Face and Hands	2
29. For Calling Each Other Liars	4
30. For Playing Bandy	10
31. For Blotting Your Copy Book	2
32. For Not Making a bow when you go home	4
33. For Not Making a bow when you come away	4
34. Wrestling at School	4
35. Scuffling at School	4
36. For Weting each Other Washing at Play Time	2
37. For Hollowing and Hooping Going Home	3
38. For Delaying Time Going Home or Coming to School	3
39. For Not Making a Bow when you come in or go out	2
40. For Throwing anything harder than your trab ball	4
41. For every word you miss in your lesson without excuse	1
42. For Not saying yes Sir or no Sir or yes Marm, no Marm	2
43. For Troubling Each Others Writing Affairs	2
44. For Not Washing at Play Time when going to Books	4
45. For Going and Playing about the Mill or Creek	6
46. For Going about the barn or doing any mischief about	7

Whatever you might think of this in light of Dr. Spock or Piaget or the Yale Child Study folks, it must be apparent that civility was honored, and in all likelihood, no one ever played Bandy a second time! I've yet to meet a parent in public school who ever stopped to calculate the heavy, sometimes lifelong price their children pay for the privilege of being rude and ill-mannered at school. I haven't met a public school parent yet who was properly suspicious of the state's endless forgiveness of bad behavior for which the future will be merciless.

At about the same time Master Chaffin was beating the same kind of sense into young tarheels that convict Hobby had beaten into little Washington, Robert Owen, a Scottish industrialist usually given credit for launching utopian socialism, was constructing his two-volume *Life*. This autobiography contains "Ten Rules of Schooling," the first two of which show a liberalization occurring in nineteenth-century educational thought:

1st Rule—No scolding or punishment of the Children.

2nd Rule—Unceasing kindness in tone, look, word, and action, to all children without exception, by every teacher employed so as to create a real affection and full confidence between the teachers and the taught.

The Owenite colony had what we now call a theory of holistic schooling as its foundation, Owen was a genuine messiah figure and his colony operated in a part of Indiana which was removed from prying eyes. New Harmony, as it was called, was the center of the transatlantic upper-class world's fascinated attention in its short existence.

Yet it fell apart in three years, slightly less time than it took for John Dewey's own Lab School to be wrecked by Owenite principles unmistakably enough to suggest to Dewey it would be the better if he got out of Chicago. And so he did, transferring to Teachers College in Manhattan, where, in time, his Lincoln School carried on the psychological traditions of New Harmony before it, too, ultimately failed.

The Schools Of Hellas

Wherever it occurred, schooling through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (up until the last third of the nineteenth) heavily invested its hours with language, philosophy, art, and the life of the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. In the grammar schools of the day, little pure grammar as we understand it existed; they were places of classical learning. Early America rested easily on a foundation of classical understanding, one subversive to the normal standards of British class society. The lessons of antiquity were so vital to the construction of every American institution it's hardly possible to grasp how deep the gulf between then and now is without knowing a little about those lessons. Prepare yourself for a surprise.

For a long time, for instance, classical Athens distributed its most responsible public positions by *lottery*: army generalships, water supply, everything. The implications are awesome—trust in everyone's competence was assumed; it was their version of universal driving. Professionals existed but did not make key decisions; they were only technicians, never well regarded because prevailing opinion held that technicians had enslaved their own minds. Anyone worthy of citizenship was expected to be able to think clearly and to welcome great responsibility. As you reflect on this, remember our own unvoiced assumption that anyone can guide a ton of metal traveling at high speed with three sticks of dynamite sloshing around in its tanks.

When we ask what kind of schooling was behind this brilliant society which has enchanted the centuries ever since, any honest reply can be carried in one word: None. After writing a book searching for the hidden genius of Greece in its schools, Kenneth Freeman concluded his unique study *The Schools of Hellas* in 1907 with this summary, "There were no schools in Hellas." No place boys and girls spent their youth attending continuous instruction under command of strangers. Indeed, nobody did homework in the modern sense; none could be located on standardized tests. The tests that mattered came in living, striving to meet ideals that local tradition imposed. The word *sköle* itself means leisure, leisure in a formal garden to think and reflect. Plato in *The Laws* is the first to refer to school as learned discussion.

The most famous school in Athens was Plato's Academy, but in its physical manifestation it had no classes or bells, was a well-mannered hangout for thinkers and seekers, a generator of good conversation and good friendship, things Plato thought lay at the core of education. Today we might call such a phenomenon a *salon*. Aristotle's Lyceum was pretty much the same, although Aristotle delivered two lectures a day—a tough one in the morning for intense thinkers, a kinder, gentler version of the same in the afternoon for less ambitious minds. Attendance was optional. And the famous Gymnasium so memorable as a forge for German leadership later on was in reality only an open training ground where men sixteen to fifty were free to participate in high-quality, state-subsidized instruction in boxing, wrestling, and javelin.

The idea of schooling free men in anything would have revolted Athenians. Forced training was for slaves. Among free men, learning was self-discipline, not the gift of experts. From such notions Americans derived their own academies, the French their *lycees*, and the Germans their *gymnasium*. Think of it: In Athens, instruction was unorganized even though the city-state was surrounded by enemies and its own society engaged in the difficult social experiment of sustaining a participatory democracy, extending privileges without precedent to citizens, and maintaining literary, artistic, and legislative standards which remain to this day benchmarks of human genius. For its five-hundred-year history from Homer to Aristotle, Athenian civilization was a miracle in a rude world; teachers flourished there but none was grounded in fixed buildings with regular curricula under the thumb of an intricately

layered bureaucracy.

There were no schools in Hellas. For the Greeks, study was its own reward. Beyond that few cared to go.

The Fresco At Herculaneum

Sparta, Athens' neighbor, was a horse of a different color. Society in Sparta was organized around the concept of cradle-to-grave formal training. The whole state was a universal schoolhouse, official prescriptions for the population filled every waking minute and the family was employed as a convenience for the state. Sparta's public political arrangements were an elaborate sham, organized nominally around an executive branch with two legislative bodies, but ultimate decision-making was in the hands of *ephors*, a small elite who conducted state policy among themselves. The practical aspect of imitation democracy figures strongly in the thought of later social thinkers such as Machiavelli (1532) and Hobbes (1651), as well as in minds nearer our own time who had influence on the shape of American forced schooling.

Spartan ideas of management came to American consciousness through classical studies in early schooling, through churches, and also through interest in the German military state of Prussia, which consciously modeled itself after Sparta. As the nineteenth century entered its final decades American university training came to follow the Prussian/Spartan model. Service to business and the political state became the most important reason for college and university existence after 1910. No longer was college primarily about developing mind and character in the young. Instead, it was about molding those things as instruments for use by others. Here is an important clue to the philosophical split which informed the foundation of modern schooling and to an important extent still does: small farmers, crafts folk, trades people, little town and city professionals, little industrialists, and older manorial interests took a part of their dream of America from democratic Athens or from republican Rome (not the Rome of the emperors); this comprised a significant proportion of ordinary America. But new urban managerial elites pointed to a future based on Spartan outlook.

When the instructional system of Athens transferred to Imperial Rome, a few schools we would recognize began to appear. The familiar punishment practices of colonial America can be found anticipated vividly in the famous fresco at Herculaneum, showing a Roman schoolboy being held by two of his classmates while the master advances, carrying a long whip. Roman schools must have started discipline early in the morning for we find the poet Martial cursing a school for waking him up at cock's crow with shouts and beatings; Horace immortalizes pedagogue Orbilius for whipping a love of old poets into him. But we shouldn't be misled by these school references. What few schools there were in Rome were for boys of prosperous classes, and even most of these relied upon tutors, tradition, and emulation, not school.

The word *pedagogue* is Latin for a specialized class of slave assigned to walk a student to the schoolmaster; over time the slave was given additional duties, his role was enlarged to that of drill master, a procedure memorialized in Varro's *instituit pedagogus, docet magister*: in my rusty altar-boy Latin, The master creates instruction, the slave pounds it in. A key to modern schooling is this: free men were never pedagogues. And yet we often refer to the science of modern schooling as *pedagogy*. The unenlightened parent who innocently brings matters of concern to the pedagogue, whether that poor soul is called schoolteacher, principal, or superintendent, is usually beginning a game of frustration which will end in no fundamental change. A case of barking up the wrong tree in a dark wood where the right tree is far away and obscure.

Pedagogy is social technology for winning attention and cooperation (or obedience) while strings are attached to the mind and placed in the hands of an unseen master. This may be done holistically, with smiles, music, and light-duty simulations of intellection, or it can be done harshly with rigorous drills and competitive tests. The quality

of self-doubt aimed for in either case is similar.

Pedagogy is a useful concept to help us unthread some of the mysteries of modern schooling. That it is increasingly vital to the social order is evinced by the quiet teacher-pay revolution that has occurred since the 1960s. As with police work (to which pedagogy bears important similarities), school pay has become relatively good, its hours of labor short, its job security first rate. Contrast this with the golden years of one-room schooling where pay was subsistence only and teachers were compelled to board around to keep body and soul together. Yet there was no shortage then of applicants and many sons of prominent Americans began their adult lives as schoolteachers.

With the relative opulence of today, it would be simple to fill teaching slots with accomplished men and women if that were a goal. A little adjustment in what are rationally indefensible licensing requirements would make talented people, many performance-tested adults in their fifties and sixties, available to teach. That there is not such fluid access is a good sign the purpose of schooling is more than it appears. The year-in, year-out *consistency* of mediocre teacher candidates demonstrates clearly that the school institution actively seeks, nurtures, hires, and promotes the caliber of personnel it needs.

The Seven Liberal Arts

When Rome dissolved in the sixth century, Roman genius emerged as the Universal Christian Church, an inspired religious sect grown spontaneously into a vehicle which invested ultimate responsibility for personal salvation in the sovereign individual. The Roman Church hit upon schooling as a useful adjunct, and so what few schools could be found after the fall of Rome were in ecclesiastical hands, remaining there for the next eleven or twelve centuries. Promotion inside the Church began to depend on having first received training of the Hellenic type. Thus a brotherhood of thoughtful men was created from the demise of the Empire and from the necessity of intellectually defining the new mission.

As the Church experimented with schooling, students met originally at the teacher's house, but gradually some church space was dedicated for the purpose. Thanks to competition among Church officials, each Bishop strove to offer a school and these, in time to be called Cathedral schools, attracted attention and some important sponsorship, each being a showcase of the Bishop's own educational taste.

When the Germanic tribes evacuated northern Europe, overrunning the south, cathedral schools and monastic schools trained the invading leadership—a precedent of disregarding local interests which has continued ever after. Cathedral schools were the important educational institutions of the Middle Ages; from them derived all the schools of western Europe, at least in principle.

In practice, however, few forms of later schooling would be the intense intellectual centers these were. The Seven Liberal Arts made up the main curriculum; lower studies were composed of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. Grammar was an introduction to literature, rhetoric an introduction to law and history, dialectic the path to philosophical and metaphysical disputation. Higher studies included arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Arithmetic was well beyond simple calculation, entering into descriptive and analytical capacities of numbers and their prophetic use (which became modern statistics); geometry embraced geography and surveying; music covered a broad course in theory; astronomy prepared entry into physics and advanced mathematics.

Between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries, an attempt to reduce the influence of emotionality in religion took command of church policy. Presenting the teachings of the Church in scientific form became the main ecclesiastical purpose of school, a tendency called *scholasticism*. This shift from emotion to intellect resulted in great skill in analysis, in comparison and contrasts, in classifications and abstraction, as well as famous verbal hairsplitting—like how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Scholasticism became the basis for future upper-class schooling.

The Platonic Ideal

The official use of common schooling was invented by Plato; after him the idea languished, its single torchbearer the Church. Educational offerings from the Church were intended for, though not completely limited to, those young whose parentage qualified them as a potential Guardian class. You would hardly know this from reading any standard histories of Western schooling intended for the clientele of teacher colleges.

Intense development of the Platonic ideal of comprehensive social control through schooling suddenly reappeared two thousand years later in eighteenth-century France at the hands of a philosophical *cultus* known to history as *philosophes*, enthusiastic promoters of the bizarre idea of mass forced schooling. Most prominent among them, a self-willed man named Jean Jacques Rousseau. To add piquancy to Rousseau's thought, you need to know that when they were born, he chose to give away his own five offspring to strangers. If any man captures the essence of enlightenment transformation, it is Rousseau.

The Enlightenment "project" was conceived as a series of stages, each further leveling mankind, collectivizing ordinary humanity into a colonial organism like a volvox. The penetration of this idea, at least on the periphery of our own Founders' consciousness, is captured in the powerful mystery image of the pyramid on the obverse of our Great Seal.⁵ Of course, this was only one of many colors to emerge with the new nation, and it was not the most important, an inference that can be drawn from the fact that the pyramid was kept from public notice until 1935. Then it appeared suddenly on the back of our one dollar bill, signaling a profound shift in political management.

Oriental Pedagogy

The ideal of a leveling Oriental pedagogy expressed through government schooling was promoted by Jacobin orators of the French National Convention in the early 1790s, the commencement years of our own republic. The notion of forced schooling was irresistible to French radicals, an enthusiasm whose foundation had been laid in preceding centuries by utopian writers like Harrington (*Oceania*), More (*Utopia*), Bacon (*New Atlantis*), Campanella (*City of the Sun*), and in other speculative fantasy embracing the fate of children. Cultivating a collective social organism was considered the ingredient missing from feudal society, an ingredient which would allow the West the harmony and stability of the East.

Utopian schooling is never about learning in the traditional sense; it's about the transformation of human nature. The core of the difference between Occident and Orient lies in the power relationship between privileged and ordinary, and in respective outlooks on human nature. In the West, a metaphorical table is spread by society; the student decides how much to eat; in the East, the teacher makes that decision. The Chinese character for school shows a passive child with adult hands pouring knowledge into his empty head.

To mandate outcomes centrally would be a major step in the destruction of Western identity. Management by objectives, whatever those objectives might be, is a technique of corporate subordination, not of education. Like Alfred's, Charlemagne's awareness of Asia was sharpened in mortal combat. He was the first secular Western potentate to beat the drum for secular schooling. It was easy to ignore Plato's gloomy forecast that however attractive utopia appears in imagination, human nature will not live easily with the degree of synthetic constraint it requires.

Counter-Attack On Democracy

By standards of the time, America was utopia already. No grinding poverty, no dangerous national enemies, no

indigenous tradition beyond a general spirit of exuberant optimism, a belief the land had been touched by destiny, a conviction Americans could accomplish anything. John Jay wrote to Jefferson in 1787, "The enterprise of our country is inconceivable"—inconceivable, that is, to the British, Germans, and French, who were accustomed to keeping the common population on a leash. Our colonial government was the creation of the Crown, of course, but soon a fantastic idea began to circulate, a belief that people might create or destroy governments at their will.

The empty slate of the new republic made it vulnerable to advanced utopian thinking. While in England and Germany, temptation was great to develop and use Oriental social machinery to bend mass population into an instrument of elite will, in America there was no hereditary order or traditional direction. We were a nation awash in literate, self-reliant men and women, the vast majority with an independent livelihood or ambitions toward getting one. Americans were inventors and technicians without precedent, entrepreneurs unlocked from traditional controls, dreamers, confidence men, flim-flam artists. There never was a social stew quite like it.

The practical difficulties these circumstances posed to utopian governing would have been insuperable except for one seemingly strange source of enthusiasm for such an endeavor in the business community. That puzzle can be solved by considering how the promise of democracy was a frightening *terra incognita* to men of substance. To look to men like Sam Adams or Tom Paine as directors of the future was like looking down the barrel of a loaded gun, at least to people of means. So the men who had begun the Revolution were eased out by the men who ended it.

As early as 1784, a concerted effort was made by the Boston business community to overthrow town meetings, replacing them with a professionally managed corporation. Joseph Barrell, a wealthy merchant, claimed that citizen safety could be enhanced this way—and besides, "a great number of very respectable gentlemen" wished it. Timothy Dwight, longtime president of Yale after 1795, and a pioneer in modern education (advocating science as the center of curriculum), fought a mighty battle against advancing democracy. Democracy was hardly the sort of experiment men of affairs would willingly submit their lives and fortunes to for very long.

This tension explains much about how our romance with forced schooling came about; it was a way to stop democracy aborning as Germany had done. Much ingenuity was expended on this problem in the early republic, particularly by so-called liberal Christian sects like Unitarians and Universalists. If you read relics of their debates preserved from select lyceums, private meetings at which minutes were kept, journals, recollections of drawing room conversations and club discussions, you see that what was shaping up was an attempt to square the circle, to give the appearance that the new society was true to its founding promise, while at the same time a sound basis could be established for the meritorious to run things. Once again, the spirit of Sparta was alive with its ephors and its reliance on forced instruction. In discussions, speeches, sermons, editorials, experimental legislation, letters, diaries, and elsewhere, the ancient idea of mass forced schooling was called forth and mused upon.

How Hindu Schooling Came To America (I)

By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a form of school technology was up and running in America's larger cities, one in which children of lower-class customers were psychologically conditioned to obedience under pretext that they were learning reading and counting (which may also have happened). These were the Lancaster schools, sponsored by Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York and prominent Quakers like Thomas Eddy, builder of the Erie Canal. They soon spread to every corner of the nation where the problem of an incipient proletariat existed. Lancaster schools are cousins of today's school factories. What few knew then or realize now is that they were also a Hindu invention, designed with the express purpose of retarding intellectual development.

How Hindu schooling came to America, England, Germany, and France at just about the same time is a story which has never been told. A full treatment is beyond the scope of this book, but I'll tell you enough to set you wondering how an Asiatic device specifically intended to preserve a caste system came to reproduce itself in the early republic, protected by influentials of the magnitude of Clinton and Eddy. Even a brief dusting off of schooling's

Hindu provenance should warn you that what you know about American schooling isn't much. First, a quick gloss on the historical position of India at the time of the American Revolution—for Lancaster schools were in New York two decades after its end.

India fell victim to Western dominance through nautical technology in the following fashion: When medieval Europe broke up after its long struggle to reconcile emergent science with religion, five great ocean powers appeared to compete for the wealth of the planet: Portugal, Spain, France, the Netherlands, and England. Portugal was the first to sail for treasure, leaving colonies in India, China, and South America, but its day in the sun was short. Spain emerged as the next global superpower, but after 1600, her character decayed rapidly from the corrupting effects of the gold of the Americas, which triggered a long national decline. The Netherlands, turn followed because that nation had the advantage of a single-minded commercial class in control of things with one aim in mind: wealth. The Dutch monopolized the carrying trade of Europe with globe-trotting merchant ships and courageous military seamanship, yet as with Portugal before it, the Dutch population was too small, its internal resources too anemic for its dominance to extend very long.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, England and France gradually built business in the East, both balked for a time by the Dutch who controlled the spice trade of the Indies. Three naval wars with the Dutch made the Royal Navy master of the seas, in the process developing tactics of sea warfare that made it dominant for the next two centuries. By 1700, only France and England remained as global sea powers with impressive fighting capability, and during the last half of that century these giants slugged it out directly in Canada, India, and in the territory which is today the United States, with the result that France went permanently into eclipse.

In India, the two contended through their commercial pseudopodia, the British and French East India Companies: each maintained a private army to war on the other for tea, indigo, turmeric, ginger, quinine, oilseeds, silk, and that product which most captivated British merchants with its portability and breakaway profit potential—opium. At Plassey, Chandernagor, Madras, and Wandiwash, this long corporate rivalry ended. The French abandoned India to the British. The drug monopoly was finally England's.

Out of this experience and the observations of a wealthy young Anglican chaplain in India, the formula for modern schooling was discovered. Perhaps it was no more than coincidence this fellow held his first gainful employment as a schoolteacher in the United States; on the other hand, perhaps his experience in a nation which successfully threw off British shackles sensitized him to the danger an educated population poses to plutocracies.

How Hindu Schooling Came To America (II)

Andrew Bell, the gentleman in question, used to be described in old editions of the *Britannica* as "cold, shrewd, self-seeking." He might not have been the most pious cleric. Perhaps like his contemporary, Parson Malthus, he didn't really believe in God at all, but as a young man following the flag he had an eye out for the main chance. Bell found his opportunity when he studied the structure Hindus arranged for training the lower castes, about 95 percent of the Indian population. It might well serve a Britain which had driven its peasantry into ruin in order to create an industrial proletariat for coal-driven industry.

Bell was fascinated by the *purposeful* nature of Hindu schooling. It seemed eminently compatible with the goals of the English state church. So as many another ambitious young man has done throughout history when he stumbles upon a little-known novelty, he swiped it. Before we turn to details of the Hindu method, and how Bell himself was upstaged by an ambitious young Quaker who beat him into the school market with a working version of Bell's idea, you should understand a little about Hindu religion.

After the British military conquest of India (in reality a merchant conquest) nothing excited the popular mind and the well-bred mind alike more than Hindu religion with its weird (to Western eyes) idols and rituals. Close analysis of Sanskrit literature seemed to prove that some kind of biological and social link had existed between the all-conquering Aryans, from whom the Hindus had descended, and Anglo-Saxons, which might explain theological

similarities between Hinduism and Anglicanism. The possibilities suggested by this connection eventually provided a powerful psychic stimulus for creation of class-based schooling in the United States. Of course such a development then lay far in the future.

The caste system of Hinduism or Brahminism is the Anglican class system pushed to its imaginative limits. A five-category ranking (each category further subdivided) apportions people into a system similar to that found in modern schools. Prestige and authority are reserved for the three highest castes, although they only comprise 5 percent of the total; inescapable servility is assigned the lowest caste, a pariah group outside serious consideration. In the Hindu system one may *fall* into a lower caste, *but one cannot rise*.

When the British began to administer India, Hindus represented 70 percent of a population well over a hundred million. Contrast this with an America of perhaps three million. In the northern region, British hero Robert Clive was president of Bengal where people were conspicuously lighter-skinned than the other major Indian group, having features not unlike those of the British.

Hindu castes looked like this:

The upper 5 percent was divided into three "twice-born" groups.

Brahmins—Priests and those trained for law, medicine, teaching, and other professional occupations.

The warrior and administrative caste.

The industrial caste, which would include land cultivators and mercantile groups.

The lower 95 percent was divided into:

The menial caste.

Pariahs, called "untouchables."

The entire purpose of Hindu schooling was to preserve the caste system. Only the lucky 5 percent received an education which gave perspective on the whole, a key to understanding. In actual practice, warriors, administrators, and most of the other leaders were given much diluted insight into the driving engines of the culture, so that policy could be kept in the hands of Brahmins. But what of the others, the "masses" as Western socialist tradition would come to call them in an echoing tribute to the Hindu class idea? The answer to that vital question launched factory schooling in the West.

Which brings us back to Andrew Bell. Bell noticed that in some places Hinduism had created a mass schooling institution for children of the ordinary, one inculcating a curriculum of self-abnegation and willing servility. In these places hundreds of children were gathered in a single gigantic room, divided into phalanxes of ten under the direction of student leaders with the whole ensemble directed by a Brahmin. In the Roman manner, paid pedagogues drilled underlings in the memorization and imitation of desired attitudes and these underlings drilled the rest. Here was a social technology made in heaven for the factories and mines of Britain, still uncomfortably saturated in older yeoman legends of liberty and dignity, one not yet possessing the perfect proletarian attitudes mass production must have for maximum efficiency. Nobody in the early years of British rule had made a connection between this Hindu practice and the pressing requirements of an industrial future. Nobody, that is, until a thirty-four-year-old Scotsman arrived in India as military chaplain.

How Hindu Schooling Came To America (III)

Young Bell was a go-getter. Two years after he got to India he was superintendent of the male orphan asylum of Madras. In order to save money Bell decided to try the Hindu system he had seen and found it led students quickly to docile cooperation, like parts of a machine. Furthermore, they seemed relieved not to have to think, grateful to have their time reduced to rituals and routines as Frederick Taylor was to reform the American workplace a

hundred years later.

In 1797, Bell, now forty-two, published an account of what he had seen and done. Pulling no punches, he praised Hindu drill as an effective *impediment* to learning writing and ciphering, an efficient *control* on reading development. A twenty-year-old Quaker, Joseph Lancaster, read Bell's pamphlet, thought deeply on the method, and concluded, ironically, it would be a cheap way to *awaken* intellect in the lower classes, ignoring the Anglican's observation (and Hindu experience) that it did just the opposite.

Lancaster began to gather poor children under his father's roof in Borough Road, London, to give them rudimentary instruction without a fee. Word spread and children emerged from every alley, dive, and garret, craving to learn. Soon a thousand children were gathering in the street. The Duke of Bedford heard about Lancaster and provided him with a single enormous schoolroom and a few materials. The monitorial system, as it was called, promised to promote a mental counterpart to the productivity of factories.

Transforming dirty ghetto children into an orderly army attracted many observers. The fact that Lancaster's school ran at tiny cost with only one employee raised interest, too. Invitations arrived to lecture in surrounding towns, where the Quaker expounded on what had now become his system. Lancaster schools multiplied under the direction of young men he personally trained. So talked about did the phenomenon become, it eventually attracted the attention of King George III himself, who commanded an interview with Joseph. Royal patronage followed on the stipulation that every poor child be taught to read the Bible.

But with fame and public responsibility, another side of Lancaster showed itself—he became vain, reckless, improvident. Interested noblemen bailed him out after he fell deeply in debt, and helped him found the British and Foreign School Society, but Lancaster hated being watched over and soon proved impossible to control. He left the organization his patrons erected, starting a private school which went bankrupt. By 1818 the Anglican Church, warming to Bell's insight that schooled ignorance was more useful than unschooled stupidity, set up a rival chain of factory schools that proved to be handwriting on the wall for Lancaster. In the face of this competition he fled to America where his fame and his method had already preceded him.

Meanwhile, in England, the whole body of dissenting sects gave Lancaster vociferous public support, thoroughly alarming the state church hierarchy. Prominent church laymen and clergy were not unaware that Lancaster's schools weren't playing by Hindu rules—the prospect of a literate underclass with unseemly ambitions was a window on a future impossible to tolerate. Bell had been recalled from his rectory in Dorset in 1807 to contest Lancaster's use of Hindu schooling. In 1811, he was named superintendent of an organization to oppose Lancaster's British and Foreign School Society, "The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church." Since those principles held that the poor were poor because the Lord wanted it that way, the content of the society's schooling leaves little about which we need to speculate. Bell was sent to plant his system in Presbyterian Scotland, while the patronage advantage of Bell-system schools contained and diminished the reach of Lancaster. For his services to the state, Bell was eventually buried in Westminster Abbey.

At first, Lancaster was welcomed warmly in the United States, but his affection for children and his ability to awaken pride and ambition in his charges made him ultimately unacceptable to important patrons who were much more interested in spreading Bell's dumbed-down method, without its Church of England baggage attached. Fortunately for their schemes, Lancaster grew even more shiftless, unmethodical, and incapable of sustained effort (or principled action). In the twenty remaining years of his life, Lancaster ranged from Montreal to Caracas, disowned by Quakers for reasons I've been unable to discover. He once declared it would be possible to teach illiterates to read fluently in twenty to ninety days, which is certainly true. At the age of sixty he was run over by a carriage in New York and died a few hours later.

But while he died an outcast, his system outlived him, or at least a system bearing his name did, albeit more Bell's than Lancaster's. It accustomed an influential public to expect streets to be clear of the offspring of the poor and to expenditures of tax money to accomplish this end. The first Lancaster school was opened in New York City in

1806; by 1829 the idea had spread to the Mexican state of Texas with stops as far west as Cincinnati, Louisville, and Detroit. The governors of New York and Pennsylvania recommended general adoption to their legislatures.

What exactly was a "Lancaster" school? Its essential features involved one large room stuffed with anywhere from three hundred to a thousand children under the direction of a single teacher. The children were seated in rows. The teacher was not there to teach but to be "a bystander and inspector"; students, ranked in a paramilitary hierarchy, did the actual teaching:

What the master says should be done. When the pupils as well as the schoolmaster understand how to act and learn on this system, the system, not the master's *vague discretionary, uncertain judgment*, will be in practice. In common school the authority of the master is personal, and the rod is his scepter. His absence is an immediate signal for confusion, but in a school conducted on my plan when the master leaves the school, the business will *go on as well in his absence as in his presence*. [emphasis added]

Here, without forcing the matter, is our modern *pedagogus technologicus*, harbinger of future computerized instruction. In such a system, teachers and administrators are forbidden to depart from instructions elsewhere written. But while dumbing children down was the whole of the government school education in England, it was only part of the story in America, and a minor one until the twentieth century.

Braddock's Defeat

Unless you're a professional sports addict and know that Joe Montana, greatest quarterback of the modern era, went to Waverly school in Monongahela, or that Ron Neccai, only man in modern baseball history to strike out every batter on the opposing team for a whole game did, too, or that Ken Griffey Jr. went to its high school as well, you can be forgiven if you never heard of Monongahela. But once upon a time at the beginning of our national history, Monongahela marked the forward edge of a new nation, a wilder West than ever the more familiar West became. Teachers on a frontier cannot be bystanders.

Custer's Last Stand in Montana had no military significance. Braddock's Last Stand near Monongahela, on the other hand, changed American history forever because it proved that the invincible British could be taken. And twenty-one years later we did take them, an accomplishment the French and Spanish, their principal rivals, had been unable to do. Why that happened, what inspiration allowed crude colonials to succeed where powerful and polished nations could not, is so tied up with Monongahela that I want to bring the moment back for you. It will make a useful reference point as we consider the problem of modern schooling. Without Braddock's defeat we would never have had a successful American revolution; without getting rid of the British, the competence of ordinary people to educate themselves would never have had a fair test.

In July of 1755, at the age of twenty-three, possessing no university degrees, the alumnus of no military academy, with only two years of formal schooling under his belt, half-orphan George Washington was detailed an officer in the Virginia militia to accompany an English military expedition moving to take the French fort at the forks of the Monongahela and Allegheny, the point that became Pittsburgh. His general, Edward Braddock, was an aristocrat commanding a well-equipped and disciplined force considerably superior to any possible resistance. Braddock felt so confident of success, he dismissed the advice of Washington to put aside traditional ways of European combat in the New World.

On July 9, 1755, two decades and one year before our Revolution commenced under the direction of the same Washington, Braddock executed a brilliant textbook crossing of the Monongahela near the present Homestead High Bridge by Kennywood amusement park. With fife and drum firing the martial spirit, he led the largest force in British colonial America, all in red coats and polished metal, across the green river into the trees on the farther bank. Engineers went ahead to cut a road for men and cannon.

Suddenly the advance guard was enveloped in smoke. It fell back in panic. The main body moved up to relieve,

but the groups meeting, going in opposite directions, caused pandemonium. On both sides of the milling redcoats, woods crackled with hostile gunfire. No enemy could be seen, but soldiers were caught between waves of bullets fanning both flanks. Men dropped in bunches. Bleeding bodies formed hills of screaming flesh, accelerating the panic.

Enter George, the Washington almost unknown to American schoolchildren. Making his way to Braddock, he asked permission to engage the enemy wilderness fashion; permission denied. Military theory held that allowing commands to emanate from inferiors was a precedent more dangerous than bullets. The British were too well trained to fight out of formation, too superbly schooled to adapt to the changing demands of the new situation. When my grandfather took me to the scene of that battle years after on the way to Kennywood, he muttered without explanation, "Goddamn bums couldn't think for themselves." Now I understand what he meant.

The greatest military defeat the British ever suffered in North America before Saratoga was underway. Washington's horse was shot from under him, his coat ripped by bullets. Leaping onto a second horse, his hat was lifted from his head by gunfire and the second horse went down. A legend was in the making on the Monongahela that day, passed to Britain, France, and the colonies by survivors of the battle. Mortally wounded, Braddock released his command. Washington led the retreat on his hands and knees, crawling through the twilight dragging the dying Braddock, symbolic of the imminent death of British rule in America.

Monongahela began as a town fourteen years later, crossing point for a river ferry connecting to the National Road (now Route 40) which began, appropriately enough, in the town of Washington, Pennsylvania. In 1791, leaders of the curious "Whiskey Rebellion" met in Monongahela about a block from the place I was born; Scots-Irish farmers sick of the oppression of federal rule in the new republic spoke of forging a Trans-Allegheny nation of free men. Monongahela might have been its capital had they succeeded. We know these men were taken seriously back East because Washington, who as general never raised an army larger than seven thousand to fight the British, as president assembled thirteen thousand in 1794 to march into western Pennsylvania to subdue the Whiskey rebels. Having fought *with* them as comrades, he knew the danger posed by these wild men of the farther forests was no pipedream. They were descendants of the original pioneers who broke into the virgin forest, an evergreen and aggressive strain of populism ran through their group character.

Monongahela appears in history as a place where people expected to make their own luck, a place where rich and poor talked face to face, not through representatives. In the 1830s it became a way station on the escape route from Horace Mann-style Whiggery, the notion that men should be bound minutely by rules and layered officialdom. Whiggery was a neo-Anglican governing idea grown strong in reaction to Andrew Jackson's dangerous democratic revolution. *Whigs* brought us forced schooling before they mutated into both Democrats and Republicans; history seemed to tell them that with School in hand their mission was accomplished. Thousands of Americans, sensibly fearing the worst, poured West to get clear of this new British consciousness coming back to life in the East, as if the spirit of General Braddock had survived after all. Many of the new pilgrims passed through Mon City on the road to a place that might allow them to continue seeing things their own way.

Each group passing through on its western migration left a testament to its own particular yearnings—there are no less than twenty-three separate religious denominations in Monongahela, although fewer than five thousand souls live in the town. Most surprising of all, you can find there world headquarters of an autonomous Mormon sect, one that didn't go to Nauvoo with the rest of Smith's band but decamped here in a grimier utopia. Monongahela Mormons never accepted polygamy. They read the Book of Mormon a different way. From 1755 until the Civil War, the libertarianism of places like Monongahela set the tone for the most brilliant experiment in self-governance the modern world has ever seen. Not since the end of the Pippin Kings in France had liberty been so abundantly available for such a long time. A revolution in education was at hand as knowledge of the benefits of learning to the vigor of the spirit spread far and wide across America. Formal schooling played a part in this transformation, but its role was far from decisive. Schooled or not, the United States was the best-educated nation in human history—because it had liberty.

Farragut

When I was a schoolboy at the Waverly School in Monongahela, Peg Hill told us that David Farragut, the U.S. Navy's very first admiral, had been commissioned midshipman at the ripe old age of ten for service on the warship *Essex*. Had Farragut been a schoolboy like me, he would have been in fifth grade when he sailed for the Argentine, rounding the Horn into action against British warships operating along the Pacific coast of South America.

Farragut left a description of what he encountered in his first sea fight:

I shall never forget the horrid impression made upon me at the sight of the first man I had ever seen killed. It staggered me at first, but they soon began to fall so fast that it appeared like a dream and produced no effect on my nerves.

The poise a young boy is capable of was tested when a gun captain on the port side ordered him to the wardroom for primers. As he started down the ladder, a gun captain on the starboard side opposite the ladder was "struck full in the face by an eighteen-pound shot," his headless corpse falling on Farragut:

We tumbled down the hatch together. I lay for some moments stunned by the blow, but soon recovered consciousness enough to rush up on deck. The captain, seeing me covered with blood, asked if I were wounded; to which I replied, "I believe not, sir." "Then," said he, "where are the primers?" This brought me to my senses and I ran below again and brought up the primers.

The *Essex* had success; it took prizes. Officers were dispatched with skeleton crews to sail them back to the United States, and at the age of twelve, Farragut got his first command when he was picked to head a prize crew. I was in fifth grade when I read about that. Had Farragut gone to my school he would have been in seventh. You might remember that as a rough index how far our maturity had been retarded even fifty years ago. Once at sea, the deposed British captain rebelled at being ordered about by a boy and announced he was going below for his pistols (which as a token of respect he had been allowed to keep). Farragut sent word down that if the captain appeared on deck armed he would be summarily shot and dumped overboard. He stayed below.

So ended David Farragut's first great test of sound judgment. At fifteen, this unschooled young man went hunting pirates in the Mediterranean. Anchored off Naples, he witnessed an eruption of Vesuvius and studied the mechanics of volcanic action. On a long layover in Tunis, the American consul, troubled by Farragut's ignorance, tutored him in French, Italian, mathematics, and literature. Consider our admiral in embryo. I'd be surprised if you thought his education was deficient in anything a man needs to be reckoned with.

When I was a schoolboy in Monongahela, I learned how Thomas Edison left school early because the school thought him feeble-minded. He spent his early years peddling newspapers. Just before the age of twelve he talked his mother into letting him work on trains as a train-boy, a permission she gave which would put her in jail right now. A train-boy was apprentice of all work. Shortly afterwards a printer gave Edison some old type he was about to discard and the boy, successfully begging a corner for himself in the baggage car to set type, began printing a four-page newspaper the size of a handkerchief about the lives of the passengers on the train and the things that could be seen from its window.

Several months later, twelve-year-old Edison had five hundred subscribers, earning a net profit monthly about 25 percent more than an average schoolteacher of the day made. When the Civil War broke out, the newspaper became a goldmine. Railroads had telegraph facilities so war news was available to Edison as quickly as to professional journalists, but he could move it into print sooner than they could. He sold the war to crowds at the various stops. "The Grand Trunk Herald" sold as many as a thousand extra copies after a battle at prices per issue from a dime to a quarter, amassing for Edison a handsome stake. Unfortunately, at the same time he had been experimenting with phosphorus in the baggage car. One thing led to another and Edison set the train on fire; otherwise there might never have been a light bulb.

When I was a schoolboy in Monongahela, I learned with a shock that the men who won our Revolution were barely out of high school by the standards of my time: Hamilton was twenty in the retreat from New York; Burr, twenty-one; Light Horse Harry Lee, twenty-one; Lafayette, nineteen. What amounted to a college class rose up and struck down the British empire, afterwards helping to write the most sophisticated governing documents in modern history.

When I was a schoolboy in Monongahela, I learned the famous Samuel Pepys, whose *Diary* is a classic, wasn't just an old gossip but president of the Royal Society, the most prominent association of scientists in existence in the seventeenth century. He was also Secretary of the Admiralty. Why that's important to our investigation of modern schooling is this: *Pepys could only add and subtract right up to the time of his appointment to the Admiralty*, but then quickly learned to multiply and divide to spare himself embarrassment. I took a different lesson from that class than the teacher intended, I think.

At the age of five, when I entered the first grade, I could add, subtract, and multiply because Dad used to play numbers games with my sister and me in the car. He taught me the mastery of those skills within a matter of a few hours, not years and years as it took in school. We did all calculations in our heads with such gusto I seldom use a pencil today even for much more intricate computation. Pepys verified my father's unstated premise: You can learn what you need, even the technical stuff, at the moment you need it or shortly before. Sam Pepys wasn't put in charge of Britain's sea defense because he knew how to multiply or divide but because he had good judgment, or at least it was thought so.

Ben Franklin

Ben Franklin was born on Milk Street, Boston, on January 17, 1706. His father had seventeen children (four died at birth) by two wives. Ben was the youngest. Josiah, the father, was a candlemaker, not part of the gentry. His tombstone tells us he was "without an estate or any gainful employment" which apparently means his trade didn't allow wealth to be amassed. But, as the talkative tombstone continues, "By constant labor and industry with God's blessing they maintained a large family comfortably, and brought up thirteen children and seven grandchildren reputably."

Writing to his own son at the age of sixty-five, Ben Franklin referred to his circumstances as "poverty and obscurity" from which he rose to a state of affluence, and to some degree, reputation. The means he used "so well succeeded" he thought posterity might like to know what they were. Some, he believed, "would find his example suitable to their own situations, and therefore, fit to be imitated."

At twelve he was bound apprentice to brother James, a printer. After a few years of that, and disliking his brother's authority, he ran away first to New York and soon after to Philadelphia where he arrived broke at the age of seventeen. Finding work as a printer proved easy, and through his sociable nature and ready curiosity he made acquaintance with men of means. One of these induced Franklin to go to London where he found work as a compositor and once again brought himself to the attention of men of substance. A merchant brought him back to Philadelphia in his early twenties as what might today be called an administrative assistant or personal secretary. From this association, Franklin assembled means to set up his own printing house which published a newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, to which he constantly contributed essays.

At twenty-six, he began to issue "Poor Richard's Almanac," and for the next quarter century the Almanac spread his fame through the colonies and in Europe. He involved himself deeper and deeper in public affairs. He designed an Academy which was developed later into the University of Pennsylvania; he founded the American Philosophical Society as a crossroads of the sciences; he made serious researches into the nature of electricity and other scientific inquiries, carried on a large number of moneymaking activities; and involved himself heavily in politics. At the age of forty-two he was wealthy. The year was 1748.

In 1748, he sold his business in order to devote himself to study, and in a few years, scientific discoveries gave him

a reputation with the learned of Europe. In politics, he reformed the postal system and began to represent the colonies in dealings with England, and later France. In 1757, he was sent to England to protest against the influence of the Penns in the government of Pennsylvania, and remained there five years, returning two years later to petition the King to take the government away from the Penns. He lobbied to repeal the Stamp Act. From 1767 to 1775, he spent much time traveling through France, speaking, writing, and making contacts which resulted in a reputation so vast it brought loans and military assistance to the American rebels and finally crucial French intervention at Yorktown, which broke the back of the British.

As a writer, politician, scientist, and businessman, Franklin had few equals among the educated of his day—though he left school at ten. He spent nine years as American Commissioner to France. In terms only of his ease with the French language, of which he had little until he was in his sixties, this unschooled man's accomplishments are unfathomable by modern pedagogical theory. In many of his social encounters with French nobility, this candlemaker's son held the fate of the new nation in his hands, because he (and Jefferson) were being weighed as emblems of America's ability to overthrow England.

Franklin's *Autobiography* is a trove of clues from which we can piece together the actual curriculum which produced an old man capable of birthing a nation:

My elder brothers were all put apprentice to different trades. I was put to the grammar school at eight years of age, my father intending to devote me, as the tithe of his sons, to the services of the (Anglican) church. My early readiness in learning to read (which must have been very early, as I do not remember when I could not read) and the opinion of all his friends, that I should be a good scholar, encouraged him in this purpose...I continued, however, at grammar school not quite one year.

Young Ben was yanked from grammar school and sent to another type less ritzy and more nuts and bolts in colonial times: the "writing and arithmetic" school. There under the tutelage of Mr. Brownell, an advocate of "mild, encouraging methods," Franklin failed in arithmetic:

At ten years old I was taken home to assist my father in his business.... Accordingly I was employed in cutting wick for candles, filling the dipping mold and the molds for cast candles. Attending the shop, going on errands, etc. I disliked the trade, and had a strong inclination for the sea, but my father declared against it.

There are other less flattering accounts why Franklin left both these schools and struck out on his own at the age of ten—elsewhere he admits to being a leader of mischief, some of it mildly criminal, and to being "corrected" by his father—but causation is not our concern, only bare facts. Benjamin Franklin commenced school at third-grade age and exited when he would have been in the fifth to become a tallow chandler's apprentice.

A major part of Franklin's early education consisted of studying father Josiah, who turns out, himself, to be a pretty fair example of education without schooling:

He had an excellent constitution...very strong...ingenious...could draw prettily...skilled in music...a clear pleasing voice...played psalm tunes on his violin...a mechanical genius...sound understanding...solid judgment in prudential matters, both private and public affairs. In the latter, indeed, he was never employed, the numerous family he had to educate and the straitness of his circumstances keeping him close to his grade; but I remember well his being frequently visited by leading people, who consulted him for his opinion in affairs of the town or of the church...and showed a great deal of respect for his judgment and advice...frequently chosen an arbitrator between contending parties.

We don't need to push too hard to see a variety of informal training laboratories incidentally offered in this father/son relationship which had sufficient time to prove valuable in Franklin's own development, opportunities that would have been hard to find in any school.

Josiah drew, he sang, he played violin—this was a tallow chandler with sensitivity to those areas in which human

beings are most human; he had an inventive nature ("ingenious") which must have provided a constant example to Franklin that a solution can be crafted ad hoc to a problem if a man kept his nerve and had proper self-respect. His good sense, recognized by neighbors who sought his judgment, was always within earshot of Ben. In this way the boy came to see the discovery process, various systems of judgment, the role of an active citizen who may become minister without portfolio simply by accepting responsibility for others and discharging that responsibility faithfully:

At his table he liked to have as often as he could some sensible friend or neighbor to converse with, and always took care to start some ingenious or useful topic for discourse, which might tend to improve the minds of his children. By this means he turned our attention to what was good, just, and prudent in the conduct of life; and little or no notice was ever taken of what related to the victuals on the table...I was brought up in such perfect inattention to those matters as to be quite indifferent what kind of food was set before me.

No course of instruction or quantity of homework could deliver Franklin's facility with language, only something like Josiah's incidental drills at the dinner table. We can see sharply through Franklin's memoir that a tallow chandler can indeed teach himself to speak to kings.

And there were other themes in the family Franklin's educational armory besides arts, home demonstrations, regular responsibility, being held to account, being allowed to overhear adults solving public and private problems, and constant infusions of good conversation:

He...sometimes took me to walk with him, and see joiners, bricklayers, turners, braziers, etc., at their work, that he might observe my inclination, and endeavor to fix it on some trade or other.... It has ever since been a pleasure to me to see good workmen handle their tools; and it has been useful to me, having learnt so much by it as to be able to do little jobs myself. As it is for most members of a literate society, reading was the largest single element of Franklin's educational foundation.

As it is for most members of a literate society, reading was the largest single element of Franklin's educational foundation.

From a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books. Pleased with *Pilgrim's Progress* my first collection was of John Bunyan's works in separate little volumes. I afterwards sold them to enable me to buy R. Burton's *Historical Collections*; they were small chapman's books, and cheap, 40 to 50 in all. My father's little library consisted chiefly of books in polemic divinity, most of which I read....*Plutarch's Lives* there was in which I read abundantly, and I still think that time spent to great advantage. There was also a book of Defoe's, called an *Essay on Projects*, and another of Dr. Mather's, called *Essays to Do Good*, which perhaps gave me a turn of thinking that had an influence on some of the principal future events in my life.

You might well ask how young Franklin was reading Bunyan, Burton, Mather, Defoe, Plutarch, and works of "polemic divinity" before he would have been in junior high school. If you were schooled in the brain development lore of academic pedagogy it might seem quite a tour de force.

How do you suppose this son of a workingman with thirteen kids became such an effective public speaker that for more than half a century his voice was heard nationally and internationally on the great questions? He employed a method absolutely free: He argued with his friend Collins:

Very fond we were of argument, and very desirous of confuting one another, which disputatious turn is based upon contradiction. [Here Franklin warns against using dialectics on friendships or at social gatherings] I had caught it [the dialectical habit] by reading my father's books of dispute about religion.... A question was started between Collins and me, of the propriety of educating the female sex in learning, and their abilities to study. He was of the opinion that it was improper.... I took the contrary side.

Shortly after he began arguing, he also began reading the most elegant periodical of the day, Addison and Steele's

Spectator:

I thought the writing excellent and wished, if possible, to imitate it. With that in view I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, try'd to complete the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my *Spectator* with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them.

This method was hammered out while working a sixty-hour week. In learning eloquence there's only Ben, his determination, and the *Spectator*, no teacher. For instance, while executing rewrites, Franklin came to realize his vocabulary was too barren:

I found I wanted a stock of words...which I thought I should have acquired before that time if I had gone on making verses; since the continual occasion for words of the same import, but of different length, to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rhyme, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind and make me master of it.

As a good empiricist he tried a home cure for this deficiency:

I took some tales and turned them into verse; and after a time when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collection of hints [his outline] into confusions and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and complete the paper. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work afterwards with the original I discovered many faults and amended them; but I sometimes thought... I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language.

By the time he was sixteen Franklin was ready to take up his deficiencies in earnest with full confidence he could by his own efforts overcome them. Here's how he handled that problem with arithmetic:

Being on some occasion made ashamed of my ignorance in figures, which I had twice failed in learning when at school, I took Crocker's book of Arithmetick, and went through the whole by myself with great ease. I also read Seller's and Shermey's book of Navigation and became acquainted with the geometry they contain.

This school dropout tells us he was also reading John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, as well as studying the arts of rhetoric and logic, particularly the Socratic method of disputation, which so charmed and intrigued him that he abruptly dropped his former argumentative style, putting on the mask of "the humble inquirer and doubter":

I found this method safest for myself and very embarrassing to those against whom I used it; therefore I took a delight in it, practis'd it continually, and grew very artful and expert in drawing people, even of superior knowledge, into concessions, the consequences of which they did not foresee, entangling them in difficulties out of which they could not extricate themselves, and so obtaining victories that neither myself nor my cause always deserved.

Might there be an instructive parallel between teaching a kid to drive as my uncle taught me to do at age eleven, and the incredible opportunities working-class kids like Franklin were given to develop as quickly and as far as their hearts and minds allowed? We drive, regardless of our intelligence or characters, because the economy demands it; in colonial America through the early republic, a pressing need existed to get the most from everybody. Because of that need, unusual men and unusual women appeared in great numbers to briefly give the lie to traditional social order. In that historical instant, thousands of years of orthodox suppositions were shattered. In the words of Eric Hoffer, "Only here in America were common folk given a chance to show what they could do on their own without a master to push and order them about." Franklin and Edison, multiplied many times, were the result.

George Washington

A good yardstick to measure how far modern schooling has migrated from the education of the past is George Washington's upbringing in the middle eighteenth century. Although Washington descended from important families, his situation wasn't quite the easeful life that suggests. The death of his father left him, at eleven, without Ben Franklin's best rudder, and the practice of primogeniture, which vested virtually the entire inheritance in the first son (in order to stabilize social class) compelled Washington to either face the future as a ward of his brother, an unthinkable alternative for George, or take destiny into his own hands as a boy. You probably already know how that story turned out, but since the course he pursued was nearly schoolless, its curriculum is worth a closer look. For the next few minutes imagine yourself at "school" with Washington.

George Washington was no genius; we know that from too many of his contemporaries to quibble. John Adams called him "too illiterate, too unlearned, too unread for his station and reputation." Jefferson, his fellow Virginian, declared he liked to spend time "chiefly in action, reading little." It was an age when everyone in Boston, even shoeblacks, knew how to read and count; it was a time when a working-class boy in a family of thirteen like Franklin couldn't remember when he didn't know how to read.

As a teenager, Washington loved two things: dancing and horseback riding. He pursued both with a passion that paid off handsomely when he became president. Large in physical stature, his appearance might have stigmatized him as awkward. Instead, by developing the agile strength of a dancer and an equestrian, he was able to communicate grace through his commanding presence, élan that counterpoised his large build at any gathering. Thanks to his twin obsessions he met his responsibilities with the bearing of a champion athlete, which saved his life during the Revolution. In the midst of the fray, a British sharpshooter drew a bead on this target, but found himself unable to pull the trigger because Washington bore himself so magnificently! George Mercer, a friend, described Washington as a young man in the following way:

He is straight as an Indian, measuring six feet, two inches in his stockings and weighing 175 pounds.... His frame is padded with well developed muscles, indicating great strength.

British military superiority, including the best available war-making technology, would have made hash of a brainless commander in spite of his admirable carriage, so we need to analyze the curriculum which produced "America's Fabius," as he was called.⁶

Washington had no schooling until he was eleven, no classroom confinement, no blackboards. He arrived at school already knowing how to read, write, and calculate about as well as the average college student today. If that sounds outlandish, turn back to Franklin's curriculum and compare it with the intellectual diet of a modern gifted and talented class. Full literacy wasn't unusual in the colonies or early republic; many schools wouldn't *admit* students who didn't know reading and counting because few schoolmasters were willing to waste time teaching what was so easy to learn. It was deemed a mark of depraved character if literacy hadn't been attained by the matriculating student. Even the many charity schools operated by churches, towns, and philanthropic associations for the poor would have been flabbergasted at the great hue and cry raised today about difficulties teaching literacy. American experience proved the contrary.

In New England and the Middle Atlantic Colonies, where reading was especially valued, literacy was universal. The printed word was also valued in the South, where literacy was common, if not universal. In fact, it was general literacy among all classes that spurred the explosive growth of colleges in nineteenth-century America, where even ordinary folks hungered for advanced forms of learning.

Following George to school at eleven to see what the schoolmaster had in store would reveal a skimpy menu of studies, yet one with a curious gravity: geometry, trigonometry, and surveying. You might regard that as impossible or consider it was only a dumbed-down version of those things, some kid's game akin to the many simulations one finds today in schools for prosperous children—simulated city-building, simulated court trials, simulated

businesses—virtual realities to bridge the gap between adult society and the immaturity of the young. But if George didn't get the real thing, how do you account for his first job as official surveyor for Culpepper County, Virginia, only two thousand days after he first hefted a surveyor's transit in school?

For the next three years, Washington earned the equivalent of about \$100,000 a year in today's purchasing power. It's probable his social connections helped this fatherless boy get the position, but in frontier society anyone would be crazy to give a boy serious work unless he actually could do it. Almost at once he began speculating in land; he didn't need a futurist to tell him which way the historical wind was blowing. By the age of twenty-one, he had leveraged his knowledge and income into twenty-five hundred acres of prime land in Frederick County, Virginia.

Washington had no father as a teenager, and we know he was no genius, yet he learned geometry, trigonometry, and surveying when he would have been a fifth or sixth grader in our era. Ten years later he had prospered directly by his knowledge. His entire life was a work of art in the sense it was an artifice under his control. He even eventually freed his slaves without being coerced to do so. Washington could easily have been the first king in America but he discouraged any thinking on that score, and despite many critics, he was so universally admired the seat of government was named after him while he was still alive.

Washington attended school for exactly two years. Besides the subjects mentioned, at twelve and thirteen (and later) he studied frequently used legal forms like bills of exchange, tobacco receipts, leases, and patents. From these forms, he was asked to deduce the theory, philosophy, and custom which produced them. By all accounts, this steeping in grown-up reality didn't bore him at all. I had the same experience with Harlem kids 250 years later, following a similar procedure in teaching them how to struggle with complex income tax forms. Young people yearn for this kind of guided introduction to serious things, I think. When that yearning is denied, schooling destroys their belief that justice governs human affairs.

By his own choice, Washington put time into learning deportment, how to be regarded a gentleman by other gentlemen; he copied a book of rules which had been used at Jesuit schools for over a century and with that, his observations, and what advice he could secure, gathered his own character. Here's rule 56 to let you see the flavor of the thing: "Associate yourself with men of good Quality if you Esteem your own reputation." Sharp kid. No wonder he became president.

Washington also studied geography and astronomy on his own, gaining a knowledge of regions, continents, oceans, and heavens. In light of the casual judgment of his contemporaries that his intellect was of normal proportions, you might be surprised to hear that by eighteen he had devoured all the writings of Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Daniel Defoe and read regularly the famous and elegant *Spectator*. He also read Seneca's *Morals*, Julius Caesar's *Commentaries*, and the major writing of other Roman generals like the historian Tacitus.

At sixteen the future president began writing memos to himself about clothing design, not content to allow something so important to be left in the hands of tradesmen. Years later he became his own architect for the magnificent estate of Mt. Vernon. While still in his twenties, he began to experiment with domestic industry where he might avoid the vagaries of international finance in things like cotton or tobacco. First he tried to grow hemp "for medicinal purposes," which didn't work out; next he tried flax—that didn't work either. At the age of thirty-one, he hit on wheat. In seven years he had a little wheat business with his own flour mills and hired agents to market his own brand of flour; a little later he built fishing boats: four years before the Declaration was written he was pulling in 9 million herring a year.

No public school in the United States is set up to allow a George Washington to happen. Washingtons in the bud stage are screened, browbeaten, or bribed to conform to a narrow outlook on social truth. Boys like Andrew Carnegie who begged his mother not to send him to school and was well on his way to immortality and fortune at the age of thirteen, would be referred today for psychological counseling; Thomas Edison would find himself in Special Ed until his peculiar genius had been sufficiently tamed.

Anyone who reads can compare what the American present does in isolating children from their natural sources of education, modeling them on a niggardly last, to what the American past proved about human capabilities. The

effect of the forced schooling institution's strange accomplishment has been monumental. No wonder history has been outlawed.

Washington's *critics* dubbed him "Fabius" after the Roman general who dogged Hannibal's march but avoided battle with the Carthaginian. Washington wore down British resolve by eroding the general belief in their invincibility, something he had learned on the Monongahela when Braddock's force was routed. Eventually the French became convinced Washington was on the winning side, and with their support America became a nation. But it was the strategy of Washington that made a French-American alliance possible at all.

Montaigne's Curriculum

Between the fall of Rome in the late fifth century and the decline of monarchy in the eighteenth, secular schooling in any form was hardly a ripple on the societies of Europe. There was talk of it at certain times and places, but it was courtly talk, never very serious. What simple schooling we find was modestly undertaken by religious orders which usually had no greater ambition than providing a stream of assistants to the ecclesiastical bureaucracy, and perhaps molding the values of whatever future leaders proved susceptible; the few exceptions shouldn't be looked upon as the spark for our own schools. School was only a tiny blip on the radar until the last half of the eighteenth century.

If you and I are to have a productive partnership in this book you need to clear your mind of false history, the type that clogs the typical school chronicle written for teacher training institutes where each fact may be verifiable but the conclusions drawn from them are not. Turn to typical school history and you will learn about the alleged anticipation of our own schools by Comenius, of the reformed Latin Grammar School founded by Dean Colet at St. Paul's in London in 1510, of the "solitaries of Port Royal," whoever those lonely men may have been; each instance is real, the direction they lead in is false. What formal school experimentation the West provided touched only a tiny fraction of the population, and rarely those who became social leaders, let alone pioneers of the future.

You can disinter proclamations about schooling from Alfred's kingdom or Charlemagne's, but you can't find a scrap of hard evidence that the thing was ever seriously essayed. What talk of schooling occurs is the exclusive property of philosophers, secret societies, and a host of cranks, quacks, and schemers. What you never find anywhere is any popular clamor for a place to dump children called School. Yet while schooling is conspicuous by its absence, there's no shortage of intelligent commentary about *education*—a commodity not to be conflated with the lesser term until late in history.

Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Pope Pius II, in his tract *The Education of Children* (1451), prescribes the reading and study of classical authors, geometry, and arithmetic "for training the mind and assuring rapidity of conceptions." He included history and geography in his recommended curriculum, adding that "there is nothing in the world more beautiful than enlightened intelligence." The sixteenth century is filled with theories of education from men like Erasmus, Rabelais, and Montaigne. French schoolman Gabriel Compayre, in his *History of Pedagogy* (1885), holds all three in the highest regard:

Erasmus, Rabelais, and Montaigne...before pretending to surpass them, even at this day, we should rather attempt to overtake them, and to equal them in their pedagogical precepts.

Like most educated men and women, Erasmus was his own teacher. He assigned politeness an important place in education:

The tender mind of the child should...love and learn the liberal arts...be taught tact in the conduct of the social life...from the earliest be accustomed to good behavior based on moral principles.

Montaigne, who actually attended school at Guienne from the age of six until he was thirteen, bequeathed an image of late sixteenth-century schooling amazingly modern in its particulars:

Tis the true house of correction of imprisoned youth...do but come when they are about their lesson and you shall hear nothing but the outcries of boys under execution, with the thundering noise of their *Pedagogues*, drunk with fury, to make up the consort. A pretty way this to tempt these tender and timorous souls to love their book, with a furious countenance and a rod in hand.

What Montaigne requires of a student seeking education is the development of sound judgment: "If the judgment be not better settled, I would rather have him spend his time at tennis."

Montaigne was preoccupied with the training of judgment. He would have history learned so that facts have contexts and historical judgment a bearing on contemporary affairs; he was intrigued by the possibilities of *emulation*, as were all the classical masters,⁷ and so informs us. He said we need to see the difference between teaching, "where Marcellus died," which is unimportant and teaching "why it was unworthy of his duty that he died there," which has great significance. For Montaigne, learning to judge well and speak well is where education resides:

Whatever presents itself to our eyes serves as a sufficient book. The knavery of a page, the blunder of a servant, a table witticism...conversation with men is wonderfully helpful, so is a visit to foreign lands...to whet and sharpen our wits by rubbing them upon those of others.

And in *Gargantua* the physician Rabelais set out a pedagogy quite in harmony with the experience-based curriculum of John Locke.

When I started teaching, I was able to transfer principles of Montaigne to my classroom without any difficulty. They proved as useful to me in 1962 as they must have been to Montaigne in 1562, wisdom eternally sane, always cost-free. In contrast, the bloated lists of "aims," "motivations," and "methods" the New York City Board of Education supplied me with were worse than useless; many were dead wrong

One important bit of evidence that the informal attitude toward schooling was beginning to break up in seventeenth-century New England is found in the Massachusetts School Law of 1647, legislation attempting to establish a system of schools by government order and providing means to enforce that order. Talk like this had been around for centuries, but this was a significant enactment, coming from a theocratic utopia on the frontier of the known universe.

Yet for all the effort of New England Puritan leadership to make its citizenry uniform through schooling and pulpit, one of history's grand ironies is that orderly Anglican Virginia and the heirs of Puritan Massachusetts were the prime makers of a revolution which successfully overthrew the regulated uniformity of Britain. And in neither the startling Declaration of Independence, which set out the motives for this revolution, nor in the even more startling Bill of Rights in which ordinary people claimed their reward for courageous service, is either the word *School* or the word *Education* even mentioned. At the nation's founding, nobody thought School a cause worth going to war for, nobody thought it a right worth claiming.

⁷Horace Mann and the entire inner core of mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century school men derided emulation or the imitation of notable models as an effective spring of learning; thus was the most ancient and effective motivation to learn—to become like someone admirable—put to death deliberately by institutional pedagogy.

- [A Change In The Governing Mind](#)
- [Extending Childhood](#)
- [The Geneticist's Manifesto](#)
- [Participatory Democracy Put To The Sword](#)
- [Bad Character As A Management Tool](#)
- [An Enclosure Movement For Children](#)
- [The Dangan](#)
- [Occasional Letter Number One](#)
- [Change Agents Infiltrate](#)
- [Bionomics](#)
- [Waking Up Angry](#)

Today's corporate sponsors want to see their money used in ways to line up with business objectives.... This is a young generation of corporate sponsors and they have discovered the advantages of building long-term relationships with educational institutions.

– Suzanne Cornforth of Paschall & Associates, public relations consultants. As quoted in *The New York Times*, July 15, 1998

A Change In The Governing Mind

Sometimes the best hiding place is right in the open. It took seven years of reading and reflection for me to finally figure out that mass schooling of the young by force was a creation of the four great coal powers of the nineteenth century. It was under my nose, of course, but for years I avoided seeing what was there because no one else seemed to notice. Forced schooling arose from the new logic of the Industrial Age—the logic imposed on flesh and blood by fossil fuel and high-speed machinery.

This simple reality is hidden from view by early philosophical and theological anticipations of mass schooling in various writings about social order and human nature. But you shouldn't be fooled any more than Charles Francis Adams was fooled when he observed in 1880 that what was being cooked up for kids unlucky enough to be snared by the newly proposed institutional school net combined characteristics of the cotton mill and the railroad with those of a state prison.

After the Civil War, utopian speculative analysis regarding isolation of children in custodial compounds where they could be subjected to deliberate molding routines, began to be discussed seriously by the Northeastern policy elites of business, government, and university life. These discussions were inspired by a growing realization that the productive potential of machinery driven by coal was limitless. Railroad development made possible by coal and startling new inventions like the telegraph, seemed suddenly to make village life and local dreams irrelevant. A new governing mind was emerging in harmony with the new reality.

The principal motivation for this revolution in family and community life might seem to be greed, but this surface appearance conceals philosophical visions approaching religious exaltation in intensity—that effective early indoctrination of all children would lead to an orderly scientific society, one controlled by the best people, now freed from the obsolete straitjacket of democratic traditions and historic American libertarian attitudes.

Forced schooling was the medicine to bring the whole continental population into conformity with these plans so that it might be regarded as a "human resource" and managed as a "workforce." No more Ben Franklins or Tom Edisons could be allowed; they set a bad example. One way to manage this was to see to it that individuals were prevented from taking up their working lives until an advanced age when the ardor of youth and its insufferable self-confidence had cooled.

Extending Childhood

From the beginning, there was purpose behind forced schooling, purpose which had nothing to do with what parents, kids, or communities wanted. Instead, this grand purpose was forged out of what a highly centralized corporate economy and system of finance bent on internationalizing itself was thought to need; that, and what a strong, centralized political state needed, too. School was looked upon from the first decade of the twentieth century as a branch of industry and a tool of governance. For a considerable time, probably provoked by a climate of official anger and contempt directed against immigrants in the greatest displacement of people in history, social managers of schooling were remarkably candid about what they were doing. In a speech he gave before businessmen prior to the First World War, Woodrow Wilson made this unabashed disclosure:

We want one class to have a liberal education. We want another class, a very much larger class of necessity, to forgo the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks.

By 1917, the major administrative jobs in American schooling were under the control of a group referred to in the press of that day as "the Education Trust." The first meeting of this trust included representatives of Rockefeller, Carnegie, Harvard, Stanford, the University of Chicago, and the National Education Association. The chief end, wrote Benjamin Kidd, the British evolutionist, in 1918, was to "impose on the young the ideal of subordination."

At first, the primary target was the tradition of independent livelihoods in America. Unless Yankee entrepreneurialism could be extinguished, at least among the common population, the immense capital investments that mass production industry required for equipment weren't conceivably justifiable. Students were to learn to think of themselves as *employees* competing for the favor of management. Not as Franklin or Edison had once regarded themselves, as self-determined, free agents.

Only by a massive psychological campaign could the menace of *overproduction* in America be contained. That's what important men and academics called it. The ability of Americans to think as independent producers had to be curtailed. Certain writings of Alexander Inglis carry a hint of schooling's role in this ultimately successful project to curb the tendency of little people to compete with big companies. From 1880 to 1930, overproduction became a controlling metaphor among the managerial classes, and this idea would have a profound influence on the development of mass schooling.

I know how difficult it is for most of us who mow our lawns and walk our dogs to comprehend that long-range social engineering even exists, let alone that it began to dominate compulsion schooling nearly a century ago. Yet the 1934 edition of Ellwood P. Cubberley's *Public Education in the United States* is explicit about what happened and why. As Cubberley puts it:

It has come to be desirable that children should not engage in productive labor. On the contrary, all recent thinking...[is] opposed to their doing so. Both the interests of organized labor and the interests of the nation have set against child labor.¹

The statement occurs in a section of *Public Education* called "A New Lengthening of the Period of Dependence," in which Cubberley explains that "the coming of the factory system" has made extended childhood necessary by depriving children of the training and education that farm and village life once gave. With the breakdown of home and village industries, the passing of chores, and the extinction of the apprenticeship system by large-scale production with its extreme division of labor (and the "all conquering march of machinery"), an army of workers has arisen, said Cubberley, who know nothing.

Furthermore, modern industry needs such workers. Sentimentality could not be allowed to stand in the way of progress. According to Cubberley, with "much ridicule from the public press" the old book-subject curriculum was set aside, replaced by a change in purpose and "a new psychology of instruction which came to us from abroad." That last mysterious reference to a new psychology is to practices of dumbed-down schooling common to England, Germany, and France, the three major world coal-powers (other than the United States), each of which had already converted its common population into an industrial proletariat.

Arthur Calhoun's 1919 *Social History of the Family* notified the nation's academics what was happening. Calhoun declared that the fondest wish of utopian writers was coming true, the child was passing from its family "into the custody of community experts." He offered a significant forecast, that in time we could expect to see public education "designed to check the mating of the unfit." Three years later, Mayor John F. Hylan of New York said in a public speech that the schools had been seized as an octopus would seize prey, by "an invisible government." He was referring specifically to certain actions of the Rockefeller Foundation and other corporate interests in New York City which preceded the school riots of 1917.

The 1920s were a boom period for forced schooling as well as for the stock market. In 1928, a well-regarded volume called *A Sociological Philosophy of Education* claimed, "It is the business of teachers to run not merely schools but the world." A year later, the famous creator of educational psychology, Edward Thorndike of Columbia Teachers College, announced, "Academic subjects are of little value." William Kirkpatrick, his colleague at Teachers College, boasted in *Education and the Social Crisis* that the whole tradition of rearing the young was being made over by experts.

¹This is the same Ellwood P. Cubberley who wrote in his Columbia Teachers College Dissertation of 1905 that schools were to be factories "in which raw products, children, are to be shaped and formed into finished products... manufactured like nails, and the specifications for manufacturing will come from government and industry."

The Geneticist's Manifesto

Meanwhile, at the project offices of an important employer of experts, the Rockefeller Foundation, friends were hearing from Max Mason, its president, that a comprehensive national program was underway to allow, in Mason's words, "the control of human behavior." This dazzling ambition was announced on April 11, 1933. Schooling figured prominently in the design.

Rockefeller had been inspired by the work of Eastern European scientist Hermann Müller to invest heavily in genetics. Müller had used x-rays to override genetic law, inducing mutations in fruit flies. This seemed to open the door to the scientific control of life itself. Müller preached that planned breeding would bring mankind to paradise faster than God. His proposal received enthusiastic endorsement from the greatest scientists of the day as well as from powerful economic interests.

Müller would win the Nobel Prize, reduce his proposal to a fifteen-hundred-word *Geneticist's Manifesto*, and watch with satisfaction as twenty-two distinguished American and British biologists of the day signed it. The state must prepare to consciously guide human sexual selection, said Müller. School would have to separate worthwhile breeders from those slated for termination.

Just a few months before this report was released, an executive director of the National Education Association announced that his organization expected "to accomplish by education what dictators in Europe are seeking to do by compulsion and force." You can't get much clearer than that. WWII drove the project underground, but hardly retarded its momentum. Following cessation of global hostilities, school became a major domestic battleground for the scientific rationalization of social affairs through compulsory indoctrination. Great private corporate foundations led the way.

Participatory Democracy Put To The Sword

Thirty-odd years later, between 1967 and 1974, teacher training in the United States was covertly revamped through coordinated efforts of a small number of private foundations, select universities, global corporations, think tanks, and government agencies, all coordinated through the U.S. Office of Education and through key state education departments like those in California, Texas, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and New York.

Important milestones of the transformation were: 1) an extensive government exercise in futurology called *Designing Education for the Future*, 2) the *Behavioral Science Teacher Education Project*, and 3) Benjamin Bloom's multivolume *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, an enormous manual of over a thousand pages which, in time, impacted every school in America. While other documents exist, these three are appropriate touchstones of the whole, serving to make clear the nature of the project underway.

Take them one by one and savor each. *Designing Education*, produced by the Education Department, redefined the term "education" after the Prussian fashion as "a means to achieve important economic and social goals of a national character." State education agencies would henceforth act as on-site federal enforcers, ensuring the compliance of local schools with central directives. Each state education department was assigned the task of becoming "an agent of change" and advised to "lose its independent identity as well as its authority," in order to "form a partnership with the federal government."

The second document, the gigantic *Behavioral Science Teacher Education Project*, outlined teaching reforms to be forced on the country after 1967. If you ever want to hunt this thing down, it bears the U.S. Office of Education Contract Number OEC-0-9-320424-4042 (B10). The document sets out clearly the intentions of its creators—nothing less than "impersonal manipulation" through schooling of a future America in which "few will be able to maintain control over their opinions," an America in which "each individual receives at birth a multi-purpose

identification number" which enables employers and other controllers to keep track of underlings and to expose them to direct or subliminal influence when necessary. Readers learned that "chemical experimentation" on minors would be normal procedure in this post-1967 world, a pointed foreshadowing of the massive Ritalin interventions which now accompany the practice of forced schooling.

The *Behavioral Science Teacher Education Project* identified the future as one "in which a small elite" will control all important matters, one where participatory democracy will largely disappear. Children are made to see, through school experiences, that their classmates are so cruel and irresponsible, so inadequate to the task of self-discipline, and so ignorant they need to be controlled and regulated for society's good. Under such a logical regime, school terror can only be regarded as good advertising. It is sobering to think of mass schooling as a vast demonstration project of human inadequacy, but that is at least one of its functions.

Post-modern schooling, we are told, is to focus on "pleasure cultivation" and on "other attitudes and skills compatible with a non-work world." Thus the socialization classroom of the century's beginning—itsself a radical departure from schooling for mental and character development—can be seen to have evolved by 1967 into a full-scale laboratory for psychological experimentation.

School conversion was assisted powerfully by a curious phenomenon of the middle to late 1960s, a tremendous rise in school violence and general school chaos which followed a policy declaration (which seems to have occurred nationwide) that the disciplining of children must henceforth mimic the "due process" practice of the court system. Teachers and administrators were suddenly stripped of any effective ability to keep order in schools since the due process apparatus, of necessity a slow, deliberate matter, is completely inadequate to the continual outbreaks of childish mischief all schools experience.

Now, without the time-honored ad hoc armory of disciplinary tactics to fall back on, disorder spiraled out of control, passing from the realm of annoyance into more dangerous terrain entirely as word surged through student bodies that teacher hands were tied. And each outrageous event that reached the attention of the local press served as an advertisement for expert prescriptions. Who had ever seen kids behave this way? Time to surrender community involvement to the management of experts; time also for emergency measures like special education and Ritalin. During this entire period, lasting five to seven years, outside agencies like the Ford Foundation exercised the right to supervise whether "children's rights" were being given due attention, fanning the flames hotter even long after trouble had become virtually unmanageable.

The *Behavioral Science Teacher Education Project*, published at the peak of this violence, informed teacher-training colleges that under such circumstances, teachers had to be trained as therapists; they must translate prescriptions of social psychology into "practical action" in the classroom. As curriculum had been redefined, so teaching followed suit.

Third in the series of new gospel texts was Bloom's *Taxonomy*,² in his own words, "a tool to classify the ways individuals are to act, think, or feel as the result of some unit of instruction." Using methods of behavioral psychology, children would learn proper thoughts, feelings, and actions, and have their improper attitudes brought from home "remediated."

In all stages of the school experiment, testing was essential to localize the child's mental state on an official rating scale. Bloom's epic spawned important descendant forms: Mastery Learning, Outcomes-Based Education, and School-to-Work government-business collaborations. Each classified individuals for the convenience of social managers and businesses, each offered data useful in controlling the mind and movements of the young, mapping the next adult generation. But for what purpose? Why was this being done?

^{2A} fuller discussion of Bloom and the other documents mentioned here, plus much more, is available in the writing of Beverly Eakman, a Department of Justice employee, particularly her book *The Cloning of the American Mind* (1998).

Bad Character As A Management Tool

A large piece of the answer can be found by reading between the lines of an article that appeared in the June 1998 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Written by Mortimer Zuckerman, owner of *U.S. News and World Report* (and other major publications), the essay praises the American economy, characterizing its lead over Europe and Asia as so structurally grounded no nation can possibly catch up for a hundred years. American workers and the American managerial system are unique.

You are intrigued, I hope. So was I. Unless you believe in master race biology, our advantage can only have come from training of the American young, in school and out, training which produces attitudes and behavior useful to management. What might these crucial determinants of business success be?

First, says Zuckerman, the American worker is a pushover. That's my translation, not his, but I think it's a fair take on what he means when he says the American is indifferent to everything but a paycheck. He doesn't try to tell the boss his job. By contrast, Europe suffers from a strong "steam age" craft tradition where workers demand a large voice in decision-making. Asia is even worse off, because even though the Asian worker is silenced, tradition and government interfere with what business can do.

Next, says Zuckerman, workers in America live in constant panic; they know companies here owe them nothing as fellow human beings. Fear is our secret supercharger, giving management flexibility no other country has. In 1996, after five years of record profitability, almost half of all Americans in big business feared being laid off. This fear keeps a brake on wages.

Next, in the United States, human beings don't make decisions, abstract formulas do; management by mathematical rules makes the company manager-proof as well as worker-proof.

Finally, our endless consumption completes the charmed circle, consumption driven by non-stop addiction to novelty, a habit which provides American business with the only reliable domestic market in the world. Elsewhere, in hard times business dries up, but not here; here we shop till we drop, mortgaging the future in bad times as well as good.

Can't you feel in your bones Zuckerman is right? I have little doubt the fantastic wealth of American big business is psychologically and procedurally grounded in our form of schooling. The training field for these grotesque human qualities is the classroom. Schools train individuals to respond as a mass. Boys and girls are drilled in being bored, frightened, envious, emotionally needy, generally incomplete. A successful mass production economy requires such a clientele. A small business, small farm economy like that of the Amish requires individual competence, thoughtfulness, compassion, and universal participation; our own requires a managed mass of leveled, spiritless, anxious, familyless, friendless, godless, and obedient people who believe the difference between *Cheers* and *Seinfeld* is a subject worth arguing about.

The extreme wealth of American big business is the direct result of school having trained us in certain attitudes like a craving for novelty. That's what the bells are for. They don't ring so much as to say, "Now for something different."

An Enclosure Movement For Children

The secret of American schooling is that it doesn't teach the way children learn, and it isn't supposed to; school was engineered to serve a concealed command economy and a deliberately re-stratified social order. It wasn't made for the benefit of kids and families as those individuals and institutions would define their own needs. School is the first

impression children get of organized society; like most first impressions, it is the lasting one. Life according to school is *dull* and *stupid*, only consumption promises relief: Coke, Big Macs, fashion jeans, that's where real meaning is found, that is the classroom's lesson, however indirectly delivered.

The decisive dynamics which make forced schooling poisonous to healthy human development aren't hard to spot. Work in classrooms isn't significant work; it fails to satisfy real needs pressing on the individual; it doesn't answer real questions experience raises in the young mind; it doesn't contribute to solving any problem encountered in actual life. The net effect of making all schoolwork external to individual longings, experiences, questions, and problems is to render the victim listless. This phenomenon has been well-understood at least since the time of the British enclosure movement which forced small farmers off their land into factory work. Growth and mastery come only to those who vigorously self-direct. Initiating, creating, doing, reflecting, freely associating, enjoying privacy—these are precisely what the structures of schooling are set up to prevent, on one pretext or another.

As I watched it happen, it took about three years to break most kids, three years confined to environments of emotional neediness with nothing real to do. In such environments, songs, smiles, bright colors, cooperative games, and other tension-breakers do the work better than angry words and punishment. Years ago it struck me as more than a little odd that the Prussian government was the patron of Heinrich Pestalozzi, inventor of multicultural fun-and-games psychological elementary schooling, and of Friedrich Froebel, inventor of kindergarten. It struck me as odd that J.P. Morgan's partner, Peabody, was instrumental in bringing Prussian schooling to the prostrate South after the Civil War. But after a while I began to see that behind the philanthropy lurked a rational economic purpose.

The strongest meshes of the school net are invisible. Constant bidding for a stranger's attention creates a chemistry producing the common characteristics of modern schoolchildren: whining, dishonesty, malice, treachery, cruelty. Unceasing competition for official favor in the dramatic fish bowl of a classroom delivers cowardly children, little people sunk in chronic boredom, little people with no apparent purpose for being alive. The full significance of the classroom as a dramatic environment, as *primarily* a dramatic environment, has never been properly acknowledged or examined.

The most destructive dynamic is identical to that which causes caged rats to develop eccentric or even violent mannerisms when they press a bar for sustenance on an aperiodic reinforcement schedule (one where food is delivered at random, but the rat doesn't suspect). Much of the weird behavior school kids display is a function of the aperiodic reinforcement schedule. And the endless confinement and inactivity to slowly drive children out of their minds. Trapped children, like trapped rats, need close management. Any rat psychologist will tell you that.

The Dangan

In the first decades of the twentieth century, a small group of soon-to-be-famous academics, symbolically led by John Dewey and Edward Thorndike of Columbia Teachers College, Ellwood P. Cubberley of Stanford, G. Stanley Hall of Clark, and an ambitious handful of others, energized and financed by major corporate and financial allies like Morgan, Astor, Whitney, Carnegie, and Rockefeller, decided to bend government schooling to the service of business and the political state—as it had been done a century before in Prussia.

Cubberley delicately voiced what was happening this way: "The nature of the national need must determine the character of the education provided." National need, of course, depends upon point of view. The NEA in 1930 sharpened our understanding by specifying in a resolution of its Department of Superintendence that what school served was an "effective use of capital" through which our "unprecedented wealth-producing power has been gained." When you look beyond the rhetoric of Left and Right, pronouncements like this mark the degree to which the organs of schooling had been transplanted into the corporate body of the new economy.

It's important to keep in mind that no harm was meant by any designers or managers of this great project. It was only the law of nature as they perceived it, working progressively as capitalism itself did for the ultimate good of all.

The real force behind school effort came from true believers of many persuasions, linked together mainly by their belief that family and church were retrograde institutions standing in the way of progress. Far beyond the myriad practical details and economic considerations there existed a kind of grail-quest, an idea capable of catching the imagination of dreamers and firing the blood of zealots.

The entire academic community here and abroad had been Darwinized and Galtonized by this time and to this contingent school seemed an instrument for managing evolutionary destiny. In Thorndike's memorable words, conditions for controlled selective breeding had to be set up before the new American industrial proletariat "took things into their own hands."

America was a frustrating petri dish in which to cultivate a managerial revolution, however, because of its historic freedom traditions. But thanks to the patronage of important men and institutions, a group of academics were enabled to visit mainland China to launch a modernization project known as the "New Thought Tide." Dewey himself lived in China for two years where pedagogical theories were inculcated in the Young Turk elements, then tested on a bewildered population which had recently been stripped of its ancient form of governance. A similar process was embedded in the new Russian state during the 1920s.

While American public opinion was unaware of this undertaking, some big-city school superintendents were wise to the fact that they were part of a global experiment. Listen to H.B. Wilson, superintendent of the Topeka schools:

The introduction of the American school into the Orient has broken up 40 centuries of conservatism. It has given us a new China, a new Japan, and is working marked progress in Turkey and the Philippines. The schools...are in a position to determine the lines of progress. (*Motivation of School Work*, 1916)

Thoughts like this don't spring full-blown from the heads of men like Dr. Wilson of Topeka. They have to be planted there.

The Western-inspired and Western-financed Chinese revolution, following hard on the heels of the last desperate attempt by China to prevent the British government traffic in narcotic drugs there, placed that ancient province in a favorable state of anarchy for laboratory tests of mind-alteration technology. Out of this period rose a Chinese universal tracking procedure called "The Dangan," a continuous lifelong personnel file exposing every student's intimate life history from birth through school and onwards. The Dangan constituted the ultimate overthrow of privacy. Today, nobody works in China without a Dangan.

By the mid-1960s preliminary work on an American Dangan was underway as information reservoirs attached to the school institution began to store personal information. A new class of expert like Ralph Tyler of the Carnegie Endowments quietly began to urge collection of personal data from students and its unification in computer code to enhance cross-referencing. Surreptitious data gathering was justified by Tyler as "the moral right of institutions."

Occasional Letter Number One

Between 1896 and 1920, a small group of industrialists and financiers, together with their private charitable foundations, subsidized university chairs, university researchers, and school administrators, spent more money on forced schooling than the government itself did. Carnegie and Rockefeller, as late as 1915, were spending more themselves. In this laissez-faire fashion a system of modern schooling was constructed without public participation. The motives for this are undoubtedly mixed, but it will be useful for you to hear a few excerpts from the first mission statement of Rockefeller's General Education Board as they occur in a document called *Occasional Letter Number One* (1906):

In our dreams...people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present educational conventions [intellectual and character education] fade from our minds, and unhampered by tradition we

work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, educators, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians, nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have ample supply. The task we set before ourselves is very simple...we will organize children...and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way.

This mission statement will reward multiple rereadings.

Change Agents Infiltrate

By 1971, the U.S. Office of Education was deeply committed to accessing private lives and thoughts of children. In that year it granted contracts for seven volumes of "change-agent" studies to the RAND Corporation. Change-agent training was launched with federal funding under the Education Professions Development Act. In time the fascinating volume *Change Agents Guide to Innovation in Education* appeared, following which grants were awarded to teacher training programs for the development of change agents. Six more RAND manuals were subsequently distributed, enlarging the scope of change agency.

In 1973, Catherine Barrett, president of the National Education Association, said, "Dramatic changes in the way we raise our children are indicated, particularly in terms of schooling...we will be agents of change." By 1989, a senior director of the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory told the fifty governors of American states that year assembled to discuss government schooling, "What we're into is total restructuring of society." It doesn't get much plainer than that. There is no record of a single governor objecting.

Two years later Gerald Bracey, a leading professional promoter of government schooling, wrote in his annual report to clients: "We must continue to produce an uneducated social class." Overproduction was the bogey of industrialists in 1900; a century later underproduction made possible by dumbed-down schooling had still to keep that disease in check.

Bionomics

The crude power and resources to make twentieth-century forced schooling happen as it did came from large corporations and the federal government, from powerful, lone-established families, and from the universities, now swollen with recruits from the declining Protestant ministry and from once-clerical families. All this is easy enough to trace once you know it's there. But the soul of the thing was far more complex, an amalgam of ancient religious doctrine, utopian philosophy, and European/Asiatic strong-state politics mixed together and distilled. The great facade behind which this was happening was a new enlightenment: scientific scholarship in league with German research values brought to America in the last half of the nineteenth century. Modern German tradition always assigned universities the primary task of directly serving industry and the political state, but that was a radical contradiction of American tradition to serve the individual and the family.

Indiana University provides a sharp insight into the kind of science-fictional consciousness developing outside the mostly irrelevant debate conducted in the press about schooling, a debate proceeding on early nineteenth-century lines. By 1900, a special discipline existed at Indiana for elite students, Bionomics. Invitees were hand-picked by college president David Starr Jordan, who created and taught the course. It dealt with the why and how of producing a new evolutionary ruling class, although that characterization, suggesting as it does kings, dukes, and princes, is somewhat misleading. In the new scientific era dawning, the ruling class were those managers trained in the goals and procedures of new systems. Jordan did so well at Bionomics he was soon invited into the major leagues of university existence, (an invitation extended personally by rail tycoon Leland Stanford) to become first president of Stanford University, a school inspired by Andrew Carnegie's famous "Gospel of Wealth" essay.

Jordan remained president of Stanford for thirty years.

Bionomics acquired its direct link with forced schooling in a fortuitous fashion. When he left Indiana, Jordan eventually reached back to get his star Bionomics protégé, Ellwood P. Cubberley, to become dean of Teacher Education at Stanford. In this heady position, young Cubberley made himself a reigning aristocrat of the new institution. He wrote a history of American schooling which became the standard of the school business for the next fifty years; he assembled a national syndicate which controlled administrative posts from coast to coast. Cubberley was the man to see, the kingmaker in American school life until its pattern was set in stone.

Did the abstract and rather arcane discipline of Bionomics have any effect on real life? Well, consider this: the first formal legislation making forced sterilization a legal act on planet Earth was passed, not in Germany or Japan, but in the American state of Indiana, a law which became official in the famous 1927 Supreme Court test case *Buck vs. Bell*. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote the majority opinion allowing seventeen-year-old Carrie Buck to be sterilized against her will to prevent her "degenerate offspring," in Holmes' words, from being born. Twenty years after the momentous decision, in the trial of German doctors at Nuremberg, Nazi physicians testified that their precedents were American—aimed at combating racial degeneracy. The German name for forced sterilization was "the Indiana Procedure."

To say this bionomical spirit infected public schooling is only to say birds fly.³ Once you know it's there, the principle jumps out at you from behind every school bush. It suffused public discourse in many areas where it had claimed superior insight. Walter Lippmann, in 1922, demanded "severe restrictions on public debate," in light of the allegedly enormous number of feeble-minded Americans. The old ideal of participatory democracy was insane, according to Lippmann.

The theme of scientifically controlled breeding interacted in a complex way with the old Prussian ideal of a logical society run by experts loyal to the state. It also echoed the idea of British state religion and political society that God Himself had appointed the social classes. What gradually began to emerge from this was a Darwinian caste-based American version of institutional schooling remote-controlled at long distance, administered through a growing army of hired hands, layered into intricate pedagogical hierarchies on the old Roman principle of divide and conquer. Meanwhile, in the larger world, assisted mightily by intense concentration of ownership in the new electronic media, developments moved swiftly also.

In 1928, Edward L. Bernays, godfather of the new craft of spin control we call "public relations," told the readers of his book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* that "invisible power" was now in control of every aspect of American life. Democracy, said Bernays, was only a front for skillful wire-pulling. The necessary know-how to pull these crucial wires was available for sale to businessmen and policy people. Public imagination was controlled by shaping the minds of schoolchildren.

By 1944, a repudiation of Jefferson's idea that mankind had natural rights was resonating in every corner of academic life. Any professor who expected free money from foundations, corporations, or government agencies had to play the scientific management string on his lute. In 1961, the concept of the political state as the sovereign principle surfaced dramatically in John F. Kennedy's famous inaugural address in which his national audience was lectured, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Thirty-five years later, Kennedy's lofty Romanized rhetoric and metaphor were replaced by the tough-talking wise guy idiom of *Time*, instructing its readers in a 1996 cover story that "Democracy is in the worst interest of national goals." As *Time* reporters put it, "The modern world is too complex to allow the man or woman in the street to interfere in its management." Democracy was deemed a system for losers.

To a public desensitized to its rights and possibilities, frozen out of the national debate, to a public whose fate was in the hands of experts, the secret was in the open for those who could read entrails: the original American ideals had been repudiated by their guardians. School was best seen from this new perspective as the critical terminal on a production line to create a utopia resembling EPCOT Center, but with one important bionomical limitation: it

wasn't intended for everyone, at least not for very long, this utopia.

Out of Johns Hopkins in 1996 came this chilling news:

The American economy has grown massively since the mid 1960s, but workers' real spendable wages are no higher than they were 30 years ago.

That from a book called *Fat and Mean*, about the significance of corporate downsizing. During the boom economy of the 1980s and 1990s, purchasing power rose for 20 percent of the population and actually declined 13 percent for the other four-fifths. Indeed, after inflation was factored in, purchasing power of a working couple in 1995 was only 8 percent greater than for a single working man in 1905; this steep decline in common prosperity over ninety years forced both parents from home and deposited kids in the management systems of daycare, extended schooling, and commercial entertainment. Despite the century-long harangue that schooling was the cure for unevenly spread wealth, exactly the reverse occurred—wealth was 250 percent more concentrated at century's end than at its beginning.

I don't mean to be inflammatory, but it's as if government schooling made people dumber, not brighter; made families weaker, not stronger; ruined formal religion with its hard-sell exclusion of God; set the class structure in stone by dividing children into classes and setting them against one another; and has been midwife to an alarming concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a fraction of the national community.

³The following questions were put to schoolchildren in the South Dearborn School District in Aurora, Indiana, in 1994, with which they were asked to: Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree: "I approve the practice of sterilizing the feeble-minded living in state institutions," and "I think it is unacceptable to society to use medical procedures to keep genetically defective humans alive so they can marry and reproduce."

Waking Up Angry

Throughout most of my long school career I woke up angry in the morning, went through the school day angry, went to sleep angry at night. Anger was the fuel that drove me to spend thirty years trying to master this destructive institution.

- [The School Edition](#)
- [Intellectual Espionage](#)
- [Looking Behind Appearances](#)
- [The Sudbury Valley School](#)
- [Bootie Zimmer](#)
- [False Premises](#)
- [A System Of State Propaganda](#)
- [The Ideology Of The Text](#)
- [The National Adult Literacy Survey](#)
- [Name Sounds, Not Things](#)
- [The Meatgrinder Classroom](#)
- [The Ignorant Schoolmaster](#)
- [Frank Had A Dog; His Name Was Spot](#)
- [The Pedagogy of Literacy](#)
- [Dick And Jane](#)

The deeds were monstrous, but the doer [Adolf Eichmann]....was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous. There was no sign in him of firm ideological convictions or of specific evil motives, and the only notable characteristic one could detect in his past behavior as well as in his behavior during the trial...was something entirely negative; it was not stupidity but thoughtlessness.... Might not the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected with our faculty for thought

– Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*

The School Edition

I always knew schoolbooks and real books were different. Most kids do. But I remained vague on any particular grounds for my prejudice until one day, tired of the simple-minded junior high school English curriculum, I decided to teach *Moby Dick* to eighth-grade classes. A friendly assistant principal smuggled a school edition into the book purchases and we were able to weigh anchor the next fall.

What a book! Ishmael, the young seaman who relates Melville's tale, is a half-orphan by decree of Fate, sentenced never to know a natural home again. But Ahab is no accidental victim. He has consciously willed his own exile from a young wife and child, from the fruits of his wealth, and from Earth itself in order to pursue his vocation of getting even. Revenge on the natural order is what drives him.

War against God and family. To me, it defines the essence of Americanness. It's no accident that America's three

classic novels—*Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Huckleberry Finn*—each deal with ambiguous families or that each emerges from a time not far from either side of the Civil War. America had been an inferno for families, as Melville, Hawthorne, and Twain all knew. Midway through our first full century as a nation, the nearly universal American experience of homelessness found its voice. Ishmael is a half-orphan, Ahab an absentee father and husband, the harpooners expatriate men of color; Pearl a bastard, Hester an adulteress, the Reverend Dimmesdale a sexual predator and runaway father; Huck Finn, de facto, an adoptee, Jim a twice-uprooted African slave. When we think what our schools became we need to recall what a great pile of us are homeless. We long for homes we can never have as long as we have institutions like school, television, corporation, and government *in loco parentis*.

Patricia Lines of the U.S. Department of Education, in trying honorably to discuss what the rank and file of homeschoolers actually do, finally declared it seems to be wrapped up closely with a feeling of "intense interest in the life of the community." Above anything else, she found *loyalty* in the warp and woof of family:

Homeschoolers are tremendously *loyal* as family members, they are suspicious of television and other less intimate influences. They eat as a family, they socialize as a family, they attend church as a family, they become members of an extended...homeschooling community.

American great fiction is about individuals broken from family. The closest they come to satisfying the universal yearning is a struggle for surrogates—like the strange connection between Pearl, Hester, and the dark forest. America's most fascinating storytellers focus on the hollowness of American public life. We have no place to go when work is done. Our inner life long extinguished, our public work in remaking the world can never be done because personal *homework* isn't available to us. There's no institutional solace for this malady. In outrage at our lonely fate, we lay siege to the family sanctuary wherever it survives, as Ahab lay siege to the seas for his accursed Whale.

For this and other reasons long lost, I decided to teach *Moby Dick* to my eighth-grade classes. Including the dumb ones. I discovered right away the white whale was just too big for forty-five-minute bell breaks; I couldn't divide it comfortably to fit the schedule. Melville's book is too vast to say just what the right way to teach it really is. It speaks to every reader privately. To grapple with it demanded elastic time, not the fixed bell breaks of junior high. Indeed, it offered so many choices of purpose—some aesthetic, some historical, some social, some philosophical, some theological, some dramatic, some economic—that compelling the attention of a room full of young people to any one aspect seemed willful and arbitrary.

Soon after I began teaching *Moby Dick* I realized the school edition wasn't a real book but a kind of disguised indoctrination providing all the questions, a scientific addition to the original text designed to make the book teacher-proof and student-proof. If you even read those questions (let alone answered them) there would be no chance ever again for a private exchange between you and Melville; the invisible editor would have preempted it.

The editors of the school edition provided a package of prefabricated questions and more than a hundred chapter-by-chapter abstracts and interpretations of their own. Many teachers consider this a gift—it does the thinking for them. If I didn't assign these questions, kids wanted to know why not. Their parents wanted to know why not. Unless everyone duly parroted the party line set down by the book editor, children used to getting high marks became scared and angry.

The school text of *Moby Dick* had been subtly denatured; worse than useless, it was actually dangerous. So I pitched it out and bought a set of undoctored books with my own money. The school edition of *Moby Dick* asked all the right questions, so I had to throw it away. Real books don't do that. Real books demand people actively participate by asking their own questions. Books that show you the best questions to ask aren't just stupid, they hurt the mind under the guise of helping it—exactly the way standardized tests do. Real books, unlike schoolbooks, can't be standardized. They are eccentric; no book fits everyone.

If you think about it, schooled people, like schoolbooks, are much alike. Some folks find that desirable for economic reasons. The discipline organizing our economy and our politics derives from mathematical and

interpretive exercises, the accuracy of which depends upon customers being much alike and very predictable. People who read too many books get quirky. We can't have too much eccentricity or it would bankrupt us. Market research depends on people behaving *as if* they were alike. It doesn't really matter whether they *are* or not.

One way to see the difference between schoolbooks and real books like *Moby Dick* is to examine different procedures which separate librarians, the custodians of real books, from schoolteachers, the custodians of schoolbooks. To begin with, libraries are usually comfortable, clean, and quiet. They are orderly places where you can actually read instead of just pretending to read.

For some reason libraries are never age-segregated, nor do they presume to segregate readers by questionable tests of ability any more than farms or forests or oceans do. The librarian doesn't tell me what to read, doesn't tell me what sequence of reading I have to follow, doesn't grade my reading. The librarian trusts me to have a worthwhile purpose of my own. I appreciate that and trust the library in return.

Some other significant differences between libraries and schools: the librarian lets me ask my own questions and helps me when I want help, not when she decides I need it. If I feel like reading all day long, that's okay with the librarian, who doesn't compel me to stop at intervals by ringing a bell in my ear. The library keeps its nose out of my home. It doesn't send letters to my family, nor does it issue orders on how I should use my reading time at home.

The library doesn't play favorites; it's a democratic place as seems proper in a democracy. If the books I want are available, I get them, even if that decision deprives someone more gifted and talented than I am. The library never humiliates me by posting ranked lists of good readers. It presumes good reading is its own reward and doesn't need to be held up as an object lesson to bad readers. One of the strangest differences between a library and a school is that you almost never see a kid behaving badly in a library.

The library never makes predictions about my future based on my past reading habits. It tolerates eccentric reading because it realizes free men and women are often very eccentric. Finally, the library has real books, not schoolbooks. I know the *Moby Dick* I find in the library won't have questions at the end of the chapter or be scientifically bowdlerized. Library books are not written by collective pens. At least not yet.

Real books conform to the private curriculum of each author, not to the invisible curriculum of a corporate bureaucracy. Real books transport us to an inner realm of solitude and unmonitored mental reflection in a way schoolbooks and computer programs can't. If they were not devoid of such capacity, they would jeopardize school routines devised to control behavior. Real books conform to the private curriculum of particular authors, not to the demands of bureaucracy.

Intellectual Espionage

At the start of WWII millions of men showed up at registration offices to take low-level academic tests before being inducted.¹ The years of maximum mobilization were 1942 to 1944; the fighting force had been mostly schooled in the 1930s, both those inducted and those turned away. Of the 18 million men were tested, 17,280,000 of them were judged to have the minimum competence in reading required to be a soldier, a 96 percent literacy rate. Although this was a 2 percent fall-off from the 98 percent rate among *voluntary* military applicants ten years earlier, the dip was so small it didn't worry anybody.

WWII was over in 1945. Six years later another war began in Korea. Several million men were tested for military service but this time 600,000 were rejected. Literacy in the draft pool had dropped to 81 percent, even though all that was needed to classify a soldier as literate was fourth- grade reading proficiency. In the few short years from the beginning of WWII to Korea, a terrifying problem of adult illiteracy had appeared. The Korean War group

received most of its schooling in the 1940s, and it had more years in school with more professionally trained personnel and more scientifically selected textbooks than the WWII men, yet it could not read, write, count, speak, or think as well as the earlier, less-schooled contingent.

A third American war began in the mid-1960s. By its end in 1973 the number of men found noninductible by reason of inability to read safety instructions, interpret road signs, decipher orders, and so on—in other words, the number found illiterate—had reached 27 percent of the total pool. Vietnam-era young men had been schooled in the 1950s and the 1960s—much better schooled than either of the two earlier groups—but the 4 percent illiteracy of 1941 which had transmuted into the 19 percent illiteracy of 1952 had now had grown into the 27 percent illiteracy of 1970. Not only had the fraction of competent readers dropped to 73 percent but a substantial chunk of even those were only barely adequate; they could not keep abreast of developments by reading a newspaper, they could not read for pleasure, they could not sustain a thought or an argument, they could not write well enough to manage their own affairs without assistance.

Consider how much more compelling this steady progression of intellectual blindness is when we track it through army admissions tests rather than college admissions scores and standardized reading tests, which inflate apparent proficiency by frequently changing the way the tests are scored.

Looking back, abundant data exist from states like Connecticut and Massachusetts to show that by 1840 the incidence of complex literacy in the United States was between 93 and 100 percent wherever such a thing mattered. According to the Connecticut census of 1840, only one citizen out of every 579 was illiterate and you probably don't want to know, not really, what people in those days considered literate; it's too embarrassing. Popular novels of the period give a clue: *Last of the Mohicans*, published in 1826, sold so well that a contemporary equivalent would have to move 10 million copies to match it. If you pick up an uncut version you find yourself in a dense thicket of philosophy, history, culture, manners, politics, geography, analysis of human motives and actions, all conveyed in data-rich periodic sentences so formidable only a determined and well-educated reader can handle it nowadays. Yet in 1818 we were a small-farm nation without colleges or universities to speak of. Could those simple folk have had more complex minds than our own?

By 1940, the literacy figure for all states stood at 96 percent for whites, 80 percent for blacks. Notice that for all the disadvantages blacks labored under, four of five were nevertheless literate. Six decades later, at the end of the twentieth century, the National Adult Literacy Survey and the National Assessment of Educational Progress say 40 percent of blacks and 17 percent of whites can't read at all. Put another way, black illiteracy doubled, white illiteracy quadrupled. Before you think of anything else in regard to these numbers, think of this: we spend three to four times as much real money on schooling as we did sixty years ago, but sixty years ago virtually everyone, black or white, could read.

In their famous bestseller, *The Bell Curve*, prominent social analysts Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein say that what we're seeing are the results of selective breeding in society. Smart people naturally get together with smart people, dumb people with dumb people. As they have children generation after generation, the differences between the groups gets larger and larger. That sounds plausible and the authors produce impressive mathematics to prove their case, but their documentation shows they are entirely ignorant of the military data available to challenge their contention. The terrifying drop in literacy between World War II and Korea happened in a decade, and even the brashiest survival-of-the-fittest theorist wouldn't argue evolution unfolds that way. *The Bell Curve* writers say black illiteracy (and violence) is genetically programmed, but like many academics they ignore contradictory evidence.

For example, on the matter of violence inscribed in black genes, the inconvenient parallel is to South Africa where 31 million blacks live, the same count living in the United States. Compare numbers of blacks who died by violence in South Africa in civil war conditions during 1989, 1990, and 1991 with our own peacetime mortality statistics and you find that far from exceeding the violent death toll in the United States or even matching it, South Africa had proportionately less than one-quarter the violent death rate of American blacks. If more contemporary comparisons are sought, we need only compare the current black literacy rate in the United States (56 percent)

with the rate in Jamaica (98.5 percent)—a figure considerably higher than the American white literacy rate (83 percent).

If not heredity, what then? Well, one change is indisputable, well-documented and easy to track. During WWII, American public schools massively converted to non-phonetic ways of teaching reading. On the matter of violence alone this would seem to have impact: according to the Justice Department, 80 percent of the incarcerated *violent* criminal population is illiterate or nearly so (and 67 percent of all criminals locked up). There seems to be a direct connection between the humiliation poor readers experience and the life of angry criminals.²

As reading ability plummeted in America after WWII, crime soared, so did out-of-wedlock births, which doubled in the 1950s and doubled again in the '60s, when bizarre violence for the first time became commonplace in daily life.

When literacy was first abandoned as a primary goal by schools, white people were in a better position than black people because they inherited a three-hundred-year-old American tradition of learning to read at home by matching spoken sound with letters, thus home assistance was able to correct the deficiencies of dumbed-down schools for whites. But black people had been forbidden to learn to read under slavery, and as late as 1930 only averaged three to four years of schooling, so they were helpless when teachers suddenly stopped teaching children to read, since they had no fall-back position. Not helpless because of genetic inferiority but because they had to trust school authorities to a much greater extent than white people.

Back in 1952 the Army quietly began hiring hundreds of psychologists to find out how 600,000 high school graduates had successfully faked illiteracy. Regna Wood sums up the episode this way:

After the psychologists told the officers that the graduates weren't faking, Defense Department administrators knew that something terrible had happened in grade school reading instruction. And they knew it had started in the thirties. Why they remained silent, no one knows. The switch back to reading instruction that worked for everyone should have been made then. But it wasn't.

In 1882, fifth graders read these authors in their *Appleton School Reader*: William Shakespeare, Henry Thoreau, George Washington, Sir Walter Scott, Mark Twain, Benjamin Franklin, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Bunyan, Daniel Webster, Samuel Johnson, Lewis Carroll, Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and others like them. In 1995, a student teacher of fifth graders in Minneapolis wrote to the local newspaper, "I was told children are not to be expected to spell the following words correctly: back, big, call, came, can, day, did, dog, down, get, good, have, he, home, if, in, is, it, like, little, man, morning, mother, my, night, off, out, over, people, play, ran, said, saw, she, some, soon, their, them, there, time, two, too, up, us, very, water, we, went, where, when, will, would, etc. Is this nuts?"

¹The discussion here is based on Regna Lee Wood's work as printed in Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch's *Network News and Views* (and reprinted many other places). Together with other statistical indictments, from the National Adult Literacy Survey, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and a host of other credible sources, it provides chilling evidence of the disastrous turn in reading methodology. But in a larger sense the author urges every reader to trust personal judgment over "numerical" evidence, whatever the source. During the writer's 30-year classroom experience, the decline in student ability to comprehend difficult text was marked, while the ability to extract and parrot "information" in the form of "facts" was much less affected. This is a product of deliberate pedagogy, to what end is the burden of my essay.

²A particularly clear example of the dynamics hypothesized to cause the correlation can be found in Michael S. Brunner's monograph, "Reduced Recidivism and Increased Employment Opportunity Through Research-Based Reading Instruction," United States Department of Justice (June 1992). Brunner's recent book *Retarding America*, written as a Visiting Fellow for the U.S. Department of Justice, is recommended. A growing body of documentation ties illiteracy causally to violent crime. A study by Dennis Hogenson titled "Reading Failure and Juvenile Delinquency" (Reading Reform Foundation) attempted to correlate teenage aggression with age, family size, number of parents present in home, rural versus urban environment, socio-economic status, minority group membership, and religious preference. None of these factors produced a significant correlation. But one did. As the author reports, "Only reading failure was found to correlate with aggression in both populations of delinquent boys." An organization of ex-prisoners testified before the Sub-Committee on Education of the U.S. Congress that in its opinion illiteracy was an important causative factor in crime "for the illiterate have very few honest ways to make a living." In 1994 the U.S.

Department of Education acknowledged that two-thirds of all incarcerated criminals have poor literacy.

Looking Behind Appearances

Do you think class size, teacher compensation, and school revenue have much to do with education quality? If so, the conclusion is inescapable that we are living in a golden age. From 1955 to 1991 the U.S. pupil/teacher ratio dropped 40 percent, the average salary of teachers rose 50 percent (in real terms) and the annual expense per pupil, inflation adjusted, soared 350 percent. What other hypothesis, then, might fit the strange data I'm about to present?

Forget the 10 percent drop in SAT and Achievement Test scores the press beats to death with regularity; how do you explain the 37 percent decline since 1972 in students who score above 600 on the SAT? *This is an absolute decline, not a relative one.* It is not affected by an increase in unsuitable minds taking the test or by an increase in the numbers. The absolute body count of smart students is down drastically with a test not more difficult than yesterday's but considerably less so.

What should be made of a 50 percent decline among the most rarefied group of test-takers, those who score above 750? In 1972, there were 2,817 American students who reached this pinnacle; only 1,438 did in 1994—*when kids took a much easier test.* Can a 50 percent decline occur in twenty-two years without signaling that some massive leveling in the public school mind is underway?¹

In a real sense where your own child is concerned you might best forget scores on these tests entirely as a reliable measure of what they purport to assess. I wouldn't deny that *mass* movements in these scores in one direction or another indicate *something* is going on, and since the correlation between success in *schooling* and success on these tests is close, then significant score shifts are certainly measuring changes in understanding. This is a difficult matter for anyone to sort out, since many desirable occupational categories (and desirable university seats even before that) are reserved for those who score well. The resultant linkage of adult income with test scores then creates the illusion these tests are separating cream from milk, but the results are rigged in advance by foreclosing opportunity to those screened out by the test! In a humble illustration, if you only let students with high scores on the language component of the SATs cut hair, eventually it would appear that verbal facility and grooming of tresses had some vital link with each other. Between 1960 and 1998 the nonteaching bureaucracy of public schools grew 500 percent, but oversight was concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. The 40,520 school districts with elected boards this nation had in 1960 shriveled to 15,000 by 1998.

On the college rung of the school ladder something queer was occurring, too. Between 1960 and 1984 the quality of undergraduate education at America's fifty best-known colleges and universities altered substantially. According to a 1996 report by the National Association of Scholars, these schools stopped providing "broad and rigorous exposure to major areas of knowledge" for the average student, even at decidedly un-average universities like Yale and Stanford.

In 1964, more than half of these institutions required a thesis or comprehensive for the bachelor's degree; by 1993, 12 percent did; over the same period, the average number of classroom days fell 16 percent, and requirements in math, natural science, philosophy, literature, composition, and history almost vanished. Rhetoric, most potent of the active literacies, *completely* vanished, and a foreign language, once required at 96 percent of the great colleges, fell to 64 percent.

According to *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (December 1995), 33 percent of all patients cannot read and understand instructions on how often to take medication, notices about doctor's appointments, consent forms, labels on prescription bottles, insurance forms, and other simple parts of self-care. They are rendered helpless by inability to read. Concerning those behind the nation's prison walls (a population that has tripled since 1980), the National Center for Education Statistics stated in a 1996 report that 80 percent of all prisoners could not interpret a bus schedule, understand a news article or warranty instructions, or read maps,

schedules, or payroll forms. Nor could they balance a checkbook. Forty percent could not calculate the cost of a purchase.

Once upon a time we were a new nation that allowed ordinary citizens to learn how to read well and encouraged them to read anything they thought would be useful. Close reading of tough-minded writing is still the best, cheapest, and quickest method known for learning to think for yourself. This invitation to commoners extended by America was the most revolutionary pedagogy of all.

Reading, and rigorous discussion of that reading in a way that obliges you to formulate a position and support it against objections, is an operational definition of education in its most fundamental civilized sense. No one can do this very well without learning ways of paying attention: from a knowledge of diction and syntax, figures of speech, etymology, and so on, to a sharp ability to separate the primary from the subordinate, understand allusion, master a range of modes of presentation, test truth, and penetrate beyond the obvious to the profound messages of text. Reading, analysis, and discussion are the way we develop reliable judgment, the principal way we come to penetrate covert movements behind the facade of public appearances. Without the ability to read and argue we're just geese to be plucked.

Just as experience is necessary to understand abstraction, so the reverse is true. Experience can only be mastered by extracting general principles out of the mass of details. In the absence of a perfect universal mentor, books and other texts are the best and cheapest stand-ins, always available to those who know where to look. Watching details of an assembly line or a local election unfold isn't very educational unless you have been led in careful ways to analyze the experience. Reading is the skeleton key for all who lack a personal tutor of quality.²

Reading teaches nothing more important than the state of mind in which you find yourself *absolutely alone* with the thoughts of another mind, a matchless form of intimate rapport available only to those with the ability to block out distraction and concentrate. Hence the urgency of reading *well* if you read for power.

Once you trust yourself to go mind-to-mind with great intellects, artists, scientists, warriors, and philosophers, you are finally free. In America, before we had forced schooling, an astonishing range of unlikely people knew reading was like Samson's locks—something that could help make them formidable, that could teach them their rights and how to defend those rights, could lead them toward self-determination, free from intimidation by experts. These same unlikely people knew that the power bestowed through reading could give them insight into the ways of the human heart, so they would not be cheated or fooled so easily, and that it could provide an inexhaustible store of useful knowledge—advice on how to do just about anything.

By 1812, Pierre DuPont was claiming that barely four in a thousand Americans were unable to read well and that the young had skill in argumentation thanks to daily debates at the common breakfast table. By 1820, there was even more evidence of Americans' avid reading habits, when 5 million copies of James Fenimore Cooper's complex and allusive novels were sold, along with an equal number of Noah Webster's didactic *Speller*—to a population of dirt farmers under 20 million in size.

In 1835, Richard Cobden announced there was six times as much newspaper reading in the United States as in England, and the census figures of 1840 gave fairly exact evidence that a sensational reading revolution had taken place without any exhortation on the part of public moralists and social workers, but because common people had the initiative and freedom to learn. In North Carolina, the worst situation of any state surveyed, eight out of nine could still read and write.

In 1853, Per Siljestromm, a Swedish visitor, wrote, "In no country in the world is the taste for reading so diffuse as among the common people in America." The *American Almanac* observed grandly, "Periodical publications, especially newspapers, disseminate knowledge throughout all classes of society and exert an amazing influence in forming and giving effect to public opinion." It noted the existence of over a thousand newspapers. In this nation of common readers, the spiritual longings of ordinary people shaped the public discourse. Ordinary people who could read, though not privileged by wealth, power, or position, could see through the fraud of social class or the even

grander fraud of official expertise. That was the trouble.

In his book *The New Illiterates*, author Sam Blumenfeld gives us the best introduction to what went wrong with reading in the United States. He also gives us insight into why learning to read needn't be frustrating or futile. A typical letter from one of his readers boasts of her success in imparting the alphabet code to four children under the age of five by the simple method of practice with letter sounds. One day she found her three-year-old working his way through a lesson alone at the kitchen table, reading S-am, Sam, m-an, man, and so on. Her verdict on the process: "I had just taught him his letter sounds. He picked [the rest] up and did it himself. That's how simple it is."

1The critics of schooling who concentrate on fluctuations in standardized test scores to ground their case against the institution are committing a gross strategic mistake for several reasons, the most obvious of which is that in doing so they must first implicitly acknowledge the accuracy of such instruments in ranking every member of the youth population against every other member, hence the justice of using such measures to allocate privileges and rewards. An even larger folly occurs because the implicit validation of these tests by the attention of school critics cedes the entire terrain of scientific pedagogy, armoring it against strong counter-measures by recruiting the opposition, in effect, to support teaching to the test. The final folly lies in the ease with which these measures can be rigged to produce whatever public effects are wanted.

2In a fascinating current illustration of the power of books, black female tennis star Venus Williams' father acknowledged in a press interview for the *Toronto Globe* that he had, indeed, set out to create a tennis millionaire from his infant daughter even before her birth. Mr. Williams, who had no knowledge whatsoever of the game of tennis, and who was reared in a poor home in the South by his single mother, had his ambition piqued by witnessing a young woman on television receiving a \$48,000 check for playing tennis successfully. At that moment he proposed to his wife that they set out to make their unborn children tennis millionaires. How did he learn the game? By reading books, he says, and renting videos. That, and common sense discipline, was all that Venus and sister Serena needed to become millionaire teenagers.

The Sudbury Valley School

I know a school for kids ages three to eighteen that doesn't teach anybody to read, yet everyone who goes there learns to do it, most very well. It's the beautiful Sudbury Valley School, twenty miles west of Boston in the old Nathaniel Bowditch "cottage" (which looks suspiciously like a mansion), a place ringed by handsome outbuildings, a private lake, woods, and acres of magnificent grounds. Sudbury is a private school, but with a tuition under \$4,000 a year it's considerably cheaper than a seat in a New York City public school. At Sudbury kids teach themselves to read; they learn at many different ages, even into the teen years (though that's rare). When each kid is ready he or she self-instructs, if such a formal label isn't inappropriate for such a natural undertaking. During this time they are free to request as much adult assistance as needed. That usually isn't much.

In thirty years of operation, Sudbury has never had a single kid who didn't learn to read. All this is aided by a magnificent school library on open shelves where books are borrowed and returned on the honor system. About 65 percent of Sudbury kids go on to good colleges. The place has never seen a case of dyslexia. (That's not to say some kids don't reverse letters and such from time to time, but such conditions are temporary and self-correcting unless institutionalized into a disease.) So Sudbury doesn't even teach reading yet all its kids learn to read and even like reading. What could be going on there that we don't understand?

Bootie Zimmer

The miracle woman who taught me to read was my mother, Bootie. Bootie never got a college degree, but nobody despaired about that because daily life went right along then without too many college graduates. Here was Bootie's scientific method: she would hold me on her lap and read to me while she ran her finger under the words. That was it, except to read always with a lively expression in her voice and eyes, to answer my questions, and from time to time to give me some practice with different letter sounds. One thing more is important. For a long time we would *sing*, "A, B, C, D, E, F, G,.....H, I, J, K, LMNOP..." and so on, every single day. We learned to love

each letter. She would read tough stories as well as easy ones. Truth is, I don't think she could readily tell the difference any more than I could. The books had some pictures but only a few; words made up the center of attention. Pictures have nothing at all to do with learning to love reading, except too many of them will pretty much guarantee that it never happens.

Over fifty years ago my mother Bootie Zimmer chose to teach me to read well. She had no degrees, no government salary, no outside encouragement, yet her private choice to make me a reader was my passport to a good and adventurous life. Bootie, the daughter of a Bavarian printer, said "Nuts!" to the Prussian system. She voted for her own right to decide, and for that I will always be in her debt. She gave me a love of language and it didn't cost much. Anybody could have the same, if schooling hadn't abandoned its duty so flagrantly.

False Premises

The religious purpose of modern schooling was announced clearly by the legendary University of Wisconsin sociologist Edward A. Ross in 1901 in his famous book, *Social Control*. Your librarian should be able to locate a copy for you without much trouble. In it Ed Ross wrote these words for his prominent following: "Plans are underway to replace community, family, and church with propaganda, education, and mass media....the State shakes loose from Church, reaches out to School.... People are only little plastic lumps of human dough." *Social Control* revolutionized the discipline of sociology and had powerful effects on the other human sciences: in social science it guided the direction of political science, economics, and psychology; in biology it influenced genetics, eugenics, and psychobiology. It played a critical role in the conception and design of molecular biology.

There you have it in a nutshell. The whole problem with modern schooling. It rests on a nest of false premises. People are not little plastic lumps of dough. They are not blank tablets as John Locke said they were, they are not machines as de La Mettrie hoped, not vegetables as Friedrich Froebel, inventor of kindergartens, hypothesized, not organic mechanisms as Wilhelm Wundt taught every psychology department in America at the turn of the century, nor are they repertoires of behaviors as Watson and Skinner wanted. They are not, as the new crop of systems thinkers would have it, mystically harmonious microsystems interlocking with grand macrosystems in a dance of atomic forces. I don't want to be crazy about this; locked in a lecture hall or a bull session there's probably no more harm in these theories than reading too many Italian sonnets all at one sitting. But when each of these suppositions is sprung free to serve as a foundation for school experiments, it leads to frightfully oppressive practices.

One of the ideas that empty-child thinking led directly to was the notion that human breeding could be enhanced or retarded as plant and animal breeding was—by scientific gardeners and husbandmen. Of course, the time scale over which this was plotted to happen was quite long. Nobody expected it to be like breeding fruit flies, but it was a major academic, governmental, and even military item generously funded until Hitler's proactive program (following America's lead) grew so embarrassing by 1939 that our own projects and plans were made more circumspect.

Back at the beginning of the twentieth century, the monstrously influential Edward Thorndike of Columbia Teachers College said that school would establish conditions for "selective breeding before the masses take things into their own hands." The religious purpose of modern schooling was embarrassingly evident back when Ross and Thorndike were on center stage, but they were surrounded by many like-minded friends. Another major architect of standardized testing, H.H. Goddard, said in his book *Human Efficiency* (1920) that government schooling was about "the perfect organization of the hive." He said standardized testing was a way to make lower classes recognize their own inferiority. Like wearing a dunce cap, it would discourage them from breeding and having ambition. Goddard was head of the Psychology Department at Princeton, so imagine the effect he had on the minds of the doctoral candidates he coached, and there were hundreds. We didn't leave the religious purpose of modern schooling back in the early years of the century. In April of 1996, Al Shanker of the AFT said in his regular *New York Times* split-page advertisement that every teacher was really a priest.

A System Of State Propaganda

Something strange is going on in schools and has been going on for quite some time. Whatever it is does not arise from the main American traditions. As closely as I can track the thing through the attitudes, practices, and stated goals of the shadowy crew who make a good living skulking around educational "laboratories," think tanks, and foundations, we are experiencing an attempt, successful so far, to reimpose the strong-state, strong social class attitudes of England and Germany on the United States—the very attitudes we threw off in the American Revolution. And in this counter-revolution the state churches of England and Germany have been replaced by the secular church of forced government schooling.

Advertising, public relations, and stronger forms of quasi-religious propaganda are so pervasive in our schools, even in "alternative" schools, that independent judgment is suffocated in mass-produced secondary experiences and market-tested initiatives. Lifetime Learning Systems, one of the many new corporations formed to dig gold from our conditions of schooling, announced to its corporate clients, "School is the ideal time to influence attitudes, build long-term loyalties, introduce new products, test-market, promote sampling and trial usage—and above all—to generate immediate sales."

Arnold Toynbee, the establishment's favorite historian in mid-twentieth-century America, said in his monumental *Study of History* that the original promise of universal education had been destroyed as soon as *the school laws were passed*, a destruction caused by "the possibility of turning education to account as a means of amusement for the masses" and a means of "profit for the enterprising persons by whom the amusement is purveyed." This opportunistic conversion quickly followed mass schooling's introduction when fantastic profit potential set powerful forces in motion:

The bread of universal education is no sooner cast upon the water than a shoal of sharks arises from the depths and devours the children's bread under the educator's very eyes.

In Toynbee's analysis "the dates speak for themselves":

The edifice of universal education was, roughly speaking, completed... in 1870; and the Yellow Press was invented twenty years later—as soon, that is, as the first generation of children from the national schools had acquired sufficient purchasing power—by a stroke of irresponsible genius which had divined that the educational labour of love could be made to yield a royal profit.

But vultures attending the inception of forced compulsion schooling attracted more ferocious predators:

[The commercial institutions that set about at once to prey on forced mass schooling] attracted the attention of the rulers of modern...national states. If press lords could make millions by providing idle amusement for the half-educated, serious statesman could draw, not money perhaps, but power from the same source. The modern dictators have deposed the press lords and substituted for crude and debased private entertainment an equally crude and debased system of state propaganda.

The Ideology Of The Text

Looking back on the original period of school formation in her study of American history textbooks, *America Revised*, Frances Fitzgerald remarked on the profound changes that emerged following suggestions issued by sociologists and social thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The original history of our institutions and the documents which protect our unique liberties gradually began to be effaced. Fitzgerald raises the puzzle of textbook alteration:

The ideology that lies behind these texts is rather difficult to define.... it does not fit usual political

patterns....the texts never indicate any line of action....authors avoid what they choose to and some of them avoid main issues....they fail to develop any original ideas....they confuse social sciences with science....clouds of jargon....leave out ideas....historical names are given no character, they are cipher people....*there are no conflicts, only "problems"*. [emphasis added]

Indeed, the texts may be unfathomable, and that may be the editorial intent.

The National Adult Literacy Survey

In 1982, Anthony Oettinger, a member of the private discussion group called the Council on Foreign Relations, asked an audience of communications executives this question: "Do we really have to have everybody literate—writing and reading in the traditional sense—when we have means through our technology to achieve a new flowering of oral communication?" Oettinger suggested "our idea of literacy" is "obsolete." Eighty-three years earlier John Dewey had written in "The Primary Education Fetish" that "the plea for the predominance of learning to read in early school life because of the great importance attaching to literature seems to be a perversion."

For the balance of this discussion I'm going to step into deeper water, first reviewing what reading in a Western alphabet really means and what makes it a reasonably easy skill to transmit or to self-teach, and then tackling what happened to deprive the ordinary person of the ability to manage it very well. I want to first show you *how*, then answer the more speculative question *why*.

The National Adult Literacy Survey represents 190 million U.S. adults over age sixteen with an average school attendance of 12.4 years. The survey is conducted by the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey. It ranks adult Americans into five levels. Here is its 1993 analysis:

Forty-two million Americans over the age of sixteen can't read. Some of this group can write their names on Social Security cards and fill in height, weight, and birth spaces on application forms.

Fifty million can recognize printed words on a fourth- and fifth-grade level. They cannot write simple messages or letters.

Fifty-five to sixty million are limited to sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade reading. A majority of this group could not figure out the price per ounce of peanut butter in a 20-ounce jar costing \$1.99 when told they could round the answer off to a whole number.

Thirty million have ninth- and tenth-grade reading proficiency. This group (and all preceding) cannot understand a simplified written explanation of the procedures used by attorneys and judges in selecting juries.

About 3.5 percent of the 26,000-member sample demonstrated literacy skills adequate to do traditional college study, a level 30 percent of all U.S. high school students reached in 1940, and which 30 percent of secondary students in other developed countries can reach today. This last fact alone should warn you how misleading comparisons drawn from international student competitions really are, since the samples each country sends are small elite ones, unrepresentative of the entire student population. But behind the bogus superiority a real one is concealed.

Ninety-six and a half percent of the American population is mediocre to illiterate where deciphering print is concerned. This is no commentary on their intelligence, but without ability to take in primary information from print and to interpret it they are at the mercy of commentators who tell them what things mean. A

working definition of immaturity might include an excessive need for other people to interpret information for us.

Certainly it's possible to argue that bad readers aren't victims at all but perpetrators, cursed by inferior biology to possess only shadows of intellect. That's what bell-curve theory, evolutionary theory, aristocratic social theory, eugenics theory, strong-state political theory, and some kinds of theology are about. All agree most of us are inferior, if not downright dangerous. The integrity of such theoretical outlooks— at least where reading was concerned—took a stiff shot on the chin from America. Here, democratic practice allowed a revolutionary generation to learn how to read. Those granted the opportunity took advantage of it brilliantly.

Name Sounds, Not Things

So how was the murder of American reading ability pulled off? I'll tell you in a second, but come back first to classical Greece where the stupendous invention of the alphabet by Phoenicians was initially understood. The Phoenicians had an alphabetic language used to keep accounts, but the Greeks were the first to guess correctly that revolutionary power could be unleashed by transcending mere lists, using written language for the permanent storage of analysis, exhortation, visions, and other things. After a period of experiment the Greeks came up with a series of letters to represent sounds of their language. Like the Phoenicians, they recognized the value of naming each letter in a way distinct from its sound value—as every human being has a name distinct from his or her personality, as numbers have names for reference.

Naming sounds *rather than things* was the breakthrough! While the number of things to be pictured is impossibly large, the number of sounds is strictly limited. In English, for example, most people recognize only forty-four.¹

The problem, which American families once largely solved for themselves, is this: in English, a Latin alphabet has been imposed on a Germanic language with multiple non-Germanic borrowings, and it doesn't quite fit. Our 44 sounds are spelled 400+ different ways. That sounds horrible, but in reality in the hands of even a mediocre teacher, it's only annoying; in the hands of a good one, a thrilling challenge. Actually, 85 percent of the vast word stock of English can be read with knowledge of only 70 of the phonograms. A large number of the remaining irregularities seldom occur and can be remastered on an as-needed basis. Meanwhile a whole armory of mnemonic tricks like "If a 'c' I chance to spy, place the 'e' before the 'i'" exists to get new readers over the common humps. Inexpensive dictionaries, spell-check typewriters, computers, and other technology are readily available these days to silently coach the fearful, but in my experience, that "fear" is neither warranted nor natural. Instead, it is engendered. Call it good business practice.

Also, communicating abstractions in picture language is a subtlety requiring more time and training to master than is available for most of us. Greeks now could organize ambitious concepts abstractly in written language, communicating accurately with each other over space and time much more readily than their competitors.

According to Mitford Mathews:²

The secret of their phenomenal advance was in their conception of the nature of a word. They reasoned that words were sounds or combinations of ascertainable sounds, and they held inexorably to the basic proposition that writing, properly executed, was a guide to sound. reading. A number of other good treatments are available for the newcomer.

Learning sound-sight correspondences comes first in an alphabetic language. Competence with the entire package of sounds corresponding to alphabet symbols comes quickly. After that anything can be read and its meaning inquired after. The substantial speaking vocabulary kids bring to school (6,000–10,000 words) can now be read at once, and understood.

When the Romans got the alphabet through the Etruscans they lost the old letter names so they invented new ones

making them closer to the letter sounds. That was a significant mistake which causes confusion in novice readers even today. Through conquest the Latin alphabet spread to the languages of Europe; Rome's later mutation into the Universal Christian Church caused Latin, the language of church liturgy, to flow into every nook and cranny of the former empire.

The Latin alphabet was applied to the English language by Christian missionaries in the seventh century. While it fused with spoken English this was far from a perfect fit. There were no single letters to stand for certain sounds. Scribes had to scramble to combine letters to approximate sounds that had no companion letter. This matching process was complicated over centuries by repeated borrowings from other languages and by certain massive sound shifts which still occupy scholars in trying to explain.

Before the spread of printing in the sixteenth century, not being able to read wasn't much of a big deal. There wasn't much to read. The principal volume available was the Bible, from which appropriate bits were read aloud by religious authorities during worship and on ceremonial occasions. Available texts were in Latin or Greek, but persistent attempts to provide translations was a practice thought to contain much potential for schism. An official English Bible, the Authorized King James Version, appeared in 1611, preempting all competitors in a bold stroke which changed popular destiny.

Instantly, the Bible became a universal textbook, offering insights both delicate and powerful, a vibrant cast of characters, brilliant verbal pyrotechnics and more to the humblest rascal who could read. Talk about a revolutionary awakening for ordinary people! The Bible was it, thanks to the dazzling range of models it provided in the areas of exegesis, drama, politics, psychology, characterization, plus the formidable reading skills it took to grapple with the Bible. A little more than three decades after this translation, the English king was deposed and beheaded. The connection was direct. Nothing would ever be the same again because too many good readers had acquired the proclivity of thinking for themselves.

The magnificent enlargement of imagination and voice that the Bible's exceptional catalogue of language and ideas made available awakened in ordinary people a powerful desire *to read* in order to read the Holy Book without a priest's mediation. Strenuous efforts were made to discourage this, but the Puritan Revolution and Cromwell's interregnum sent literacy surging. Nowhere was it so accelerated as in the British colonies in North America, a place already far removed from the royal voice.

Printing technology emerged. Like the computer in our own day, it was quickly incorporated into every corner of daily life. But there were still frequent jailings, whippings, and confiscations for seditious reading as people of substance came to realize how dangerous literacy could be.

Reading offered many delights. Cravings to satisfy curiosity about this Shakespeare fellow or to dabble in the musings of Lord Bacon or John Locke were now not difficult to satisfy. Spelling and layout were made consistent. Before long, prices of books dropped. All this activity intensified pressure on illiterate individuals to become literate. The net result of printing (and Protestantism, which urged communicants to go directly to the Word, eliminating the priestly middleman), stimulated the spread of roving teachers and small proprietary and church schools. A profession arose to satisfy demand for a popular way to understand what uses to make of books, and from this a demand to understand many things.

The "problem" with English phonics has been wildly exaggerated, sometimes by sincere people but most often by those who make a living as guides through the supposed perils of learning to read. These latter constitute a vast commercial empire with linkages among state education departments, foundations, publishers, authors of school readers, press, magazines, education journals, university departments of education, professional organizations, teachers, reading specialists, local administrators, local school boards, various politicians who facilitate the process and the U.S. offices of education, defense and labor.

2Mitford Mathews, *Teaching to Read Historically Considered* (1966). A brief, intelligent history of reading. A number of other good treatments are available for the newcomer.

The Meatgrinder Classroom

The first schoolman to seriously challenge what is known today as phonics was Friedrich Gedike, a disciple of Rousseau, director of a well-known gymnasium in Prussia. In 1791 he published the world's first look/say primer, *A Children's Reader Without the ABC's and Spelling*. The idea was to eliminate drill. Kids would learn through pictures following suggestions the legendary mystic and scholar Comenius set down in his famous *Orbis Pictus* of 1657.

After a brief splash and three editions, the fashion vanished for an excellent reason: As good as it sounds in theory, it doesn't work well at all in practice (although here and there exceptions are encountered and infuriatingly enough it can *seem* to work in the early years of first and second grade). Soon after that the rapidly developing reading power in phonetically trained children makes them capable of recognizing in print their entire speaking and listening vocabulary, while look/say trained readers can read without error only the words they have memorized as whole shapes, a relative handful.

This is devilishly complex terrain. Gedike's theory held that when enough words are ingested and recognized, the student *can figure out for himself* the seventy key phonograms of the English language. Indeed this is the only credible explanation which *could* account for the well-known phenomenon of children who teach themselves to read handily without the use of any system at all. I have no doubt children occasionally learn to read this way. Yet if true, how do we account for the grotesque record of whole-word instruction for over a century and a half in every conceivable school setting?

Money, time, attention, and caring adults in profusion, all have been available to make this alternative method work to teach reading proficiency, yet its record in competition with the old-fashioned alphabet system is horrifying. What might account for this?

I have a hunch based on a decade of ruminating. Since no one has yet bothered to assemble a large group of self-taught good readers to ask them how it happened, let my hunch serve as a working hypothesis for you to chew upon at your leisure. Consider first the matter of *time*. The average five-year-old can master all of the seventy phonograms in six weeks. At that point he can read just about anything fluently. Can he *understand* everything? No, of course not. But also, no synthetic barrier to understanding is being interposed by weird-looking words to be memorized whole, either. Paulo Freire taught ignorant *campesinos* with no tradition of literacy at all to read in thirty hours. They were adults, with different motivations than children, but when he showed them a sentence and they realized it said "The land belongs to the tiller," they were hooked. That's Jesuit savvy for you.

Back to this matter of time. By the end of the fourth grade, phonics-trained students are at ease with an estimated 24,000 words. Whole-word trained students have memorized about 1,600 words and can successfully guess at some thousands more, but also *unsuccessfully* guess at thousands, too. One reigning whole-word expert has called reading "a psycholinguistic guessing game" in which the reader is not extracting the writer's meaning but constructing a meaning of his own.

While there is an attractive side to this that is ignored by critics of whole language (and I number myself among these), the value doesn't begin to atone for the theft of priceless reading time and guided practice. As long as whole-language kids are retained in a hothouse environment, shielded from linguistic competition, things seem idyllic, but once mixed together with phonetically trained kids of similar age and asked to avail themselves of the intellectual treasure locked up in words, the result is not so pretty. Either the deficient kid must retreat from the field with a whopping sense of inferiority, or, worse, he must advance aggressively into the fray, claiming books are overrated, that thinking and judgment are merely matters of opinion. The awful truth is that circumstances hardly give us the luxury of testing Gedike's hypothesis about kids being able to deduce the rules of language from a handful of words. Humiliation makes mincemeat of most of them long before the trial is fairly joined.

So, the second hunch I have is that where whole-word might work when it works at all is in a comfortable, protected environment without people around to laugh derisively at the many wretched mistakes you must make on

the way to becoming a Columbus of language. But in case you hadn't noticed, schools *aren't* safe places for the young to guess at the meanings of things. Only an imbecile would pretend that school isn't a pressure-cooker of psychodrama. Wherever children are gathered into groups by compulsion, a pecking order soon emerges in which malice, mockery, intimidation of the weak, envy, and a whole range of other nasty characteristics hold sway, like that famous millpond of Huxley's, whose quiet surface mirroring fall foliage conceals a murderous subterranean world whose law is eat or be eaten.

That's melodramatic, I suppose, yet thirty classroom years and a decade more as a visitor in hundreds of other schools have shown me what a meatgrinder the peaceful classroom really is. Bill is wondering whether he will be beaten again on the way to the lunchroom; Molly is paralyzed with fear that the popular Jean will make loud fun of her prominent teeth; Ronald is digging the point of a sharpened pencil into the neck of Herbert who sits in front of him, all the while whispering he will get Herb good if he gets Ron in trouble with the teacher; Alan is snapping a rubber band at Flo; Ralph is about to call Leonard "trailer park trash" for the three-hundredth time that day, not completely clear he knows what it means, yet enjoying the anguish it brings to Leonard's face; Greta, the most beautiful girl in the room, is practicing ogling shyer boys, then cutting them dead when she evokes any hopeful smiles in response; Willie is slowly shaken down for a dollar by Phil; and Mary's single mom has just received an eviction notice.

Welcome to another day in an orderly, scientific classroom. Teacher may have a permanent simper pasted on her face, but it's deadly serious, the world she presides over, a bad place to play psycholinguistic guessing games which involve sticking one's neck out in front of classmates as the rules of language are empirically derived. A method that finds mistakes to be "charming stabs in the right direction" may be onto something person-to-person or in the environment of a loving home, but it's dynamically unsuited to the forge of forced schooling.

The Ignorant Schoolmaster

After Gedike, the next innovator to hit on a reading scheme was Jean Joseph Jacotot, a grand genius, much misunderstood. A professor of literature at nineteen, Jacotot discovered a method of teaching nonspeakers of French the French language beginning not with primers but with Fenelon's *Telemachus*. Jacotot read aloud slowly while students followed his reading in a dual translation—to their own familiar language and to Fenelon's spoken French. Then the process was repeated. After the group reading, each student individually dismantled the entire book into parts, into smaller parts, into paragraphs, into sentences, into words, and finally into letters and sounds. This followed the "natural" pattern of scientists it was thought, beginning with wholes, and reducing them to smaller and smaller elements.

Jacotot has a reputation as a whole-word guru, but any resemblance to contemporary whole-word reading in Jacotot is illusion. His method shifts the burden for analysis largely from the shoulders of the teacher to the student. The trappings of holistic noncompetitiveness are noticeably absent. Penalty for failure in his class was denial of advancement. Everyone succeeded in Jacotot's system, but then, his students were highly motivated, self-selected volunteers, all of college age.

From Jacotot we got the idea anybody can teach anything. His was the concept of the ignorant schoolmaster. It should surprise no one that the ideas of Jacotot interested Prussians who brought his system back to Germany and modified it for younger children. For them, however, a *book* seemed too impractical a starting point, perhaps a *sentence* would be better or a *single* word. Eventually it was the latter settled upon. Was this the genesis of whole-word teaching which eventually dealt American reading ability a body blow?

The answer is a qualified No. In the German "normal word" method the whole-word was not something to be memorized but a specimen of language to be analyzed into syllables. The single word was made a self-conscious vehicle for learning letters. Once letter sounds were known, reading instruction proceeded traditionally. To a great extent, this is the method my German mother used with my sister and me to teach us to read fluently before we

ever saw first grade.

Frank Had A Dog; His Name Was Spot

Two flies now enter the reading ointment in the persons of Horace Mann and his second wife, Mary Peabody. There is raw material here for a great intrigue novel: in the early 1830s, a minister in Hartford, Thomas Gallaudet, invented a sight-reading, look-say method to use with the deaf. Like Jacotot, Gallaudet was a man of unusual personal force and originality. He served as director at the asylum for the education of the deaf and dumb in Hartford. Deaf mutes couldn't learn a sound-symbol system, it was thought, so Gallaudet devised a sight-reading vocabulary of fifty whole-words which he taught through pictures. Then his deaf students learned a manual alphabet which permitted them to indicate letters with their fingers and communicate with others.

Even in light of the harm he inadvertently caused, it's hard not to be impressed by Gallaudet. In Gallaudet's system, writing transmuted from a symbolic record of *sounds* to a symbolic record of *pictures*. Gallaudet had reinvented English as ancient Babylonian! One of his former teachers, William Woodbridge, then editor of the *American Annals of Education*, received a long, detailed letter in which Gallaudet described his flash-card method and demanded that education be regarded as a science like chemistry: "Mind, like matter, can be made subject to experiment." Fifty words could be learned by memory *before* introducing the alphabet. By removing the "dull and tedious" normal method, great interest "has [been] excited in the mind of the little learner."

Historically, three important threads run together here: 1) that learning should be scientific, and learning places a laboratory; 2) that words be learned ideographically; 3) that relieving boredom and tedium should be an important goal of pedagogy. Each premise was soon pushed to extremes. These themes institutionalized would ultimately require a vast bureaucracy to enforce. But all this lay in the future.

Gallaudet had adopted the point of view of a deaf-mute who had to make his way without assistance from sound to spoken language. Samuel Blumenfeld's analysis of what was wrong in this is instructive:

It led to serious confusions in Gallaudet's thinking concerning two very different processes; that of learning to speak one's native language and that of learning to read it. In teaching the deaf to read by sight he was also teaching them language by sight for the first time. They underwent two learning processes, not one. But a normal child came to school already with the knowledge of several thousand words in his speaking vocabulary, with a much greater intellectual development which the sense of sound afforded him. In learning to read it was not necessary to teach him what he already knew, to repeat the process of learning to speak. The normal child did not learn his language by learning to read. He learned to read in order to help him expand his use of the language.

In 1830, Gallaudet published *The Child's Picture Defining and Reading Book*, a book for children with normal hearing, seeking to generalize his method to all. In its preface, the book sets down for the first time basic whole-word protocols. Words will be taught as representing objects and ideas, not as sounds represented by letters.

He who controls language controls the public mind, a concept well understood by Plato. Indeed, the manipulation of language was at the center of curriculum at the Collegia of Rome, in the Jesuit academies, and the private schools maintained for children of the influential classes; it made up an important part of the text of Machiavelli; it gave rise to the modern arts and sciences of advertising and public relations. The whole-word method, honorably derived and employed by men like Gallaudet, was at the same time a tool to be used by any regime or interest with a stake in *limiting* the growth of intellect.

Gallaudet's primer, lost to history, was published in 1836. One year later, the Boston School Committee was inaugurated under the direction of Horace Mann. Although no copies of the primer have survived, Blumenfeld tells us, "From another source we know that its first line was, *Frank had a dog; his name was Spot.*" On August 2,

1836, Gallaudet's primer was adopted by the Boston Primary School Committee on an experimental basis. A year later a report was issued pronouncing the method a success on the basis of *speed in learning* when compared to the alphabet system, and of bringing a "pleasant tone" to the classroom by removing "the old unintelligible, and irksome mode of teaching certain arbitrary marks, or letters, by certain arbitrary sounds."

A sight vocabulary is faster to learn than letters and phonograms, but the gain is a Trojan horse; only after several years have passed does the sight reader's difficulty learning words from outside sources begin to become apparent. By that time conditions made pressing by the social situation of the classroom and demands from the world at large combine to make it hard to retrace the ground lost.

Mann endorsed Gallaudet's primer in his *Second Annual Report* (1838). His endorsement, Gallaudet's general fame and public adulation, erroneous reports circulating at the time that mighty Prussia was using a whole-word system, and possibly the prospect of fame and a little profit, caused Mann's own wife, Mary Tyler Peabody—whose family names were linked to a network of powerful families up and down the Eastern seaboard—to write a whole-word primer. The Mann family was only one of a host of influential voices being raised against the traditional reading instructions in the most literate nation on earth. In Woodbridge's *Annals of Education*, a steady tattoo was directed against spelling and the alphabet method.

By the time of the Gallaudet affair, both Manns were under the spell of phrenology, a now submerged school of psychology and the brainchild of a German physician. Francois Joseph Gall, in working with the insane, had become convinced he had located the physical site of personality traits like love, benevolence, acquisitiveness, and many more. He could provide a map of their positions inside the skull! These faculties signaled their presence, said Gall, by making bumps on the visible exterior of the cranium. The significance of this to the future of reading is that among Gall's claims was: too much reading causes insanity. The Manns agreed.

One of Gall's converts was a Scottish lawyer named George Combe. On October 8, 1838, Mann wrote in his diary that he had met "the author of that extraordinary book, *The Constitution of Man*, the doctrines of which will work the same change in metaphysical science that Lord Bacon wrought in natural." The book was Combe's. Suddenly the Mann project to downgrade reading acquired a psychological leg to accompany the political, social, economic, and religious legs it already possessed. Unlike other arguments against enlightenment of ordinary people—all of which invoked one or another form of class interest—what psychological phrenology offered was a scientific argument based on the supposed best interests of the child. Thus a potent weapon fell into pedagogy's hands which would not be surrendered after phrenology was discredited. If one psychology could not convince, another might. By appearing to avoid any argument from special interest, the scientific case took the matter of who should learn what out of the sphere of partisan politics into a loftier realm of altruism.

Meanwhile Combe helped Mann line up his great European tour of 1843, which was to result in the shattering *Seventh Report* to the Boston School Committee of 1844. (The *Sixth* had been a plea to phrenologize classrooms!) This new report said: "I am satisfied our greatest error in teaching children to read lies in beginning with the alphabet." Mann was attempting to commit Massachusetts children to the hieroglyphic system of Gallaudet. The result was an outcry from Boston's schoolmasters, a battle that went on in the public press for many months culminating (on the schoolmaster's side) in this familiar lament:

Education is a great concern; it has often been tampered with by vain theorists; it has suffered from the stupid folly and the delusive wisdom of its treacherous friends; and we hardly know which have injured it most. Our conviction is that it has much more to hope from the collected wisdom and common prudence of the community than from the suggestions of the individual. Locke injured it by his theories, and so did Rousseau, and so did Milton. All their plans were too splendid to be true. It is to be advanced by conceptions, neither soaring above the clouds, nor groveling on the earth—but by those plain, gradual, productive, common sense improvements, which use may encourage and experience suggest. We are in favor of advancement, provided it be towards usefulness....

We love the secretary but we hate his theories. They stand in the way of substantial education. It is impossible for a

sound mind not to hate them.

The Pedagogy Of Literacy

Between Mann's death and the great waves of Italian immigration after the 1870s, the country seemed content with McGuffey readers, Webster Spelling Books, *Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Bible*, and the familiar alphabet method for breaking the sound code. But beginning about the year 1880 with the publication of Francis W. Parker's *Supplementary Reading for Primary Schools* (and his *Talks on Pedagogics*, 1883), a new attack on reading was mounted.

Parker was a loud, affable, flamboyant teacher with little academic training himself, a man forced to resign as principal of a Chicago teachers college in 1899 for reasons not completely honorable. Shortly thereafter, at the age of sixty-two, he was suddenly selected to head the School of Education at Rockefeller's new University of Chicago,¹ a university patterned after great German research establishments like Heidelberg, Berlin, and Leipzig.

As supervisor of schools in Boston in a former incarnation, Parker had asserted boldly that learning to read was learning a vocabulary which can be instantly recalled as ideas when certain symbolic signposts are encountered. Words are learned, he said, by repeated acts of association of the word with the idea it represents.

Parker originated the famous Quincy Movement, the most recognizable starting point for progressive schooling. Its reputation rested on four ideas: 1) *group activities* in which the individual is submerged for the good of the collective; 2) *emphasis on the miracles of science (as opposed to traditional classical studies of history, philosophy, literature)*; 3) *informal instruction* in which teacher and student dress casually, call each other by first names, treat all priorities as very flexible, etc; 4) *the elimination of harsh discipline* as psychologically damaging to children. Reading was not stressed in Parker schools.

Parker's work and that of other activists antagonistic to reading received a giant forward push in 1885 from one of the growing core of America's new "psychologists" who had studied with Wilhelm Wundt at Leipzig. James McKeen Cattell boldly announced he had proven, using the tachistoscope, *that we read whole words and not letters*. Cattell's lusty ambition resounds in his cry of triumph:

These results are important enough to prove those to be wrong who hold with Kant that psychology can never become an exact science.

Until 1965 no one bothered to check Cattell's famous experiment with the tachistoscope. When they did, it was found Cattell had been dead wrong. People read letters, not words.

It was out of the cauldron of Columbia Teachers College that the most ferocious advocate of whole-word therapy came: Edward Burke Huey was his name, his mentor, G. Stanley Hall. In 1908 they published an influential book, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*, which laid out the revolution in a way that sent a message of bonanzas to come to the new educational book publishing industry. Publishing was a business just beginning to reap fantastic profits from contracts with the new factory schools. Centralized management was proving a pot of gold for lucky book contractors in big cities. The message was this: "Children should be taught to read English as if it were Chinese: ideographically."

Huey was even more explicit: he said *children learned to read too well and too early and that was bad for them*:

He must not, by reading adult grammatical and logical forms, begin exercises in mental habits which will violate his childhood.

As Blumenfeld (to whom I owe much of the research cited here) explains, Huey concocted a novel justification

based on Darwinian evolution for jettisoning the alphabet system:

The history of the language in which picture-writing was long the main means of written communication has here a wealth of suggestions for the framers of the new primary course. It is not from mere perversity that the boy chinks or carves his records on a book and desk.... There is here a correspondence with, if not a direct recapitulation of the life of the race; and we owe it to the child to encourage his living through the best there is in this pictography stage....

!Mrs. Anita McCormick Blaine, daughter of the inventor of the harvesting machine, became his patron, purchasing the College of Education for him with a contribution of \$1million.

Dick And Jane

As many before him, Huey missed entirely the brilliant Greek insight that *reading* and *understanding* are two different things. Good reading is the fluent and effortless cracking of the symbol-sound code which puts understanding within easy reach. Understanding is the translation of that code into meaning.

It is for many people a natural and fairly harmless mistake. Since they read for meaning, the code-cracking step is forgotten. Forgotten, that is, by those who read well. For others, self-disgust and despair engendered by halting progress *in decoding sounds* sets into play a fatal chain of circumstances which endangers the relationship to print for a long time, sometimes wrecking it forever. If decoding is a painful effort, filled with frustrating errors, finally a point is reached when the reader says, in effect, *to the devil with it*.

Another piece of dangerous philosophy is concealed inside whole-word practice—the notion that a piece of writing is only an orange one squeezes in order to extract something called meaning, some bit of data. The sheer luxury of putting your mind in contact with the greatest minds of history across time and space, *feeling* the rhythm of their thought, the sallies and retreats, the marshaling of evidence, the admixture of humor or beauty of observation and many more attributes of the power and value language possesses, has something in common with being coached by Bill Walsh in football or Toscanini in orchestra conducting. *How* these men say what they say is as important as the translating their words into your own. The music of language is what poetry and much rhetoric are about, the literal meaning often secondary. Powerful speech depends on this understanding.

By 1920, the sight-word method was being used in new wave progressive schools. In 1927, another professor at Columbia Teachers College, Arthur Gates, laid the foundation for his own personal fortune by writing a book called *The Improvement of Reading*, which purported to muster thirty-one experimental studies proving that sight reading was superior to phonics. All these studies are either trivial or highly ambiguous at best and at times, in a practice widely encountered throughout higher education research in America, Gates simply draws the conclusions he wants from facts which clearly lead elsewhere.

But his *piece de resistance* is a comparison of first-grade deaf pupils tutored in the whole-word method with Detroit first graders. The scores of the two groups are almost identical, causing Gates to declare this a most convincing demonstration. Yet it had been well known for almost a century that deaf children taught with a method created expressly for deaf children only gain a temporary advantage which disappears quickly. In spite of this cautionary detail Gates called this "conclusive proof" *that normal children taught this way would improve even faster!*

Shortly after the book's publication, Arthur Gates was given the task of authoring Macmillan's basal reader series, a pure leap into whole-word method by the most prestigious education publisher of them all. Macmillan was a corporation with wide-reaching contacts able to enhance an author's career. In 1931, Gates contributed to the growth of a new reading industry by writing an article for *Parents* magazine, "New Ways of Teaching Reading."

Parents were told to abandon any residual loyalty they might have to the barren, formal older method and to embrace the new as true believers. A later article by a Gates associate was expressly tailored for "those parents concerned because children do not know their letters." It explained that "the modern approach to reading" eliminated the boredom of code-cracking.

With its finger in the wind, Scott, Foresman, the large educational publisher, ordered a revision of its Elson Basic Readers drawn on the traditional method, a series which had sold 50 million copies to that date. To head up the mighty project, the publisher brought in William S. Gray, dean of the University of Chicago College of Education, to write its all new whole-word pre-primer and primer books, a series marking the debut of two young Americans who would change millions of minds into mush during their long tenure in school classrooms. Their names were Dick and Jane. After Gates and Gray, most major publishers fell into line with other whole-word series and in the words of Rudolf Flesch, "inherited the kingdom of American education," with its fat royalties. Blumenfeld does the student of American schooling a great service when he compares this original 1930 Dick and Jane with its 1951 successor:

"In 1930, the Dick and Jane *Pre-Primer* taught 68 sign words in 39 pages of story text, with an illustration per page, a total of 565 words—and a Teacher's Guidebook of 87 pages. In 1951, the same book was expanded to 172 pages with 184 illustrations, a total of 2,603 words—and a Guidebook of 182 pages to teach a sight vocabulary of only 58 words!" Without admitting any disorder, the publisher was protecting itself from this system, and the general public, without quite knowing why, was beginning to look at its schools with unease.

By 1951, entire public school systems were bailing out on phonics and jumping on the sight-reading bandwagon. Out of the growing number of reading derelicts poised to begin tearing the schools apart which tormented them, a giant remedial reading industry was spawned, a new industry completely in the hands of the very universities who had with one hand written the new basal readers, and with the other taught a generation of new teachers about the wonders of the whole-word method.

Mute evidence that Scott, Foresman wasn't just laughing all the way to the bank, but was actively trying to protect its nest egg in *Dick and Jane*, was its canny multiplication of words intended to be learned. In 1930, the word *look* was repeated 8 times; in 1951, 110 times; in the earlier version *oh* repeats 12 times, in the later 138 times; in the first, see gets 27 repetitions, and in the second, 176.1

The legendary children's book author, Dr. Seuss, creator of a string of best-sellers using a controlled "scientific" vocabulary supplied by the publisher, demonstrated his own awareness of the mindlessness of all this in an interview he gave in 1981:

I did it for a textbook house and they sent me a word list. That was due to the Dewey revolt in the twenties, in which they threw out phonics reading and went to a word recognition as if you're reading a Chinese pictograph instead of blending sounds or different letters. I think killing phonics was one of the greatest causes of illiteracy in the country.

Anyway they had it all worked out that a healthy child at the age of four can only learn so many words in a week. So there were two hundred and twenty-three words to use in this book. I read the list three times and I almost went out of my head. I said, "I'll read it once more and if I can find two words that rhyme, that'll be the title of my book." I found "cat" and "hat" and said, the title of my book will be *The Cat in the Hat*.

For the forty-one months beginning in January of 1929 and concluding in June of 1932, there were eighty-eight articles written in various pedagogical journals on the subject of reading difficulties and remedial teaching; in the forty-one months beginning in July of 1935 and concluding in December of 1938, the number rose almost 200 percent to 239. The first effects of the total victory of whole-word reading philosophy were being reflected in academic journals as the once mighty reading Samson of America was led eyeless to Gaza with the rest of the slaves.

11955 proved to be a year of great frustration to the reading combine because of the publication of Rudolf Flesch's hostile *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which precisely analyzed the trouble and laid it at the doorstep of the reading establishment. The book was a hot seller for over a year, continuing to reverberate through the reading world for a long time thereafter. In 1956, 56,000 reading professionals formed a look/say defense league called the International Reading Association. It published three journals as bibles of enthusiasm: *The Reading Teacher*, *The Journal of Reading*, *The Reading Research Quarterly*. Between 1961 and 1964, a new generation of academics shape-shifted look/say into psycholinguistics under the leadership of Frank Smith, an excellent writer when not riding his hobby horse, and Kenneth and Yetta Goodman, senior authors at Scott, Foresman who had been widely quoted as calling reading "a psycholinguistic guessing game." From 1911 to 1981, there were 124 legitimate studies attempting to prove Cattell and the other whole-word advocates right. Not a single one confirmed whole-word reading as effective.

- [Wadleigh The Death School](#)
- [Dr. Caleb Gattegno, Expert](#)
- [Intimidation](#)
- [Hector Of The Feeble-Mind](#)
- [Hector Isn't The Problem](#)
- [One Lawyer Equals 3,000 Reams of Paper](#)
- [The Great Transformation](#)
- [Education As A Helix Sport](#)
- [I'm Outta Here!](#)

*The master's face goes white, then red. His mouth tightens and opens
and spit flies everywhere....*

What will I do, boys?

Flog the boy, sir.

Till?

Till the blood spurts, sir.

– Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*.
Writing of Ireland's schools as
they were in the 1940s.

Wadleigh, The Death School

One day after spending nearly my entire life inside a school building as student and teacher, I quit. But not before I saw some things you ought to know. McCourt is right, spit flies everywhere in the classroom and school, children mock us because of it. The smell of saliva. I had forgotten until I returned as a teacher. Put the cosmic aspect aside and come back again into school with me. See it from the inside with grownup eyes.

On my first day back to school I was hired to substitute in a horrible place, Wadleigh Junior High School, nicknamed "the death school" by regulars at the West End Tavern near Columbia. Jean Stapleton (Archie Bunker's wife, Edith) had gone there as a young girl; so had Anais Nin, celebrated diarist and writer of erotica. Some palace revolution long before I got there had altered the nature of this school from an earnest, respectable Victorian lock-up to something indescribable. During my teaching debut at Wadleigh, I was attacked by a student determined to bash my brains out with a chair.

Wadleigh was located three blocks from that notorious 110th Street corner in Harlem made famous by a bestseller

of the day, *New York Confidential*, which called it "the most dangerous intersection in America." I mention danger as the backdrop of my teaching debut because two kinds of peril were in the air that season: one, phony as my teaching license, was the "Cuban Missile Crisis"; the other, only too genuine, was a predicament without any possible solution, a deadly brew compounded from twelve hundred black teenagers penned inside a gloomy brick pile for six hours a day, with a white guard staff misnamed "faculty" manning the light towers and machine-gun posts. This faculty was charged with dribbling out something called "curriculum" to inmates, a gruel so thin Wadleigh might rather have been a home for the feeble-minded than a place of education.

My own motive in being there was a personal quest. I was playing hooky from my real job as a Madison Avenue ad writer flogging cigarettes and shaving cream, a fraternity boy's dream job. Not a single day without Beefeater Martinis, then the preferred ad man's tippie, not a morning without headache, not a single professional achievement worth the bother. I was hardly a moralist in those days, but I wasn't a moron either. Thoughts of a future composed of writing fifty words or so a week, drunk every day, hunting sensation every night, had begun to make me nervous. Sitting around the West End one weekend I decided to see what schoolteaching was like.

Harlem then was an ineffable place where the hip white in-crowd played in those last few moments before the fires and riots of the 1960s broke out. Black and white still pretended it was the same high-style Harlem of WWII years, but a new awareness was dawning among teenagers. Perhaps Mama had been sold a bill of goods about the brighter tomorrow progressive America was arranging for black folks, but the kids knew better.

"The natives are restless." That expression I heard a half-dozen times in the single day I spent at Wadleigh, the Death School. Candor was the style of the moment among white teachers (who comprised 100 percent of the faculty) and with administrators in particular. On some level, black kids had caught on to the fact that their school was a liar's world, a jobs project for seedy white folk.

The only blacks visible outside Harlem and its outrigger ghettos were maids, laborers, and a token handful stuffed into make-work government occupations, in theater, the arts, or civil service.

The notable exception consisted of a small West Indian business and professional elite which behaved itself remarkably like upper-class whites, exhibiting a healthy dose of racial prejudice, itself built on skin color and gradations, lighter being better. British manners made a difference in Harlem just as they did elsewhere. The great ad campaigns of the day were overwhelmingly British. Men in black eye patches wearing Hathaway shirts whose grandfathers fought at Mafeking, "curiously delicious" Schweppes "Commander Whitehead" ads, ads for Rolls cars where the loudest noise you heard was the ticking of the electric clock. The British hand in American mid-twentieth-century life was noticeably heavy. Twelve hundred Wadleigh black kids had no trouble figuring out what recolonization by the English meant for *them*.

I had no clue of this, of course, the day I walked into a school building for the first time in nine years, a building so dark, sour, and shabby it was impossible to accept that anyone seriously thought kids were better held there than running the streets.

Consider the orders issued me and under which I traveled to meet eighth graders on the second floor:

Good morning, Mr. Gatto. You have typing. Here is your program. Remember, **THEY MUST NOT TYPE!** Under no circumstances are they allowed to type. I will come around unannounced to see that you comply. **DO NOT BELIEVE ANYTHING THEY TELL YOU** about an exception. **THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS.**

Picture the scene: an assistant principal, a man already a living legend throughout the school district, a man with a voice of command like Ozymandias, dispatching young Gatto (who only yesterday wrote the immortal line "Legs are in the limelight this year" for a hosiery ad) into the dark tunnels of the Death School with these words:

Not a letter, not a numeral, not a punctuation mark from those keys or you will never be hired here again.
Go now.

When I asked what I should do instead with the class of seventy-five, he replied, "Fall back on your resources. Remember, you have no *typing* license!"

Off I went up the dark stairs, down the dark corridor. Opening the door I discovered my dark class in place, an insane din coming from seventy-five old black Underwoods, Royals, Smith Coronas: CLACKA! CLACKA! CLACKA! CLICK! CLICK! CLACK! DING! SLAM! CLACK! Seven hundred and fifty black fingers dancing *around under the typewriter covers*. One-hundred and fifty hammering hands clacking louder by far than I could bellow: STOP....TYPING! NO TYPING ALLOWED! DON'T TYPE! STOP! STOP! STOP I SAY! PUT THOSE COVERS ON THE MACHINES!

The last words were intended for the most flagrant of the young stenographers who had abandoned any pretense of compliance. By unmasking their instruments they were declaring war. In self-defense, I escalated my shouting into threats and insults, the standard tactical remedy of teachers in the face of impending chaos, kicked a few chairs, banged an aluminum water pitcher out of shape, and was having some success curtailing rogue typers when an ominous chant of OOOOOHHHHHH! OOOOOOOOOHHHHHH! warned me some other game was now afoot.

Sure enough, a skinny little fellow had arisen in the back of the room and was bearing down on me, chair held high over his head. He had heard enough of my deranged screed, just as Middlesex farmers had enough of British lip and raised *their* chairs at Concord and Lexington. I too raised a chair and was backing my smaller opponent down when all of a sudden I caught a vision of both of us as a movie camera might. It caused me to grin and when I did the whole class laughed and tensions subsided.

"Isn't this a typing period?" I said, "WHY DON'T YOU START TYPING?" Day One of my thirty-year teaching career concluded quietly with a few more classes to which I said at once, "No goofing off! Let's TYPE!" And they did. All the machines survived unscathed.

I had never thought much about kids up to that moment, even fancied I didn't like them, but these bouts of substitute teaching raised the possibility I was reacting adversely not to youth but to invisible societal directives ordering young people to act childish whether they want to or not. Such behavior provides the best excuse for mature oversight. Was it possible I *did* like kids, just not the script written for them?

There were other mysteries. What kind of science justified such sharp distinctions among classes when even by the house logic of schooling it was obvious that large numbers of students were misplaced? Why didn't this bother teachers? Why the apparent indifference to important matters like these? And why was the mental ration doled out so sparingly? Whenever I stepped up my own pace and began cracking the mental whip, all manner of kids responded better than when I followed the *prescribed* dopey curriculum. Yet if that were so, why this skimpy diet instead?

The biggest mystery lurked in the difference between the lusty goodwill of first, second, and to some extent third graders—even in Harlem—the bright, quick intelligence and goodwill always so abundant in those grades, and the wild change fourth grade brought in terms of sullenness, dishonesty, and downright mean spirit.

I knew *something* in the school experience was affecting these kids, but what? It had to be hidden in those first-, second- and third-grade years which appear so idyllic even in Harlem. What surfaced by fourth grade was the effect of a lingering disease running rampant in the very utopian interlude when they were laughing, singing, playing, and running round in the earlier grades. And kids who had been to kindergarten seemed worse than the others.

But schoolwork came as a great relief to me in spite of everything, after studying Marlboro cigarette campaigns and Colgate commercials. In those days I was chomping at the bit to have work that involved real responsibility; this imperative made me decide to throw ambition to the winds at least for the moment and teach. Plenty of time to get rich later on, I thought.

In New York City in the 1960s, becoming a teacher was easier than you could imagine or believe (it still is). It was

a time of rich cash harvests for local colleges giving two-week teacher courses for provisional certification; nearly everyone passed and permanent license requirements could be met on the job. At the end of summer I had a license to go to school and get paid for it. Whether I could actually teach was never an issue with anyone. Kids assigned to me had no choice in the matter. That following autumn I found regular work at William J. O'Shea Junior High whose broken concrete playground sat in plain view of the world-famous Museum of Natural History, diagonally across Columbus Avenue to the northeast. It was a playground my kids and I were later to use to make the school rich by designing and arranging for a weekend flea market to be held on this site. But that came long afterwards.

Dr. Caleb Gattegno, Expert

I began to schoolteach as an engineer would, solving problems as they arose. Because of my upbringing and because of certain unresolved contradictions in my own character I had a great private need not just to have a *job* but to have *work* that would allow me to build the unbuilt parts of myself, to give me competence and let me feel my life was one being lived instead of it living me. I brought to those first years an intensity of watchfulness probably uncommon in those who grow up untroubled. My own deficiencies provided enough motivation to want to make something worthwhile happen.

Had I remained a problem-solver I would have drowned in life for sure, but a habit of mind that demands things in context sensitized me to the culture of schooling as a major element in my work and that wariness eventually allowed me to surmount it. The highest school priorities are administrative coherence, student predictability, and institutional stability; children doing well or poorly are incidental to the main administrative mission. Hence teachers are often regarded as instruments which respond best if handled like servants made to account for the silverware. In order to give these vertical relationships strength, the horizontal relationships among teachers— collegiality—must be kept weak.

This divide-and-conquer principle is true of any large system. The way it plays itself out in the culture of schooling is to bestow on some few individuals *favor*, on some few *grief*, and to approach the large middle with a carrot in one hand, a stick in the other with these dismal examples illuminating the discourse. In simple terms, some are bribed into loyalty, but seldom so securely they become complacent; others sent despairing, but seldom without hope since a crumb might eventually fall their way. Those whose loyalties are purchased function as spies to report staff defiance or as cheerleaders for new initiatives.

I used to hear from Granddad that a man's price for surrendering shows you the dirt floor of his soul. A short list of customary teacher payoffs includes: 1) assignment to a room on the shady side of the building; 2) or one away from playground noise; 3) a parking permit; 4) the gift of a closet as a private office; 5) the tacit understanding that one can solicit administrative aid in disciplinary situations without being persecuted afterwards; 6) first choice of textbooks from the available supply in the book room; 7) access to the administrators' private photocopy machine; 8) a set of black shades for your windows so the room can be sufficiently darkened to watch movies comfortably; 9) privileged access to media equipment so *machines* could be counted on to take over the teaching a few days each week; 10) assignment of a student teacher as a private clerk; 11) the right to go home on Friday a period or two early in order to beat the weekend rush; 12) a program with first period (or first and second) free so the giftee can sleep late while a friend or friendly administrator clocks them in.

Many more "deals" than this are available, extra pay for certain cushy specialized jobs or paid after-school duty are major perks. Thus is the ancient game of divide and conquer played in school. How many times I remember hearing, "Wake up, Gatto. Why should I bother? This is all a big joke. Nobody cares. Keep the kids quiet, that's what a good teacher is. I have a life when I get home from this sewer." Deals have a lot to do with that attitude and the best deals of all go to those who establish themselves as experts. As did Dr. Caleb Gattegno.

A now long-forgotten Egyptian intellectual, Caleb Gattegno enjoyed a brief vogue in the 1960s as inventor of a reading system based on the use of nonverbal color cues to aid learning. He was brought to the middle school

where I worked in 1969 to demonstrate how his new system solved seemingly intractable problems. This famous man's *demonstration* made such impact on me that thirty years later I could lead you blindfolded to the basement room on West 77th Street where twenty-five teachers and administrators crammed into the rear lane of a classroom in order to be touched by this magic. Keep in mind it was only the demonstration I recall, I can't remember the idea at all. It had something to do with color.

Even now I applaud Gattegno's courage if nothing else. A stranger facing a new class is odds-on to be eaten alive, the customary example of this situation is the hapless substitute. But in his favor another classroom advantage worked besides his magical color technology, the presence of a crowd of adults virtually guaranteed a peaceful hour. Children are familiar with adult-swarmed through the twice-a-year-visitation days of parents. Everyone knows by some unvoiced universal etiquette to be on best behavior when a concentration of strange adults appears in the back of the room.

On the appointed day, at the appointed hour, we all assembled to watch the great man put children through their paces. An air of excitement filled the room. >From the publicity buildup a permanent revolution in our knowledge of reading was soon to be put on display. Finally, with a full retinue of foundation officers and big bureaucrats, Dr. Caleb Gattegno entered the arena.

I can't precisely say *why* what happened next happened. The simple truth is I wasn't paying much attention. But suddenly a babble of shouting woke me. Looking up, I saw the visiting expert's face covered with blood! He was making a beeline through the mob for the door as if desperate to get there before he bled to death.

As I later pieced together from eyewitness accounts, Dr. Gattegno had selected a student to cooperate with his demonstration, a girl with a mind of her own. She didn't *want* to be the center of attention at that moment. When Gattegno persisted her patience came to an end. What I learned in a Harlem typing class years earlier, the famous Egyptian intellectual now learned in a school in the middle of some of the most expensive real estate on earth.

Almost immediately after she raked her long fingernails down his well-educated cheeks, the doctor was off to the races, exiting the room quickly, dashing up the staircase into Egyptian history. We were left milling about, unable to stifle cynical remarks. What I failed to hear, then or later, was a single word of sympathy for his travail. Word of the incident traveled quickly through the three-story building, the event was postmortemed for days.

I should be ashamed to say it, but I felt traces of amusement at his plight, at the money wasted, at the temporary chagrin of important people. Not a word was ever said again about Gattegno again in my presence. I read a few pages of his slim volume and found them intelligent, but for some unaccountable reason I couldn't muster interest enough to read on. Probably because there isn't any trick to teaching children to read by very old-fashioned methods, which makes it difficult to work up much enthusiasm for novelty. Truth to tell, the reading world doesn't *need* a better mousetrap. If you look up his work in the library, I'd appreciate it if you'd drop me a postcard explaining what his colorful plan was all about.

Intimidation

New teachers and even beleaguered veterans are hardly in any position to stand back far enough to see clearly the bad effect the dramatic setting of the building—its rules, personalities, and hidden dynamics—has on their own outlook and on children's lives. About one kid in five in my experience is in acute torment from the intimidation of peers, maybe more are driven to despair by the indifference of official machinery. What the hounded souls can't possibly see is that from a system standpoint, they are the problem with their infernal whining, not their persecutors.

And for every one broken by intimidation, another breaks himself just to get through the days, months, and years ahead. This huge silent mass levels a moral accusation lowly teachers become conscious of only at their peril because there is neither law nor institutional custom to stop the transgressions. Young, idealistic teachers burn out

in the first three years because they can't solve administrative and collegial indifference, often concluding mistakenly that consciously willed policies of actual human beings—a principal here, a department head or union leader there—are causing the harm, when indifference is a system imperative; it would collapse from its contradictions if too much sensitivity entered the operating formula.

I would have been odds-on to become one of these martyrs to inadequate understanding of the teaching situation but for a fortunate accident. By the late 1960s I had exhausted my imagination inside the conventional classroom when all of a sudden a period of phenomenal turbulence descended upon urban schoolteaching everywhere. I'll tell you more about this in a while, but for the moment, suffice it to say that supervisory personnel were torn loose from their moorings, superintendents, principals and all the rest flung to the wolves by those who actually direct American schooling. In this dark time, local management cowered. During one three-year stretch I can remember, we had four principals and three superintendents. The net effect of this ideological bombardment, which lasted about five years in its most visible manifestation, was to utterly destroy the utility of urban schools. From my own perspective all this was a godsend. Surveillance of teachers and administrative routines lost their bite as school administrators scurried like rats to escape the wrath of their unseen masters, while I suddenly found myself in possession of a blank check to run my classes as I pleased as long as I could secure the support of key parents.

Hector Of The Feeble-Mind

See thirteen-year-old Hector Rodriguez¹ as I first saw him: slightly built, olive-skinned, short, with huge black eyes, his body twisting acrobatically as he tried to slip under the gated defenses of the skating rink on the northern end of Central Park one cold November day. Up to that time I had known Hector for several months but had never really *seen* him, nor would I have seen him then but for the startling puzzle he presented by gatecrashing with a fully paid admission ticket in his pocket. Was he nuts?

This particular skating rink sits in a valley requiring patrons to descend several flights of concrete steps to reach the ice. When I counted bodies at the foot of the stairs, Hector was missing. I went back up the stairs to find Hector wedged in the bars of the revolving security gate. "You little imbecile," I screamed. "Why are you sneaking in? You have a ticket!" No answer, but his expression told me his answer. It said, "Why shout? I know what I'm doing, I have principles to uphold." He actually looked offended by my lack of understanding.

Hector was solving a problem. Could the interlocking bars of the automatic turnstile be defeated? What safer way to probe than with a paid ticket in hand in case he got caught. Later as I searched school records for clues to understand this boy, I discovered in his short transit on earth he had already left a long outlaw trail behind him. And yet, although none of his crimes would have earned more than a good spanking a hundred years earlier, now they helped support a social service empire. By substituting an excessive response for an appropriate (minimal) reaction, behavior we sought to discourage has doubled and redoubled. It is implicit in the structure of institutional logic that this happens. What's bad for real people is the very guarantee of institutional amorality.

At the time of this incident, Hector attended one of the fifty-five public schools with the lowest academic ratings in New York State, part of a select group threatened with takeover by state custodians. Seven of the nine rapists of the Central Park jogger—a case that made national headlines some years back—were graduates of the school. Of the thirteen classes in Hector's grade, a full nine were of higher rank than the one he was in. Hector might be seen at twelve as an exhausted salmon swimming upstream in a raging current trying to sweep away his dignity. We had deliberately unleashed such a flood by assigning about eleven hundred kids in all, to five *strictly* graduated categories:

First Class was called "Gifted and Talented Honors."

Second Class was called "Gifted and Talented."

Third Class was called "Special Progress."

Fourth Class was called "Mainstream."

Fifth Class was called "Special Ed." These last kids had a cash value to the school three times higher than

the others, a genuine incentive to find fatal defects where none existed.

Hector was a specimen from the doomed category called Mainstream, itself further divided into alphabetized subcategories—A, B, C, or D. Worst of the worst above Special Ed would be Mainstream D where he reported. Since Special Ed was a life sentence of ostracism and humiliation at the hands of the balance of the student body, we might even call Hector "lucky" to be Mainstream, though as Mainstream D, he was suspended in that thin layer of mercy just above the truly doomed. Hector's standardized test scores placed him about three years behind the middle of the rat-pack. This, and his status as an absolute cipher (where school activities, sports, volunteer work, and good behavior were concerned) would have made it difficult enough for anyone prone to be his advocate, but in Hector's case, he wasn't just behind an eight-ball, he was six feet under one.

Shortly after I found him breaking and entering (the skating rink), Hector was arrested in a nearby elementary school with a gun. It was a fake gun but it looked pretty real to the school secretaries and principal. I found out about this at my school faculty Christmas party when the principal came bug-eyed over to the potato salad where I camped, crying, GATTO, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME? His exact words. Hector had been dismissed for holiday only that morning; he then hightailed it immediately to his old elementary school, still in session, to turn the younger children loose, to free the pint-sized slaves like a modern Spartacus. Come forward now one year in time: Hector in high school, second report card. He failed every subject, and was absent enough to be cited for truancy. But you could have guessed that before I told you because you read the same sociology books I do.

Can you see the Hector trapped inside these implacable school records? Poor, small for his age, part of a minority, not accounted much by people who matter, dumb, in a super-dumb class, a bizarre gatecrasher, a gunslinger, a total failure in high school? Can you see Hector? Certainly you think you do. How could you not? The system makes it so easy to classify him and predict his future.

What is society to do with its Hectors? This is the boy, multiplied by millions, that school people have been agonizing about in every decade of the twentieth century. This is the boy who destroyed the academic mission of American public schooling, turning it into a warehouse operation, a clinic for behavioral training and attitude adjustment. Hector's principal said to the *Christian Science Monitor* when it made a documentary film about my class and Hector's, "Sure the system stinks, but John [Gatto] has nothing to replace it. And as bad as the system is, it's better than chaos."

But is the only alternative to a stifling system really chaos?

!Not his real name

Hector Isn't The Problem

The country has been sold a bill of goods that the problem of modern schooling is Hector. That's a demon we face, that misperception. Under its many faces and shape-shifting rhetoric, forced schooling itself was conceived as the frontline in a war against chaos. Horace Mann wrote once to Reverend Samuel May, "Schools will be found to be the way God has chosen for the reformation of the world." School is the beginning of the process to keep Hector and his kind in protective custody. Important people believe with the fervor of religious energy that civilization can only survive if the irrational, unpredictable impulses of human nature are continually beaten back, confined until their demonic vitality is sapped.

Read Merle Curti's *Social Ideas of the Great Educators*, a classic which will never be allowed to go out of print as long as we have college courses as gatekeeper for teacher certification. Curti shows that every single one of the greats used this Impending Chaos argument in front of financial tycoons to marshal support for the enlargement of forced schooling.

I don't want to upset you, but I'm not sure. I have evidence Hector isn't what school and society make him out to be, data that will give a startlingly different picture. During the period when the skating incident and school stickup occurred, Senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska was putting together an education plank in order to run for his party's presidential nomination. To that end, his office called me to inquire whether I could meet with the Senator to discuss an article I wrote which had been printed in the *Congressional Record*. It was agreed we would meet for breakfast at Manhattan's famous Algonquin Hotel, site of the famous literary Roundtable. Hector and his close friend Kareem would join us.

Our conference lasted three hours without any bell breaks. It was cordial but businesslike with the senator asking hard questions and his assistant, a vivacious attractive woman, taking notes. Hector dominated the discussion. Concise, thoughtful, inventive, balanced in his analysis, graceful in his presentation with the full range of sallies, demurs, illustrations, head-cockings, and gestures you might expect from a trained conversationalist. Where had he learned to handle himself that way? Why didn't he act this way in school?

As time passed, Hector gravitated bit by bit to the chair where the woman I thought to be Kerrey's assistant was sitting. Hector perched in a natural posture on its arm, still apparently intent on the verbal give and take, but I noticed he cast a smoldering glance directly down at the lady. By a lucky accident I got a snapshot of him doing it. It turned out she was the movie star Debra Winger! Hector was taking both Washington *and* Hollywood in stride while eating a trencherman's breakfast at a class hotel! He proved to be a valuable colleague in our discussion too, I think the Senator would agree.

In April of the following year, Hector borrowed fifteen dollars from me to buy pizza for a young woman attending Columbia University's School of International Affairs. As far as Hector was concerned, being a graduate student was only her cover—in his world of expertise as a knowledgeable student of the comic book industry (and a talented self-taught graphic artist), she was, in reality, a famous writer for Marvel Comics. The full details of their liaison are unknown to me, but a brilliant piece of documentary film footage exists of this young woman giving a private seminar to Hector and Kareem under an old oak tree on the Columbia campus. What emerged from the meetings between writer and diminutive hold-up man was a one-day-a-week private workshop at her studio just north of Wall Street.

In November of that same year, utterly unknown to his school (where he was considered a dangerous moron), all gleaming in white tie, tails and top hat, Hector acted as master of ceremonies for a program on school reform at Carnegie Hall, complete with a classical pianist and a lineup of distinguished speakers, including the cantankerous genius Mary Leue, founder of the Albany Free School, and several of my former students.

The following spring, just after he produced his unblemished record of failure as a high school freshman, Hector came to me with a job application. An award-winning cable television show was packaging kids into four-person production teams to make segments for a television magazine format hour like *60 Minutes*. Hector wanted to work there.

I sprang the bad news to him right away: "Your goose is cooked," I said. "You'll sit down in that interview and they'll ask you how you're doing in school. You'll say, 'Listen, I'm failing all my subjects and oh, another thing, the only experience I have with TV is watching it until my eyeballs bug out—unless you count the time they filmed me at the police station to scare me. Why would they want to scare me? I think it was because I held up an elementary school and they didn't want me to do it again.'

"So you're dead the minute they run your interview on any conventional lines. But you might have a slim chance if you don't follow the form sheet. Don't do what other kids will. Don't send in an application form. Guidance counselors will pass these out by the thousands. Use a typed résumé and a cover letter the way a real person would. And don't send it to some flunky, call up the station, find out who the producer of the show is, say in a letter that you're not the greatest *sit-down* student in the world because you have your own ideas, but that you've come to understand film through an intense study of comic art and how it produces its effects. All that's true, by the way. Mention casually you have a private apprenticeship with one of the big names in the comic business and that you've

done consultation work for the famous Nuyorican Poet's Café...."

"I have?" asked Hector.

"Sure. Don't you remember all those times you sat around with Roland chewing the fat when he was trying to shoot his film last year? Roland's one of the founders of the Nuyorican. And toss in your emceeing at Carnegie Hall; that ought to set you apart from the chumps. Now let's get on with that résumé and cover letter. As sure as I'm sitting here, they'll only get one cover letter and résumé. That should buy you an interview.

"The only way you can squeak through that interview though is to convince someone *by your behavior* you can do the job better than anyone else. They'll be staring the spots off your every move, your clothing, your gestures, trying to see into your soul. Your goose is cooked if you get caught in a grilling."

"You mean I'll shift around," Hector asked, "and get an attitude in my voice, don't you?"

"Right, just before the shifty look comes into your eyes!" I said.

We both laughed.

"So, what do I do?" Hector asked.

"The only thing you *can* do is quietly take over the interview. By quietly, I mean in a way they won't understand what's happening. You and I will just sit here until we figure out every single question they might ask, and every single *need* they might have which they won't tell you about, and every single *fear* they have that some aspect of your nature will screw up *their* project. Remember they're not hiring a kid to be nice people, they're hiring a kid because that's the gimmick of their show. So what you must do is to show by your commanding presence, impeccable manners, vast range of contacts, and dazzling intelligence that their fears are groundless.

"You're going to show them you love work for its own sake, that you don't watch the time clock, that you *can* take orders when orders make sense, that you are a goldmine of ideas, that you're fun to be around. You'll have to master all this quickly because I have a hunch you'll be called in right after your letter arrives. Can you do it?"

Six weeks later Hector started his new job.

One Lawyer Equals 3,000 Reams Of Paper

Once, a long time ago, I spoke before the District 3 School Board in Manhattan to plead that it not retain a private lawyer when all the legal work a school district is legitimately entitled to is provided free by the city's corporation counsel. In spite of this, the district had allocated \$10,000 to retain a Brooklyn law firm. This is standard technique with boards everywhere which seek legal advice to get rid of their "enemies." They either prefer to conceal this from the corporation counsel or fear such work might be rejected as illegitimate. One school board member had already consulted with these same attorneys on five separate occasions pursuing some private vendetta, then submitting bills for payment against the school funds of the district. Sometimes this is simply a way to toss a tip to friends.

My argument went as follows:

In order to emphasize the magnitude of the loss this waste of money would entail—emblematic of dozens of similar wastes every year—I want to suggest some alternate uses for this money which will become impossible once it's spent on a lawyer none of the kids needs. It would buy:

Three thousand reams of paper, 1,500,000 sheets. In September six of the schools in District 3 opened a school year without any paper at all. Letters from the principals of these schools to the school board, of which my wife has photocopies, will attest to this. It would buy enough chemicals

and lab specimens to run the entire science program at I.S 44 and Joan of Arc, nearly 2,000 copies of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* as discounted by Barnes and Noble in hardcover, enough sewing machines and fabrication supplies to offer six modern dressmaking classes. In light of the fact New York City's fashion industry is a major employer, it would seem a saner use of the funds. How many musical instruments, how much sports equipment, wood, ceramic materials, art supplies does \$10,000 buy? The Urban League's "Children Teach Children" reading project could be put in the district, displacing armies of low-utility, \$23-an-hour consultants. With \$10,000 we could pay our own students \$1-an-hour—receive better value—and see our money in the pockets of kids, not lawyers. Invested in stock or even 30-year treasury notes as a scholarship fund, this money would return in perpetuity enough interest yearly to pay a kid's way through City University. The money in question would buy 50,000 pens. Eight computer installations. Two hundred winter coats for kids who are cold.

I concluded with two suggestions: first, a referendum among parents to find out whether they would prefer one of the options above or a lawyer; second, to buy 10,000 lottery tickets so we all could have a thrill out of this potlatch instead of the solitary thrill a Brooklyn lawyer would have banking our check.

Four years later, I appeared before the same school board, with the following somewhat darker statement:

On September 3, 1986, my teaching license, which I had held for 26 years, was terminated secretly while I was on medical leave of absence for degenerative arthritis. The arthritis was contracted by climbing 80 steps a day to the third floor for more than a year—at the express request of the co-directors—with a badly broken hip held together by three large screws.

Although papers for a medical leave of absence were signed and filed, these documents were destroyed at the district level, removed from central board medical offices. The current management apparently was instructed to deny papers had ever been filed, allowing the strange conclusion I had simply walked away from a quarter century of work and vanished.

The notice terminating my teaching license was sent to an address where I hadn't lived for twenty-two years. It was returned marked "not known at this address." This satisfied the board's contractual obligation to notify me of my imminent dismissal, however nominally.

When I returned to work from what I had no reason to assume wasn't an approved leave, I was informed by personnel that I no longer worked for District 3, and that I could not work anywhere because I no longer had a teaching license. This could only be reinstated if my building principal would testify he knew I had properly filed for leave. Since this would involve the individual in serious legal jeopardy, it isn't surprising my request for such a notice was ignored.

From September 1987 to April of 1988 my family was plunged into misery as I sought to clear my name. Although I had personal copies of my leave forms at the first hearing on this matter, my building principal and the district personnel officer both claimed their signatures on the photocopies were forgeries. My appeal was denied.

Just before the second hearing in March, a courageous payroll secretary swore before a public official that my leave extensions had always been on file at Lincoln, signed by school authorities. She testified that attempts had been made to have her surrender these copies, requests she refused. Production of her affidavit to this at my third hearing caused an eventual return of my license and all lost pay. At the moment of disclosure of that affidavit during a third grievance hearing, the female co-director shouted in an agitated voice, "The District doesn't want him back!"

I am asking for an investigation of this matter because my case is far from the only time this has happened in District 3. Indeed, all over New York this business is conducted so cynically that administrators violate basic canons of decency and actual law with impunity because they know the

system will cover for them no matter how culpable their behavior.

No comment was ever forthcoming from that Board of Education. Two years after my restoration, I was named New York City Teacher of the Year. Two years after that, New York State Teacher of the Year. A year later, after addressing the Engineer's Colloquium at NASA Space Center, invitations poured in to speak from every state in the union and from all over the world. But the damage my family had sustained carried lasting effects.

Yet I proved something important, I think. On looking back at the whole sorry tapestry of the system as it revealed itself layer by layer in my agony, what was most impressive wasn't its horrifying power to treat me and my family without conscience or compassion, but its incredible *weakness* in the face of opposition. Battling without allies for thirty years, far from home and family, without financial resources, with no place to look for help except my native wit, nor for courage except to principles learned as a boy in a working-class town on the Monongahela River, I was able to back the school creature into such a corner it was eventually driven to commit crimes to get free of me.

What that suggests is cause for great hope. A relative handful of people could change the course of schooling significantly by resisting the suffocating advance of centralization and standardization of children, by being imaginative and determined in their resistance, by exploiting manifold weaknesses in the institution's internal coherence: the disloyalty its own employees feel toward it. It took 150 years to build this apparatus; it won't quit breathing overnight. The formula is to take a deep breath, then select five smooth stones and let fly. The homeschoolers have already begun.

The Great Transformation

I lived through the great transformation which turned schools from often useful places (if never the essential ones school publicists claimed) into laboratories of state experimentation. When I began teaching in 1961, the social environment of Manhattan schools was a distant cousin of the western Pennsylvania schools I attended in the 1940s, as Darwin was a distant cousin of Malthus.

Discipline was the daily watchword on school corridors. A network of discipline referrals, graded into an elaborate catalogue of well-calibrated offenses, was etched into the classroom heart. At bottom, hard as it is to believe in today's school climate, there was a common dedication to the intellectual part of the enterprise. I remember screaming (pompously) at an administrator who marked on my plan book that he would like to see evidence I was teaching "the whole child," that I didn't teach *children* at all, I taught the discipline of the English language! Priggish as that sounds, it reflects an *attitude* not uncommon among teachers who grew up in the 1940s and before. Even with much slippage in practice, Monongahela and Manhattan had a family relationship. About schooling at least. Then suddenly in 1965 everything changed.

Whatever the event is that I'm actually referring to—and its full dimensions are still only partially clear to me—it was a nationwide phenomenon simultaneously arriving in all big cities coast to coast, penetrating the hinterlands afterwards. Whatever it was, it arrived all at once, the way we see national testing and other remote-control school matters like School-to-Work legislation appear in every state today at the same time. A plan was being orchestrated, the nature of which is unmasked in the upcoming chapters.

Think of this thing for the moment as a course of discipline dictated by coaches outside the perimeter of the visible school world. It constituted psychological restructuring of the institution's mission, but traveled under the guise of a public emergency which (the public was told) dictated *increasing* the intellectual content of the business! Except for its nightmare aspect, it could have been a scene from farce, a swipe directly from Orwell's *1984* and its fictional telly announcements that the chocolate ration was being raised every time it was being lowered. This reorientation did not arise from any democratic debate, or from any public clamor for such a peculiar initiative; the public was not consulted or informed. Best of all, those engineering the makeover denied it was happening.

I watched fascinated, as over a period of a hundred days, the entire edifice of public schooling was turned upside

down. I know there was no advance warning to low-level administrators like principals, either, because I watched my first principal destroy himself trying to stem the tide. A mysterious new deal was the order of the day.

Suddenly children were to be granted "due process" before any sanction, however mild, could be invoked. A formal schedule of hearings, referees, advocates, and appeals was set up. What might on paper have seemed only a liberal extension of full humanity to children was actually the starting gun for a time of mayhem. To understand this better, reflect a minute on the full array of ad hoc responses to wildness, cruelty, or incipient chaos teachers usually employ to keep the collective classroom a civil place at all. In a building with a hundred teachers, the instituting of an adversarial system of justice meant that within just weeks the building turned into an insane asylum. Bedlam, without a modicum of civility anywhere.

This transformation, ironically enough, made administrative duty easier, because where once supervisory intercession had constituted, a regular link in the ladder of referral as it was called, in the new order, administrators were excused from minute-to-minute discipline and were granted power to assume that incidents were a teacher's fault, to be duly entered on the Cumulative Record File, the pedagogical equivalent of the Chinese Dangan.

There was a humorous aspect to what transpired over the next few years. I had no particular trouble keeping a lid on things, but for teachers who counted upon support from administrative staff it was a different story. Now, if they asked for a hand, often they were pressured to resign, or formally charged with bad classroom management, or worst of all, transferred to an even more hideous school in expectation they would eliminate themselves.

Most, under such tension, took the hint and quit. A few had to be pushed. I remember a magnificent math teacher, an older black woman with honors and accomplishments to her name, much beloved and respected by her classes, singled out for public persecution probably because she acted as an intractable moral force, a strong model teacher with strong principles. Daily investigative teams from the district office watched her classes, busily took notes in the back of her room, challenged her style of presentation openly while children listened. This went on for two weeks. Then the administration began to call her students to the school office to interrogate them, one by one, about the teacher's behavior. They coached some kids to watch her during her classes, coached them to look for any telltale signs she was a racist! Parents were called and offered an option of withdrawing their kids from her classes. Broken by the ordeal, one day she vanished.

When my wife was elected to the district school board, one of her first actions was to gain access to the superintendent's private files without his knowledge. Some of those records concerned details of official cases of harassment. Dozens of employees had been similarly purged, and dozens more were "under investigation" in this gulag on West 95th Street. Contacting these people in private, it became clear to me that, they were far from the worst teachers around. Indeed some were the best. Their relative prowess had emboldened them to speak out on policy matters and so marked them for elimination.

One principal, whose school was the most successful reading environment in the district, received similar treatment, ultimately sentenced to an official Siberia in Harlem, given no duties at all for the two years more he lasted before quitting. His crime: allegedly striking a girl although there were no witnesses to this but the girl, a student who admitted breaking into the light-control panel room in the auditorium where the offense is supposed to have occurred. His real crime was his refusal to abandon phonetic reading methodology and replace it with a politically mandated whole-word substitute.

I escaped the worst effects of the bloodbath. Mostly I minded my business trying to ignore the daily carnage. In truth I had no affection for the old system being savaged, and chaos made it easier for me to try out things that worked. On balance, I probably did my best work during those turbulent years as a direct result of the curious smokescreen they provided.

But accounts are not so simple to balance overall. If I regarded run-of-the-mill school administrators as scared rabbits or system flunkies, the reformers I saw parading daily through the building corridors looked like storm troopers and made my skin crawl.

On several occasions, energetic efforts were made by these people to recruit my assistance as an active ally. All such appeals I politely refused. True belief they had, but for all of it they seemed like savages to me, inordinately proud of their power to cause fear, as willing to trample on the decencies as the people they were harassing as indecent. However, it seemed just possible something good might actually emerge from the shakeup underway. About that, I was dead wrong. As the project advanced, schools became noticeably worse. Bad to begin with, now they mutated into something horrible.

What shape began to emerge was a fascinating echo of the same bureaucratic cancer which dogged the steps of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions. Do-nothing administrators and nonteaching teachers multiplied like locusts. With them came an entirely new class of school-teacher, one aggressively ignorant, cynical, and often tied to local political clubs. New categories of job description sprang up like weeds.

My own school fell victim to a politically correct black gym teacher imported from New England to be its principal. Two schoolwide riots followed his installation, mass marches on city hall transpired in which local politicians instrumental in the man's selection used schoolchildren as unwitting cadres to lobby their favorite schemes in newsworthy, children's crusade fashion.

A small band of old-fashioned teachers fought rearguard actions against this, but time retired them one by one until, with only an occasional exception, the classrooms of Community School District 3, in one of the most prosperous neighborhoods on earth, became lawless compounds, job projects for the otherwise unemployable.

I need to wrap this up so we can get on with things. I have to skip the full story of the Hell's Angel math teacher who parked his Harley Hog outside the door of his classroom, and when the principal objected, told him in front of startled witnesses that if the man didn't shut his mouth, the number-crunching cyclist would come to his home that evening, pour gasoline under his front door, and set his house on fire. I have to skip the hair-raising stories of not one but three junior high teachers I knew quite well who married their students. Each, spotting a likely thirteen-year-old, wooed the respective girl in class and married her a few years later. They took the more honorable course, hardly the outcome of most teacher-student romances I was privy to. I have to skip the drug habits of staff in each of the buildings I worked in and other lurid stuff like that. In the midst of the unending dullness of institutional schooling, human nature cracks through the peeling paint as grass through cement. I have to skip all that. Suffice it to say, my life experience taught me that school isn't a safe place to leave your children.

Education As A Helix Sport

Here's a principle of real education to carry you through the moments of self-doubt. Education is a helix sport, a unique personal project like seatless unicycle riding over trackless wilderness, a sport that avoids rails, rules, and programmed confinement. The familiar versions of this are cross-country skiing, sailing, hang-gliding, skateboarding, surfing, solitary mountain climbing, thousand-mile walks, things like that. I think of education as one, too.

In a helix sport the players search for a new relationship with themselves. They endure pain and risk to achieve this goal. Helix sports are free of expert micromanagement. Experts can't help you much in that moment of truth when a mistake might leave you dead. Helix sports are a revolt against predestination.

Bringing children up properly is a helix sport forcing you to realize that no boy or girl on earth is just like another. If you do understand this you also understand there can exist no reliable map to tell you all you need to do. Process kids like sardines and don't be surprised when they come out oily and dead. In the words of the Albany Free School, if you aren't making it up as you go along, you aren't doing it right.

The managerial and social science people who built forced schooling had no scruples about making your kids fit into their scheme. It's suffocating to the spirit to be treated this way. A young lady from Tucson wrote me, "Now that I'm nearly 25, I can hardly remember why I began to be afraid to go to school." I wrote back that she was

afraid because her instincts warned her the school business had no use for the personal growth she sought. All pedagogical theory is based on stage theories of human development. All stage theories of child rearing talk in averages. The evidence before your own eyes and ears must show you that average men and women don't actually exist. Yet they remain the basis of social theory, even though such artificial constructs are useless to tell you anything valuable about your own implacably nonabstract child.

I'm Outta Here!

One day, after thirty years of this, I took a deep breath and quit.

- [MunsterbergAnd His Disciples](#)
- [The Prototype Is A Schoolteacher](#)
- [Teachers College Maintains The Planet](#)
- [A Lofty, Somewhat Inhuman Vision](#)
- [Rain Forest Algebra](#)
- [Godless, But Not Irreligious](#)
- [An Insider's Insider](#)
- [Compulsion Schooling](#)
- [De-Moralizing School Procedure](#)
- [William Torrey Harris](#)
- [Cardinal Principles](#)
- [The Unspeakable Chautauqua](#)

A very small group of young psychologists around the turn of the century were able to create and market a system for measuring human talent that has permeated American institutions of learning and influenced such fundamental social concepts as democracy, sanity, justice, welfare, reproductive rights, and economic progress. In creating, owning, and advertising this social technology the testers created themselves as professionals.

– Joanne Brown, *The Definition of a Profession: The Authority of Metaphor in the History of Intelligence Testing*

I have undertaken to get at the facts from the point of view of the business men—citizens of the community who, after all, pay the bills and, therefore, have a right to say what they shall have in their schools.

– Charles H. Thurber, from an address at the Annual Meeting of the National Education Association, July 9, 1897

Munsterberg And His Disciples

The self-interested have had a large hand conceiving and executing twentieth-century schooling, yet once that's said, self-interest isn't enough to explain the *zeal* in confining other people's children in rooms, locked away from the world, the infernal *zeal* which, like a toadstool, keeps forcing its way to the surface in this business. Among

millions of normal human beings professionally associated with the school adventure, a small band of true believers has been loose from the beginning, brothers and sisters whose eyes gleam in the dark, whose heartbeat quickens at the prospect of acting as "change agents" for a purpose beyond self-interest.

For true believers, children are test animals. The strongest belt in the engine of schooling is the strand of true belief. True believers can be located by their rhetoric; it reveals a scale of philosophical imagination which involves plans for you and me. All you need know about Mr. Laszlo, whose timeless faith song is cited in the front of this book (*xiii*), is that the "we" he joins himself to, the "masters who manipulate," doesn't really include the rest of us, except as objects of the exercise. Here is a true believer in full gallop. School history is crammed with wild-eyed orators, lurking just behind the lit stage. Like Hugo Munsterberg.

Munsterberg was one of the people who was in on the birth of twentieth-century mass schooling. In 1892, a recent émigré to America from Wilhelm Wundt's laboratory of physiological psychology at Leipzig, in Saxony, he was a Harvard Professor of Psychology. Munsterberg taught his students to look at schools as social laboratories suitable for testing theory, not as aggregates of young people pursuing their own purposes. The St. Louis Exposition of 1904 showcased his ideas for academicians all over the world, and the popular press made his notions familiar to upper middle classes horrified by the unfamiliar family ways of immigrants, eager to find ways to separate immigrant children from those alien practices of their parents.

Munsterberg's particular obsession lay in quantifying the mental and physical powers of the population for central government files, so policymakers could manage the nation's "human resources" efficiently. His students became leaders of the "standardization" crusade in America. Munsterberg was convinced that racial differences could be reduced to numbers, equally convinced it was his sacred duty to the Aryan race to do so. Aryanism crackled like static electricity across the surface of American university life in those days, its implications part of every corporate board game and government bureau initiative.

One of Munsterberg's favorite disciples, Lillian Wald, became a powerful advocate of medical incursions into public schools. The famous progressive social reformer wrote in 1905: "It is difficult to place a limit upon the service which *medical inspection* should perform,"¹ continuing, "Is it not logical to conclude that physical development...should so far as possible *be demanded*?" One year later, immigrant public schools in Manhattan began performing tonsillectomies and adenoidectomies *in school* without notifying parents. *The New York Times* (June 29, 1906) reported that "Frantic Italians"—many armed with stilettos—"stormed" three schools, attacking teachers and dragging children from the clutches of the true believers into whose hands they had fallen. Think of the conscience which would ascribe to itself the right to operate on children at official discretion and you will know beyond a doubt what a true believer smells like.

Even a cursory study of the history of the school institution turns up true belief in rich abundance. In a famous book, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (1948), paid for by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Russell Sage Foundation, the favorite principle of true believers since Plato makes an appearance: "A society could be completely made over in something like 15 years, the time it takes to inculcate a new culture into a rising group of youngsters." Despite the spirit of profound violence hovering over such seemingly bloodless, abstract formulas, this is indeed the will-o-the-wisp pursued throughout the twentieth century in forced schooling—not intellectual development, not character development, but the inculcation of a new synthetic culture in children, one designed to condition its subjects to a continual adjusting of their lives by unseen authorities.

It's true that numerically, only a small fraction of those who direct institutional schooling are actively aware of its ideological bent, but we need to see that without consistent generalship from that knowledgeable group in guiding things, the evolution of schooling would long ago have lost its coherence, degenerating into battles between swarms of economic and political interests fighting over the treasure-house that hermetic pedagogy represents. One of the hardest things to understand is that true believers—dedicated ideologues—are useful to *all* interests in the school stew by providing a salutary continuity to the enterprise.

Because of the predictable greed embedded in this culture, some overarching "guardian" vision, one indifferent to

material gain, seems necessary to prevent marketplace chaos. True believers referee the school game, establishing its goals, rules, penalties; they negotiate and compromise with other stakeholders. And strangely enough, above all else, they can be trusted to continue being their predictable, dedicated, selfless selves. Pragmatic stakeholders need them to keep the game alive; true believers need pragmatists as cover. Consider this impossibly melodramatic if you must. I know myself that parts of my story sound like leaves torn from *Ragtime*. But from start to finish this is a tale of true believers and how by playing on their pipes they took all the children away.

¹Forced medical inspection had been a prominent social theme in northern Germany since at least 1750.

The Prototype Is A Schoolteacher

One dependable signal of a true believer's presence is a strong passion for *everyone's* children. Find nonstop, abstract interest in the collective noun "children," the kind of love Pestalozzi or Froebel had, and you've flushed the priesthood from its lair. Eric Hoffer tells us the prototype true believer is a schoolteacher. Mao was a schoolteacher, so was Mussolini, so were many other prominent warlike leaders of our time, including Lyndon Johnson. In Hoffer's characterization, the true believer is identified by inner fire, "a burning conviction we have a holy duty to others." Lack of humor is one touchstone of true belief.

The expression "true believer" is from a fifth-century book, *The City of God*, occurring in a passage where St. Augustine urges holy men and women to abandon fear and embrace their sacred work fervently. True Belief is a psychological frame you'll find useful to explain individuals who relentlessly pursue a cause indifferent to personal discomfort, indifferent to the discomfort of others.¹ All of us show a tiny element of true belief in our makeup, usually just enough to recognize the lunatic gleam in the eye of some purer zealot when we meet face to face. But in an age which distances us from hand-to-hand encounters with authority—removing us electronically, bureaucratically, and institutionally—the truly fanatical among us have been granted the luxury of full anonymity. We have to judge their presence by the fallout.

Horace Mann exemplifies the type. From start to finish he had a mission. He spoke passionately at all times. He wrote notes *to himself* about "breaking the bond of association among workingmen." In a commencement harangue at Antioch College in 1859, he said, "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity." A few cynical critics snipe at Mann for lying about his imaginary school tour of Prussia (which led to the adoption of Prussian schooling methodologies in America), but those cynics miss the point. For the great ones, the goal is everything; the end justifies any means. Mann lived and died a social crusader. His second wife, Mary Peabody, paid him this posthumous tribute: "He was all afire with Purpose."

Al Shanker, longtime president of the American Federation of Teachers, said in one of his last Sunday advertisements in *The New York Times* before his death: "Public schools do not exist to please Johnny's parents. They do not even exist to ensure that Johnny will one day earn a good living at a job he likes." No other energy but true belief can explain what Shanker might have had in mind.

¹For instance, how else to get a handle on the Columbia Teachers College bureau head who delivered himself of this sentence in Education Week (March 18, 1998), in an essay titled "Altering Destinies": "Program officials consider no part of a student's life off limits."

Teachers College Maintains The Planet

A beautiful example of true belief in action crossed my desk recently from the alumni magazine of my own alma

mater, Columbia University. Written by the director of Columbia's Institute for Learning Technologies, a bureau at Teachers College, this mailing informed graduates that the education division now regarded itself as bound by "a contract with posterity." Something in the tone warned me against dismissing this as customary institutional gas. Seconds later I learned, with some shock, that Teachers College felt *obligated* to take a commanding role in "maintaining the planet." The next extension of this strange idea was even more pointed. Teachers College now interpreted its mandate, I was told, as one compelling it "to distribute itself all over the world and to teach every day, 24 hours a day."

To gain perspective, try to imagine the University of Berlin undertaking to distribute itself among the fifty American states, to be present in this foreign land twenty-four hours a day, swimming in the minds of Mormon children in Utah and Baptist children in Georgia. Any university intending to become global like some nanny creature spawned in Bacon's ghastly utopia, *New Atlantis*, is no longer simply in the business of education. Columbia Teachers College had become an aggressive evangelist by its own announcement, an institution of true belief selling an unfathomable doctrine. I held its declaration in my hand for a while after I read it. Thinking.

Let me underline what you just heard. Picture some U.N. thought police dragging reluctant Serbs to a loudspeaker to listen to Teachers College rant. Most of us have no frame of reference in which to fit such a picture. Narcosis in the face of true belief is a principal reason the disease progressed so far through the medium of forced schooling without provoking much major opposition. Only after a million homeschooling families and an equal number of religiously oriented private-school families emerged from their sleep to reclaim their children from the government in the 1970s and 1980s, in direct response to an epoch of flagrant social experimentation in government schools, did true belief find ruts in its road.

Columbia, where I took an undergraduate degree, is the last agency I would want maintaining *my* planet. For decades it was a major New York slumlord indifferent to maintaining its own neighborhood, a territory much smaller than the globe. Columbia has been a legendary bad neighbor to the community for the forty years I've lived near my alma mater. So much for its qualifications as Planetary Guardian. Its second boast is even more ominous—I mean that goal of intervening in mental life "all over the world," teaching "every day, 24 hours a day." Teaching what? Shouldn't we ask? Our trouble in recognizing true belief is that it wears a reasonable face in modern times.

A Lofty, Somewhat Inhuman Vision

Take a case reported by the Public Agenda Foundation which produced the first-ever survey of educational views held by teachers college professors. To their surprise, the authors discovered that the majority of nine hundred randomly selected professors of education interviewed did not regard a teacher's struggle to maintain an orderly classroom or to cope with disruptive students as major problems! The education faculty was generally unwilling to attend to these matters seriously in their work, believing that widespread alarm among parents stemming from worry that graduates couldn't spell, couldn't count accurately, couldn't sustain attention, couldn't write grammatically (or write at all) was only caused by views of life "outmoded and mistaken."

While 92 percent of the public thinks basic reading, writing, and math competency is "absolutely essential" (according to an earlier study by Public Agenda), education professors did not agree. In the matter of mental arithmetic, which a large majority of ordinary people, including some schoolteachers, consider very important, about 60 percent of education professors think cheap calculators make that goal obsolete.

The word passion appears more than once in the report from which these data are drawn, as in the following passage:

Education professors speak with passionate idealism about their own, sometimes lofty, vision of education

and the mission of teacher education programs. The passion translates into ambitious and highly-evolved expectations for future teachers, expectations that often differ dramatically from those of parents and teachers now in the classroom. "The soul of a teacher is what should be passed on from teacher to teacher," a Boston professor said with some intensity. "You have to have that soul to be a good teacher."

It's not my intention at this moment to recruit you to one or another side of this debate, but only to hold you by the back of the neck as Uncle Bud (who you'll meet up ahead) once held mine and point out that this vehicle has no brake pedal—ordinary parents and students have no way to escape this passion. Twist and turn as they might, they will be subject to any erotic curiosity inspired love arouses. In the harem of true belief, there is scant refuge from the sultan's lusty gaze.

Rain Forest Algebra

In the summer of 1997, a Democratic senator stood on the floor of the Senate denouncing the spread of what he called "wacko algebra"; one widely distributed math text referred to in that speech did not ask a question requiring algebraic knowledge *until page 107*. What replaced the boredom of symbolic calculation were discussions of the role of zoos in community life, or excursions to visit the fascinating Dogon tribe of West Africa. Whatever your own personal attitude toward "rain forest algebra," as it was snidely labeled, you would be hard-pressed not to admit one thing: its problems are almost computation-free. Whether you find the mathematical side of social issues relevant or not isn't in question. Your attention should be fixed on the existence of minds, nominally in charge of number enlightenment for your children, which consider a private agenda more important than numbers.

One week last spring, the entire math homework in fifth grade at middle-class P.S. 87 on the Upper West Side of Manhattan consisted of two questions: 1

Historians estimate that when Columbus landed on what is now the island of Hati [this is the spelling in the question] there were 250,000 people living there. In two years this number had dropped to 125,000. What fraction of the people who had been living in Hati when Columbus arrived remained? Why do you think the Arawaks died?

In 1515 there were only 50,000 Arawaks left alive. In 1550 there were 500. If the same number of people died each year, approximately how many people would have died each year? In 1550 what percentage of the original population was left alive? How do you feel about this?

Tom Loveless, professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, has no doubt that National Council of Teachers of Mathematics standards have deliberately de-emphasized math skills, and he knows precisely *how* it was done. But like other vigorous dissenters who have tried to arrest the elimination of critical intellect in children, he adduces no motive for the awesome project which has worked so well up to now. Loveless believes that the "real reform project has begun: writing standards that declare the mathematics children will learn." He may be right, but I am not so sanguine.

Elsewhere there are clues which should check premature optimism. In 1989, according to Loveless, a group of experts in the field of math education launched a campaign "to change the content and teaching of mathematics." This new math created state and district policies which "tend to present math reform as religion" and identify as sinful behaviors teacher-delivered instruction, individual student desk work, papers corrected for error. Teachers are ordered to keep "an elaborate diary on each child's 'mathematical disposition.'"

Specific skills de-emphasized are: learning to use fractions, decimals, percents, integers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division—all have given way to working with manipulatives like beans and counting sticks (much as the Arawaks themselves would have done) and with calculators. Parents worry themselves sick when fifth graders can't multiply 7 times 5 without hunting for beans and sticks. Students who learn the facts of math deep down in the bone, says Loveless, "gain a sense of number unfathomable to those who don't know them."

The question critics should ask has nothing to do with computation or reading ability and everything to do with this: How does a fellow human being come to regard ordinary people's children as experimental animals? What impulse triggers the pornographic urge to deprive kids of volition, to fiddle with their lives? It is vital that you consider this or you will certainly fall victim to appeals that you look at the worthiness of the *outcomes* sought and ignore the methods. This appeal to pragmatism urges a repudiation of principle, sometimes even on the grounds that modern physics "proves" there is no objective reality.

Whether children are better off or not being spared the effort of thinking algebraically may well be a question worth debating but, if so, the burden of proof rests on the challenger. Short-circuiting the right to choice is a rapist's tactic or a seducer's. If, behind a masquerade of number study, some unseen engineer infiltrates the inner layers of a kid's consciousness—the type of subliminal influence exerted in rain forest algebra—tinkering with the way a child sees the larger world, then in a literal sense the purpose of the operation is to dehumanize the experimental subject by forcing him or her into a predetermined consensus.

1 A P. S. 87 parent, Sol Stern, brought this information to my attention, adding this assessment, "The idea that schools can starve children of factual knowledge and basic skills, yet somehow teach critical thinking, defies common sense." Mr. Stern in his capacity as education editor of New York's City Journal often writes eloquently of the metropolitan school scene.

Godless, But Not Irreligious

True believers are only one component of American schooling, as a fraction probably a small one, but they constitute a tail that wags the dog because they possess a blueprint and access to policy machinery, while most of the rest of us do not. The true believers we call great educators—Komensky, Mather, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Mann, Dewey, Sears, Cubberley, Thorndike, et al.—were ideologues looking for a religion to replace one they never had or had lost faith in. As an abstract type, men like this have been analyzed by some of the finest minds in the history of modern thought—Machiavelli, Tocqueville, Renan, William James to name a few—but the clearest profile of the type was set down by Eric Hoffer, a one-time migrant farm worker who didn't learn to read until he was fifteen years old. In *The True Believer*, a luminous modern classic, Hoffer tells us:

Though ours is a godless age, it is the very opposite of irreligious. The true believer is everywhere on the march, shaping the world in his own image. Whether we line up with him or against him, it is well we should know all we can concerning his nature and potentialities.

It looks to me as if the energy to run this train was released in America from the stricken body of New England Calvinism when its theocracy collapsed from indifference, ambition, and the hostility of its own children. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, shortly after we became a nation, this energy gave rise to what Allan Bloom dubbed "the new American religion," eventually combining elements of old Calvinism with flavors of Anabaptism, Ranting, Leveling, Quakerism, rationalism, positivism, and that peculiar Unitarian spice: scientism.¹

Where the parent form of American Calvinism had preached the rigorous exclusion of all but a tiny handful deemed predestinated for salvation (the famous "Saints" or "justified sinners"), the descendant faith, beginning about the time of the Great Awakening of the 1740s, demanded universal *inclusion*, recruitment of *everyone* into a universal, unitarian salvation—whether they would be so recruited or not. It was a monumental shift which in time infiltrated every American institution. In its demand for eventual planetary unity the operating logic of this hybrid religion, which derived from a medley of Protestant sects as well as from Judaism, in a cosmic irony was intensely *Catholic* right down to its core.

After the Unitarian takeover of Harvard in 1805, orthodox Calvinism seemingly reached the end of its road, but so much explosive energy had been tightly bound into this intense form of sacred thought—an intensity which made every act, however small, brim with significance, every expression of personality proclaim an Election or

Damnation—that in its structural collapse, a ferocious energy was released, a tornado that flashed across the Burned Over District of upstate New York, crossing the lakes to Michigan and other Germanized outposts of North America, where it split suddenly into two parts—one racing westward to California and the northwest territories, another turning southwest to the Mexican colony called Texas. Along the way, Calvin's by now much altered legacy deposited new religions like Mormonism and Seventh Day Adventism, raised colleges like the University of Michigan and Michigan State (which would later become fortresses of the new schooling religion) and left prisons, insane asylums, Indian reservations, and poorhouses in its wake as previews of the secularized global village it aimed to create.

School was to be the temple of a new, all-inclusive civil religion. Calvinism had stumbled, finally, from being too self-contained. This new American form, learning from Calvinism's failure, aspired to become a multicultural super-system, world-girdling in the fullness of time. Our recent military invasions of Haiti, Panama, Iraq, the Balkans, and Afghanistan, redolent of the palmy days of British empire, cannot be understood from the superficial justifications offered. Yet, with an eye to Calvin's legacy, even foreign policy yields some of its secret springs. Calvinist origins armed school thinkers from the start with a utilitarian contempt for the notion of free will.

Brain-control experiments being explored in the psychophysical labs of northern Germany in the last quarter of the nineteenth century attracted rich young men from thousands of prominent American families. Such mind science seemed to promise that tailor-made technologies could emerge to shape and control thought, technologies which had never existed before. Children, the new psychologies suggested, could be emptied, denatured, then reconstructed to more accommodating designs. H.G. Wells' *Island of Dr. Moreau* was an extrapolation-fable based on common university-inspired drawing room conversations of the day.

David Hume's empirical philosophy, working together with John Locke's empiricism, had prepared the way for social thinkers to see children as blank slates—an opinion predominant among influentials long before the Civil War and implicit in Machiavelli, Bodin, and the Bacons. German psychophysics and physiological psychology seemed a wonderful manufactory of the tools a good political surgeon needed to remake the modern world. Methods for modifying society and all its inhabitants began to crystallize from the insights of the laboratory. A good living could be made by *saying* it was so, even if it weren't true. When we examine the new American teacher college movement at the turn of this century we discover a resurrection of the methodology of Prussian philosopher Herbart well underway. Although Herbart had been dead a long time by then, he had the right message for the new age. According to Herbart, "Children should be cut to fit."

[This essay is packed with references to Unitarians, Quakers, Anglicans, and other sects because without understanding something about their nature, and ambitions, it is utterly impossible to comprehend where school came from and why it took the shape it did. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that I am always referring to movements within these religions as they existed before the lifetime of any reader. Ideas set in motion long ago are still in motion because they took institutional form, but I have little knowledge of the modern versions of these sects, which for all I know are boiling a different kettle of fish.

Three groups descending from the seventeenth-century Puritan Reformation in England have been principal influences on American schooling, providing shape, infrastructure, ligatures, and intentions, although only one is popularly regarded as Puritan—the New England Congregationalists. The Congregational mind in situ, first around the Massachusetts coast, then by stages in the astonishing Connecticut Valley displacement (when Yale became its critical resonator), has been exhaustively studied. But Quakers, representing the left wing of Puritan thought, and Unitarians—that curious mirror obverse of Calvinism—are much easier to understand when seen as children of Calvinist energy, too. These three, together with the episcopacy in New York and Philadelphia, gathered in Columbia University and Penn, the Morgan Bank and elsewhere, have dominated the development of government schooling. Baptist Brown and Baptist Chicago are important to understand, too, and important bases of Dissenter variation like Presbyterian Princeton cannot be ignored, nor Baptist/Methodist centers at Dartmouth and Cornell, or centers of Freethought like Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and New York University in New York City. But someone in a hurry to understand where schooling came from and why it took the shape it did would not go far wrong by concentrating attention on the machinations of Boston, Philadelphia, Hartford, and New York City in school affairs from 1800 to 1850, or by simply examining the theologies of Congregationalism, Unitarianism, Hicksite and Gurneyite Quakerism, and ultimately the Anglican Communion, to discover how these, in complex interaction, have given us the forced schooling which so well suits their theologies.

An Insider's Insider

A bountiful source of clues to what tensions were actually at work back then can be found in Ellwood P. Cubberley's celebratory history, *Public Education in the United States* (1919, revised edition 1934), the standard in-house reference for official school legends until revisionist writings appeared in the 1960s.

Cubberley was an insider's insider, in a unique position to know things neither public nor press could know. Although Cubberley always is circumspect and deliberately vague, he cannot help revealing more than he wants to. For example, the reluctance of the country to accept its new yoke of compulsion is caught briefly in this flat statement on page 564 of the 1934 revision:

The history of compulsory-attendance legislation in the states has been much the same everywhere, and everywhere laws have been enacted only after overcoming strenuous opposition.

Reference here is to the period from 1852 to 1918 when the states, one by one, were caught in a compulsion net that used the strategy of gradualism:

At first the laws were optional...later the law was made state-wide but the compulsory period was short (ten to twelve weeks) and the age limits low, nine to twelve years. After this, struggle came to extend the time, often little by little...to extend the age limits downward to eight and seven and upwards to fourteen, fifteen or sixteen; to make the law apply to children attending private and parochial schools, and to require cooperation from such schools for the proper handling of cases; to institute state supervision of local enforcement; to connect school attendance enforcement with the child-labor legislation of the State through a system of working permits....[emphasis added]

Noteworthy is the extent to which proponents of centralized schooling were prepared to act covertly in defiance of majority will and in the face of extremely successful and inexpensive local school heritage. As late as 1901, after nearly a half-century of such legislation—first in Massachusetts, then state by state in the majority of the remaining jurisdictions—Dr. Levi Seeley of Trenton Normal School could still thunder warnings of lack of progress. In his book *Foundations of Education*, he writes, "while no law on the statute books of Prussia is more thoroughly carried out [than compulsory attendance]..." He laments that "...in 1890, out of 5,300,000 Prussian children, only 645 slipped out of the truant officer's net..." but that our own school attendance legislation is nothing more than "dead letter laws":

We have been attempting compulsory education for a whole generation and cannot be said to have made much progress—Let us cease to require only 20 weeks of schooling, 12 of which shall be consecutive, thus plainly hinting that we are not serious in the matter.

Seeley's frustration clouded his judgment. Somebody was most certainly serious about mass confinement schooling to stay at it so relentlessly and expensively in the face of massive public repudiation of the scheme.

Compulsion Schooling

The center of the scheme was Massachusetts, the closest thing to a theocracy to have emerged in America. The list below is a telling record of the long gap between the Massachusetts compulsory law of 1852 and similar legislation adopted by the next set of states. Instructive also in the chronology is the place taken by the District of Columbia, the seat of federal government.

Compulsory School Legislation

1852 Massachusetts

1875 Maine

1865	District of Columbia		New Jersey
1867	Vermont	1876	Wyoming Territory
1871	New Hampshire	1877	Ohio
	Washington Territory	1879	Wisconsin
1872	Connecticut	1883	Rhode Island
	New Mexico Territory		Illinois
1873	Nevada		Dakota Territory
1874	New York		Montana Territory
	Kansas		
	California		

Six other Western states and territories were added by 1890. Finally in 1918, sixty-six years after the Massachusetts force legislation, the forty-eighth state, Mississippi, enacted a compulsory school attendance law.

Keep in mind Cubberley's words: everywhere there was "strenuous opposition."

De-Moralizing School Procedure

But a strange thing happened as more and more children were drawn into the net, a crisis of an unexpected sort. At first those primitive one-room and two-room compulsion schools—even the large new secondary schools like Philadelphia's Central High—poured out large numbers of trained, disciplined intellects. Government schoolteachers in those early days chose overwhelmingly to emulate standards of private academies, and to a remarkable degree they succeeded in unwittingly sabotaging the hierarchical plan being moved on line. Without a carefully trained administrative staff (and most American schools had no administrators), it proved impossible to impose the dumbing-down process¹ promised by the German prototype. In addition, right through the 1920s, a skilled apprenticeship alternative was active in the United States, traditional training that still honored our national mythology of success.

Ironically, the first crisis provoked by the new school institution was taking its rhetorical mandate too seriously. From it poured an abundance of intellectually trained minds at exactly the moment when the national economy of independent livelihoods and democratic workplaces was giving way to professionally managed, accountant-driven hierarchical corporations which needed no such people. The typical graduate of a one-room school represented a force antithetical to the logic of corporate life, a cohort inclined to judge leadership on its merit, one reluctant to confer authority on mere titles.²

Immediate action was called for. Cubberley's celebratory history doesn't examine motives, but does uneasily record forceful steps taken just inside the new century to nip the career of intellectual schooling for the masses in the bud, replacing it with a different goal: the forging of "well-adjusted" citizens.

Since 1900, and due more to the activity of persons concerned with social legislation and those interested in improving the moral welfare of children than to educators themselves, there has been a general revision of the compulsory education laws of our States and the enactment of much new child-welfare...and anti-child-labor legislation....These laws have brought into the schools not only the truant and the incorrigible, who under former conditions either left early or were expelled, but also many children...who have no aptitude for book learning and many children of inferior mental qualities who do not

profit by ordinary classroom procedures....Our schools have come to contain many children who...become a nuisance in the school and *tend to demoralize school procedure*. [emphasis added]

We're not going to get much closer to running face-to-face into the true believers and the self-interested parties who imposed forced schooling than in Cubberley's mysterious "persons concerned with social legislation." At about the time Cubberley refers to, Walter Jessup, president of the University of Iowa, was publicly complaining, "Now America demands we educate the whole.... It is a much more difficult problem to teach all children than to teach those who want to learn."

Common sense should tell you it isn't "difficult" to teach children who don't want to learn. It's impossible. Common sense should tell you "America" was demanding nothing of the sort. But somebody most certainly was insisting on universal indoctrination in class subordination. The forced attendance of children who want to be elsewhere, learning in a different way, meant the short happy career of academic public schooling was deliberately foreclosed, with "democracy" used as the excuse. The new *inclusive* pedagogy effectively doomed the bulk of American children.

What you should take away from this is the *deliberate* introduction of children who "demoralize school procedure," children who were accommodated prior to this legislation in a number of other productive (and by no means inferior) forms of training, just as Benjamin Franklin had been. Richard Hofstadter and other social historians have mistakenly accepted at face value official claims that "democratic tradition"—the will of the people—imposed this anti-intellectual diet on the classroom. Democracy had nothing to do with it.

What we are up against is a strategic project supported by an uneasy coalition of elites, each with its own private goals in mind for the common institution. Among those goals was the urge to go to war against diversity, to impose orthodoxy on heterodox society. For an important clue to how this was accomplished we return to Cubberley:

The school reorganized its teaching along lines *dictated by the new psychology of instruction which had come to us from abroad....* Beginning about 1880 to 1885 our schools began to experience a new but steady change in purpose [though] it is only since about 1900 that any marked and rapid changes have set in.

The new psychology of instruction cited here is the new experimental psychology of Wilhelm Wundt at Leipzig, which dismissed the very existence of mind as an *epiphenomenon*. Children were complex machines, capable of infinite "adjustments." Here was the beginning of that new and unexpected genus of schooling which Bailyn said "troubled well-disposed, high-minded people," and which elevated a new class of technocrat like Cubberley and Dewey to national prominence. The intention to sell schooling as a substitute for faith is caught clearly in Cubberley's observation: "However much we may have lost interest in the old problems of faith and religion, the American people have come to believe thoroughly in education." New subjects replaced "the old limited book subject curriculum, both elementary and secondary."

This was done despite the objections of many teachers and citizens, and much ridicule from the public press. Many spoke sneeringly of the new subjects.

Cubberley provides an accurate account of the prospective new City on the Hill for which "public education" was to be a prelude, a City which rose hurriedly after the failed populist revolt of 1896 frightened industrial leaders. I've selected six excerpts from Cubberley's celebrated History which allow you to see, through an insider's eyes, the game that was afoot a century ago as U.S. school training was being fitted for its German uniform. (All emphasis in the list that follows is my own):

The Spanish-American War of 1898 served to awaken us as a nation...It revealed to us something of the position we should be called on to occupy in world affairs....

For the two decades following... *the specialization of labor and the introduction of labor-saving*

machinery took place to an extent before unknown.... The national and state government were called upon to do many things for the benefit of the people never attempted before.

Since 1898, education has awakened a public interest before unknown.... Everywhere state educational commissions and city school surveys have evidenced a new critical attitude.... Much new educational legislation has been enacted; *permission has been changed to obligation*; minimum requirements have been laid down by the States in many new directions; and new subjects of instruction have been added by the law. Courses of study have been entirely made over and new types of textbooks have appeared..... A complete new system of industrial education, national in scope, has been developed.

New normal schools have been founded and higher requirements have been ordered for those desiring to teach. *College departments of education have increased from eleven in 1891 to something like five hundred today [1919]. Private gifts to colleges and universities have exceeded anything known before in any land.* School taxes have been increased, old school funds more carefully guarded, and new constitutional provisions as to education have been added.

Compulsory education has begun to be a reality, and child-labor laws to be enforced.

A new interest in child-welfare and child-hygiene has arisen, *evidencing commendable desire to look after the bodies as well as the minds of children....*

Here in a brief progression is one window on the problem of modern schooling. It set out to build a new social order at the beginning of the twentieth century (and by 1970 had succeeded beyond all expectations), but in the process it crippled the democratic experiment of America, disenfranchising ordinary people, dividing families, creating wholesale dependencies, grotesquely extending childhoods. It emptied people of full humanity in order to convert them into human resources.

1 It was not really until the period around 1914 that sufficient teacher training facilities, regulated texts, controlled certification, uniform testing, stratified administrative cadres, and a sufficiently alienated public allowed the new age of schooling to tentatively begin.

2 In conservative political theory dating back to Thucydides, meritocracy is seen as a box of trouble. It creates such a competitive flux that no society can remain orderly and loyal to its governors because the governors can't guarantee preferment in licensing, appointments, grants, etc., in return. Meritocratic successes, having earned their place, are notoriously disrespectful. The most infamous meritocrat of history was Alcibiades, who ruined Athens, a cautionary name known to every elite college class, debating society, lyceum, or official pulpit in America.

William Torrey Harris

If you have a hard time believing that this revolution in the contract ordinary Americans had with their political state was intentionally provoked, it's time for you to meet William Torrey Harris, U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906. No one, other than Cubberley, who rose out of the ranks of professional pedagogues ever had as much influence as Harris. Harris both standardized and Germanized our schools. Listen to his voice from *The Philosophy of Education*, published in 1906:

Ninety-nine [students] out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom. This is not an accident but the result of substantial education, which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individual.

–*The Philosophy of Education* (1906)

Listen to Harris again, giant of American schooling, leading scholar of German philosophy in the Western hemisphere, editor and publisher of *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* which trained a generation of American intellectuals in the ideas of the Prussian thinkers Kant and Hegel, the man who gave America scientifically age-graded classrooms to replace successful mixed-age school practice. Again, from *The Philosophy of Education*, Harris sets forth his gloomy vision:

The great purpose of school can be realized better in dark, airless, ugly places.... It is to master the physical self, to transcend the beauty of nature. School should develop the power to withdraw from the external world.

–*The Philosophy of Education* (1906)

Nearly a hundred years ago, this schoolman thought self-alienation was the secret to successful industrial society. Surely he was right. When you stand at a machine or sit at a computer you need an ability to withdraw from life, to alienate yourself without a supervisor. How else could that be tolerated unless prepared in advance by simulated Birkenhead drills? School, thought Harris, was sensible preparation for a life of alienation. Can you say he was wrong?

In exactly the years Cubberley of Stanford identified as the launching time for the school institution, Harris reigned supreme as the bull goose educator of America. His was the most influential voice teaching what school was to be in a modern, scientific state. School histories commonly treat Harris as an old-fashioned defender of high academic standards, but this analysis is grossly inadequate. Stemming from his philosophical alignment with Hegel, Harris believed that children were *property* and that the state had a compelling interest in disposing of them as it pleased. Some would receive intellectual training, most would not. Any distinction that can be made between Harris and later weak curriculum advocates (those interested in stupefaction for everybody) is far less important than substantial agreement in both camps that parents or local tradition could no longer determine the individual child's future.

Unlike any official schoolman until Conant, Harris had social access to important salons of power in the United States. Over his long career he furnished inspiration to the ongoing obsessions of Andrew Carnegie, the steel man who first nourished the conceit of yoking our entire economy to cradle-to-grave schooling. If you can find copies of *The Empire of Business* (1902) or *Triumphant Democracy* (1886), you will find remarkable congruence between the world Carnegie urged and the one our society has achieved.

Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth" idea took his peers by storm at the very moment the great school transformation began—the idea that the wealthy owed society a duty to take over everything in the public interest, was an uncanny echo of Carnegie's experience as a boy watching the elite establishment of Britain and the teachings of its state religion. It would require perverse blindness not to acknowledge a connection between the Carnegie blueprint, hammered into shape in the Greenwich Village salon of Mrs. Botta after the Civil War, and the explosive developments which restored the Anglican worldview to our schools.

Of course, every upper class in history has specified what can be known. The defining characteristic of class control is its establishment of a grammar and vocabulary for ordinary people, and for subordinate elites, too. If the rest of us uncritically accept certain official concepts such as "globalization," then we have unwittingly committed ourselves to a whole intricate narrative of society's future, too, a narrative which inevitably drags an irresistible curriculum in its wake.

Since Aristotle, thinkers have understood that work is the vital theater of self-knowledge. Schooling in concert with a controlled workplace is the most effective way to foreclose the development of imagination ever devised. But where did these radical doctrines of true belief come from? Who spread them? We get at least part of the answer from the tantalizing clue Walt Whitman left when he said "only Hegel is fit for America." Hegel was the protean Prussian philosopher capable of shaping Karl Marx on one hand and J.P. Morgan on the other; the man who taught a generation of prominent Americans that history itself could be controlled by the deliberate provoking of

crises. Hegel was sold to America in large measure by William Torrey Harris, who made Hegelianism his lifelong project and forced schooling its principal instrument in its role as an unrivaled *agent provocateur*.

Harris was inspired by the notion that correctly managed mass schooling would result in a population so dependent on leaders that schism and revolution would be things of the past. If a world state could be cobbled together by Hegelian tactical manipulation, and such a school plan imposed upon it, history itself would stop. No more wars, no civil disputes, just people waiting around pleasantly like the Eloi in Wells' *The Time Machine*. Waiting for Teacher to tell them what to do. The psychological tool was alienation. The trick was to alienate children from themselves so they couldn't turn inside for strength, to alienate them from their families, religions, cultures, etc., so that no countervailing force could intervene.

Carnegie used his own considerable influence to keep this expatriate New England Hegelian the U.S. Commissioner of Education for sixteen years, long enough to set the stage for an era of "scientific management" (or "Fordism" as the Soviets called it) in American schooling. Long enough to bring about the rise of the multilayered school bureaucracy. But it would be a huge mistake to regard Harris and other true believers as merely tools of business interests; what they were about was the creation of a modern living faith to replace the Christian one which had died for them. It was their good fortune to live at precisely the moment when the dreamers of the empire of business (to use emperor Carnegie's label) for an Anglo-American world state were beginning to consider worldwide schooling as the most direct route to that destination.

Both movements, to centralize the economy and to centralize schooling, were aided immeasurably by the rapid disintegration of old-line Protestant churches and the rise from their pious ashes of the "Social Gospel" ideology, aggressively underwritten by important industrialists, who intertwined church-going tightly with standards of business, entertainment, and government. The experience of religion came to mean, in the words of Reverend Earl Hoon, "the best social programs money can buy." A clear statement of the belief that social justice and salvation were to be had through skillful consumption.

Shailer Mathews, dean of Chicago's School of Divinity, editor of *Biblical World*, president of the Federal Council of Churches, wrote his influential *Scientific Management in the Churches* (1912) to convince American Protestants they should sacrifice independence and autonomy and adopt the structure and strategy of corporations:

If this seems to make the Church something of a business establishment, it is precisely what should be the case.

If Americans listened to the corporate message, Mathews told them they would feel anew the spell of Jesus.

In the decade before WWI, a consortium of private foundations drawing on industrial wealth began slowly working toward a long-range goal of lifelong schooling and a thoroughly rationalized global economy and society.

Cardinal Principles

Frances Fitzgerald, in her superb study of American textbooks, *America Revised*, notes that schoolbooks are superficial and mindless, that they deliberately leave out important ideas, that they refuse to deal with conflict—but then she admits to bewilderment. What could the plan be behind such texts? Is the composition of these books accidental or deliberate?

Sidestepping an answer to her own question, Fitzgerald traces the changeover to a pair of influential NEA reports published in 1911 and 1918 which reversed the scholarly determinations of the blue-ribbon "Committee of Ten" report of 1893. That committee laid down a rigorous academic program for all schools and for all children, giving particular emphasis to history. It asserted, "The purpose of all education is to train the mind." The NEA reports of 1911 and 1918 denote a conscious abandonment of this intellectual imperative and the substitution of some very

different guiding principles. These statements savagely attack "the bookish curricula" which are "responsible for leading tens of thousands of boys and girls away from pursuits for which they are adapted," toward pursuits for which they are not—like independent businesses, invention, white collar work, or the professions.

Books give children "false ideals of culture." These reports urged the same kinds of drill which lay at the core of Prussian commoner schools. An interim report of 1917 also proposes that emphasis be shifted away from history to something safer called "social studies"; the thrust was away from any careful consideration of the past so that attention might be focused on the future. That 1918 NEA Report, "Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education," for all its maddening banality, was to prove over time one of the most influential education documents of the twentieth century. It decreed that specified behaviors, health, and vocational training were the central goals of education, not mental development, not character, not godliness.

Fitzgerald wrote she could not find a name for "the ideology that lies behind these texts." The way they handle history, for instance, is not history at all, "but a catechism... of American socialist realism." More than once she notes "actual hostility to the notion of intellectual training." Passion, in partnership with impatience for debate, is one good sign of the presence of true belief.

The most visible clue to the degree true belief was at work in mass schooling in the early decades of this century is the National Education Association's 1918 policy document. Written entirely in the strangely narcotic diction and syntax of official pedagogy, which makes it almost impenetrable to outsiders, *Cardinal Principles* announced a new de-intellectualized curriculum to replace the famous recipe for high goals and standards laid out three decades earlier by the legendary Committee of Ten, which declared the purpose of all education to be the training of the mind.

This new document contradicted its predecessor. In a condemnation worth repeating, it accused that older testament of forcing impossible intellectual ambitions on common children, of turning their empty heads, giving them "false ideals of culture." The weight of such statements, full of assumptions and implications, cannot easily be felt through its abstract language, but if you recognize that its language conceals a mandate for the mass dumbing down of young Americans, then some understanding of the magnitude of the successful political coup which had occurred comes through to penetrate the fog. The repudiation of the Committee of Ten was reinforced by a companion report proposing that history, economics, and geography be dropped at once.

What *Cardinal Principles* gave proof of was that stage one of a silent revolution in American society was complete. Children could now be taught anything, or even taught nothing in the part-time prisons of schooling, and there was little any individual could do about it. Bland generalities in the document actually served as potent talismans to justify the engineering of stupefaction. Local challenges could be turned back, local challengers demonized and marginalized, just by waving the national standards of *Cardinal Principles* as proof of one's legitimacy.

Venial motives as well as ideological ones were served by the comprehensive makeover of schooling, and palms incidentally greased in the transition soon found themselves defending it for their own material advantage. Schools quickly became the largest jobs project in the country, an enormous contractor for goods and services, one always willing to pay top dollar for bottom-shelf merchandise in a dramatic reversal of economic theory. There are no necessary economies in large-scale purchasing; a school is proof of that.

Cardinal Principles assured mass production technocrats they would not have to deal with intolerable numbers of independent thinkers—thinkers stuffed with dangerous historical comparisons, who understood economics, who had insight into human nature through literary studies, who were made stoical or consensus-resistant by philosophy and religion, and given confidence and competence through liberal doses of duty, responsibility, and experience.

The appearance of *Cardinal Principles* signaled the triumph of forces which had been working since the 1890s to break the hold of complex reading, debate, and writing as the common heritage of children reared in America. Like the resourcefulness and rigors of character that small farming conveyed, complex and active literacy produces a kind of character antagonistic to hierarchical, expert-driven, class-based society. As the nature of American society

was moved deliberately in this direction, forges upon which a different kind of American had been hammered were eliminated. We see this process nearly complete in the presentation of *Cardinal Principles*.

We always knew the truth in America, that almost everyone can learn almost anything or be almost anything. But the problem with that insight is that it can't co-exist with any known form of modern social ordering. Each species of true belief expresses some social vision or another, some holy way to arrange relationships, time, values, etc., in order to drive toward a settlement of the great question, "Why are we alive?" The trouble with a society which encourages argument, as America's did until the mid-twentieth century, is that there is no foreseeable end to the argument. No way to lock the door and announce that your own side has finally won. No certainty.

Our most famous true believers, the Puritans, thought they could build a City on the Hill and keep the riffraff out. When it became obvious that *exclusion* wasn't going to work, their children and grandchildren did an about-face and began to move toward a totally *inclusive* society (though not a free one). It would be intricately layered into social classes like the old British system. This time God's will wouldn't be offered as reason for the way things were arranged by men. This time Science and Mathematics would justify things, and children would be taught to accept the inevitability of their assigned fates in the greatest laboratory of true belief ever devised: the Compulsion Schoolhouse.

I remember the disbelief I felt the day I discovered that as a committee of one I could easily buy paper, milk, and any number of other school staples cheaper than my school district did.

The Unspeakable Chautauqua

One man left us a dynamic portrait of the great school project prematurely completed in miniature: William James, an insider's insider, foremost (and first) psychologist of America, brother of novelist Henry James. James' prestige as a most formidable Boston brahmin launched American psychology. Without him it's touch and go whether it would have happened at all. His *Varieties of Religious Experience* is unique in the American literary canon; no wonder John Dewey dropped Hegel and Herbart after a brief flirtation with the Germans and attached himself to James and his philosophy of pragmatism (which is the Old Norse religion brought up to date). But James was too deep a thinker to believe his own screed fully. In a little book called *Talks to Teachers*, which remains in print today, over a hundred years after it was written, James disclosed his ambivalence about the ultimate dream of schooling in America.

It was no Asiatic urge to enslave, no Midas fantasy of unlimited wealth, no conspiracy of class warfare but only the dream of a comfortable, amusing world for everyone, the closest thing to an Augustan pastoral you could imagine—the other side of the British Imperial coin. England's William Morris and John Ruskin and perhaps Thomas Carlyle were the literary godfathers of this dream society to come, a society already realized in a few cloistered spots on earth, on certain great English estates and at the mother center of the Chautauqua movement in western New York.

In 1899, James spoke to an idealistic new brigade of teachers recruited by Harvard, men and women meant to inspire the new institution then rising swiftly from the ashes of the older neighborhood schools, private schools, church schools, and home schools. He spoke to the teachers of the dream that the entire planet could be transformed into a vast Chautauqua. Before you hear what he had to say, you need to know a little about Chautauqua.

On August 10, 1878, John H. Vincent announced his plan for the formation of a study group to undertake a four-year program of guided reading for ordinary citizens. The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle signed up two hundred people its first hour, eighty-four hundred by year's end. Ten years later, enrollment had grown to one

hundred thousand. At least that many more had completed four years or fallen out after trying. In an incredibly short period of time every community in the United States had somebody in it following the Chautauqua reading program. One of its teachers, Melvil Dewey, developed the Dewey Decimal System still in use in libraries.

The reading list was ambitious. It included Green's *Short History of the English People*, full of specific information about the original Anglo-Saxon tribes and their child-rearing customs—details which proved strikingly similar to the habits of upper-class Americans. Another Chautauqua text, Mahaffey's *Old Greek Life*, dealt with the utopia of Classical Greece. It showed how civilization could only rise on the backs of underclass drudges. Many motivations to "Go Chautauqua" existed: love of learning, the social urge to work together, the thrill of competition in the race for honorary seals and diplomas which testified to a course completed, the desire to keep up with neighbors.

The Chautauqua movement gave settlers of the Midwest and Far West a common Anglo-German intellectual heritage to link up with. This grassroots vehicle of popular education offered illustrations of principles to guide anyone through any difficulty. And in Chautauqua, New York itself, at the Mother Center, a perfect jewel of a rational utopia was taking shape, attended by the best and brightest minds in American society. You'll see it in operation just ahead with its soda pop fountains and model secondary schools.

The great driving force behind Chautauqua in its early years was William Rainey Harper, a Yale graduate with a Ph.D. in philology, a man expert in ancient Hebrew, a prominent Freemason. Harper attracted a great deal of attention in his Chautauqua tenure. He would have been a prominent name on the national scene for that alone, even without his connection to the famous publishing family.

John Vincent, Chautauqua's founder, had been struck by the vision of a world college described in Bacon's utopia, one crowded and bustling with international clientele and honored names as faculty. "Chautauqua will exalt the profession of teacher until the highest genius, the richest scholarship, and the broadest manhood and womanhood of the nation are *consecrated* to this service," Vincent once said. His explanation of the movement:

We expect the work of Chautauqua will be to arouse so much interest in the subject of general liberal education that by and by in all quarters young men and women will be seeking means to obtain such education in established resident institutions.... Our diploma, though radiant with thirty-one seals—shields, stars, octagons—would not stand for much at Heidelberg, Oxford, or Harvard...an American curiosity.... It would be respected not as conferring honor upon its holder, but as indicating a popular movement in favor of higher education.

Chautauqua's leaders felt their institution was a way station in America's progress to something higher. By 1886 Chautauqua was well-known all over. The new University of Chicago, which Harper took over five years later, was patterned on the Chautauqua system, which in turn was superimposed over the logic of the German research university. Together with Columbia Teachers College, Yale, Michigan, Wisconsin, Stanford, and a small handful of others, Chicago would provide the most important *visible* leadership for American public school policy well into the twentieth century.

At the peak of its popularity, eight thousand American communities subscribed to Chautauqua's programmatic evangelism. The many tent-circuit Chautauquas simultaneously operating presented locals with the latest ideas in social progress, concentrating on self-improvement and social betterment through active Reform with a capital "R." But in practice, entertainment often superseded educational values because the temptation to hype the box-office draw was insidious. Over time, Progress came to be illustrated *dramatically* for maximum emotional impact. Audience reactions were then studied centrally and adjustments were made in upcoming shows using what had been learned. What began as education ended as show business. Its legacy is all over modern schooling in its spurious concept of *Motivation*.

Tent-Chautauqua did a great deal to homogenize the United States as a nation. It brought to the attention of America an impressive number of new ideas and concepts, always from a management perspective. What seemed even-handed was seldom that. The classic problem of ethical teaching is how to avoid influencing an audience to

think a certain way by the use of psychological trickery. In this, Chautauqua failed. But even a partial list of developments credited to Chautauqua is impressive evidence of the influence of this early mass communication device, a harbinger of days ahead. We have Chautauqua to thank in some important part for the graduated income tax, for slum clearance as a business opportunity, juvenile courts, the school lunch program, free textbooks, a "balanced" diet, physical fitness, the Camp Fire Girls, the Boy Scout movement, pure food laws, and much, much more.

One of the most popular Chautauqua speeches was titled "Responsibilities of the American Citizen." The greatest responsibility was to *listen* to national leaders and get out of the way of progress. Ideas presented during Chautauqua Week were argued and discussed after the tents were gone. The most effective kind of indoctrination, according to letters which passed among Chautauqua's directors, is always "self-inflicted." In the history of American orthodoxies, Chautauqua might seem a quaint sort of villain, but that's because technology soon offered a way through radio to "Chautauqua" on a grander scale, to Chautauqua *simultaneously* from coast to coast. Radio inherited tent-Chautauqua, presenting us with model heroes and families to emulate, teaching us all to laugh and cry the same way. The great dream of utopians, that we all behave alike like bees in a hive or ants in a hill, was brought close by Chautauqua, closer by radio, even closer by television, and to the threshold of universal reality by the World Wide Web.

The chapter in nineteenth-century history, which made Chautauqua the harbinger of the new United States, is not well enough appreciated. Ideas like evolution, German military tactics, Froebel's kindergartens, Hegelian philosophy, cradle-to-grave schooling, and systems of complete medical policing were all grist for Chautauqua's mill—nothing was too esoteric to be popularized for a mass audience by the circuit of tent-Chautauqua. But above all, Chautauqua loved Science. Science was the commodity it retailed most energetically. A new religion for a new day.

The Chautauqua operation had been attractively planned and packaged by a former president of Masonic College (Georgia), William Rainey Harper, a man whose acquaintance you made on the previous page. Dr. Harper left Chautauqua eventually to become Rockefeller's personal choice to head up a new German-style research university Rockefeller brought into being in 1890, the University of Chicago. He would eventually become an important early patron of John Dewey and other leading lights of pedagogy. But his first publicly acclaimed triumph was Chautauqua. Little is known of his work at Masonic College; apparently it was impressive enough to bring him to the attention of the most important Freemasons in America.

The real Chautauqua was not the peripatetic tent version but a beautiful Disney-like world: a village on a lake in upstate New York. William James went for a day to lecture at Chautauqua and "stayed for a week to marvel and learn"—his exact words of self-introduction to those teachers he spoke to long ago at Harvard. What he saw at Chautauqua was the ultimate realization of all reasonable thought solidified into one perfect working community. Utopia for real. Here it is as James remembered it for students and teachers:

A few summers ago I spent a happy week at the famous Assembly Grounds on the borders of Chautauqua Lake. The moment one treads that sacred enclosure, one feels one's self in an atmosphere of success. Sobriety and industry, intelligence and goodness, orderliness and reality, prosperity and cheerfulness pervade the air. It is a serious and studious picnic on a gigantic scale.

Here you have a town of many thousands of inhabitants, beautifully laid out in the forest and drained, and equipped with means for satisfying all the necessary lower and most of the superfluous higher wants of man. You have a first class college in full blast. You have magnificent music—a chorus of 700 voices, with possibly the most perfect open-air auditorium in the world.

You have every sort of athletic exercise from sailing, rowing, swimming, bicycling, to the ball field and the more artificial doings the gymnasium affords. You have kindergarten and model secondary schools. You have general religious services and special club-houses for the several sects. You have perpetually running soda-water fountains and daily popular lectures by distinguished men. You have the best of company and

yet no effort.

You have no diseases, no poverty, no drunkenness, no crime, no police. You have culture, you have kindness, you have equality, you have the best fruits of what mankind has fought and bled and striven for under the name of civilization for centuries. You have, in short, a foretaste of what human society might be were it all in the light with no suffering and dark corners.

Flickering around the edges of James' description is a dawning consciousness that something is amiss—like those suspicions of some innocent character on an old *Twilight Zone* show: it's so peaceful, so pretty and *clean*...it...it *looks* like Harmony, but I just have this terrible feeling that...*something is wrong*...!

When James left Chautauqua he realized he had seen spread before him the realization on a sample scale of all the ideals for which a scientific civilization strives: intelligence, humanity, and order. Then why his violently hostile reaction? "What a relief," he said, "to be out of there." There was no sweat, he continued disdainfully, "in this unspeakable Chautauqua." "No sight of the everlasting battle of the powers of light with those of darkness." No heroism. No struggle. No strength. No "strenuousness."

James cried aloud for the sight of the human struggle, and in a fit of pessimism, he said to the schoolteachers:

An irremediable flatness is coming over the world. Bourgeoisie and mediocrity, church sociables and teachers' conventions are taking the place of the old heights and depths....The whole world, delightful and sinful as it may still appear for a moment to one just escaped from the Chautauquan enclosure, is nevertheless obeying more and more just those ideals sure to make of it in the end a mere Chautauqua Assembly on an enormous scale.

A mere Chautauqua assembly? Is that all this monument to intelligence and order adds up to? Realizing the full horror of this country's first theme park, James would seem to have experienced an epiphany:

The scales seemed to fall from my eyes; and a wave of sympathy greater than anything I had ever before felt with the common life of common men began to fill my soul. It began to seem as if virtue with horny hands and dirty skin were the only virtue genuine and vital enough to take account of. Every other virtue poses; none is absolutely unconscious and simple, unexpectant of decoration or recognition like this. These are our soldiers, thought I, these our sustainers, these are the very parents of our lives.

Near the end of his life, James finally understood what the trap was, an overvaluation placed on order, rational intelligence, humanism, and material stuff of all sorts. The search for a material paradise is a flight away from humanity into the sterile nonlife of mechanisms where everything is perfect until it becomes junk.

At the end of 1997, Chautauqua was back in the news. A young man living there had deliberately infected at least nine girls in the small town adjoining—and perhaps as many as twenty-eight—with AIDS. He picked out most of his victims from the local high school, looking for, as he put it, "young ladies...in a risk-taking mode." A monster like this AIDS predator could turn up anywhere, naturally, but I was struck by the irony that he had found the very protected lakeside hamlet with its quaint nineteenth-century buildings and antique shops, this idyllic spot where so many of the true beliefs of rationality made their American debut, as the place to encounter women unprepared to know the ways of the human heart. "In a risk-taking mode" as he puts it in instructively sociological jargon.

Have over a hundred years of the best rational thinking and innovation the Western world can muster made no other impact on the Chautauqua area than to set up its children to be preyed upon? A columnist for a New York paper, writing about the tragedy, argued that condom distribution might have helped, apparently unaware that the legitimization of birth control devices in the United States was just one of many achievements claimed by Chautauqua.

Other remarks the reporter made were more to the point of why we need to be skeptical whether *any* kind of schooling—and Chautauqua's was the best human ingenuity could offer—is sufficient to make good people or good

places:

The area has the troubles and social problems of everywhere. Its kids are lonely in a crowd, misunderstood, beyond understanding and seeking love, as the song says, in all the wrong places.... Once, intact families, tightly knit neighborhoods and stay-at-home mothers enforced community norms. Now the world is the mall, mothers work, and community exists in daytime television and online chat rooms.

- [So Fervently Do We Believe](#)
- [The Necessity Of Detachment](#)
- [Enlarging The Nervous System](#)
- [Producing Artificial Wants](#)
- [The Parens Patriae Powers](#)
- [The Plan Advances](#)
- [Children's Court](#)
- [Mr.Young's Head Was Pounded To Jelly](#)
- [William Rainey Harper](#)
- [Death Dies](#)
- [The Three Most Popular Books](#)
- [No Place To Hide](#)
- [The Irony Of The Safety Lamp](#)

Every morning when you picked up your newspaper you would read of some new scheme for saving the world...soon all the zealots, all the Come-Outers, all the transcendentalists of Boston gathered at the Chardon Street Chapel and harangued each other for three mortal days. They talked on nonresistance and the Sabbath reform, of the Church and the Ministry, and they arrived at no conclusions. "It was the most singular collection of strange specimens of humanity that was ever assembled," wrote Edmund Quincy, and Emerson was even more specific: "Madmen, madwomen, men with beards, Dunkers, Muggletonians, Come-Outers, Groaners, Agrarians, Seventh-day Baptists, Quakers, Abolitionists, Calvinists, Unitarians, and Philosophers, all came successively to the top and seized their moment, if not their hour, wherein to chide, or pray, or preach or protest....There was some-thing artificial about the Chardon Street debates, there was a hothouse atmosphere in the chapel. There was too much suffering fools gladly, there was too much talk, too much display of learning and of wit, and there was, for all the talk of tolerance, an unchristian spirit.

– Henry Steele Commager, Theodore Parker

So Fervently Do We Believe

The cries of true believers are all around the history of schooling, thick as gulls at a garbage dump.

School principal Debbie Reeves of the upscale Barnwell Elementary School in an Atlanta suburb was quoted

recently by the USA Today newspaper as the author of this amazing testimonial of true belief, "I'm not sure you ever get to the point you have enough technology. We just believe so fervently in it."

It's that panting excitement you want to keep an eye out for, that exaggerated belief in human perfectibility that Tocqueville noticed in Americans 170 years ago. The same newspaper article wanders through the San Juan Elementary School in the very heart of Silicon Valley. There, obsolete computers sit idle in neat rows at the back of a spacious media center where years ago a highly touted "open classroom" with a sunken common area drew similar enthusiasm. The school lacks resources for the frequent updates needed to boast state-of-the-art equipment. A district employee said: "One dying technology on top of a former dying technology, sort of like layers of an archaeological dig."

America has always been a land congenial to utopian thought. The Mayflower Compact is a testimonial to this. Although its signers were trapped in history, they were ahistorical, too, capable of acts and conceptions beyond the imagination of their parents. The very thinness of constituted authority, the high percentage of males as colonists—homeless, orphaned, discarded, marginally attached, uprooted males—encouraged dreams of a better time to come. Here was soil for a better world where kindly strangers take charge of children, loving and rearing them more skillfully than their ignorant parents had ever done.

Religion flourished in the same medium, too, particularly the Independent and Dissenting religious traditions of England. The extreme rationalism of the Socinian heresy and deism, twin roots of America's passionate romance with science and technology to come, flourished too. Most American sects were built on a Christian base, but the absence of effective state or church monopoly authority in early America allowed 250 years of exploration into a transcendental dimension no other Western nation ever experienced in modern history, leaving a wake of sects and private pilgrimages which made America the heir of ancient Israel—a place where everyone, even free thinkers, actively trusted in a god of some sort.

Without Pope or Patriarch, without an Archbishop of Canterbury, the episcopal principle behind state and corporate churches lacked teeth, allowing people here to find their own way in the region of soul and spirit. This turned out to be fortunate, a precondition for our laboratory policy of national utopianism which required that every sort of visionary be given scope to make a case. It was a matter of degree, of course. Most Americans, most of the time, were much like people back in England, Scotland, Scandinavia, Germany, and Ireland, from which domains they had originally derived. After all, the Revolution itself was prosecuted by less than a quarter of our population. But enough of the other sort existed as social yeast that nobody could long escape some plan, scheme, exhortation, or tract designed to lead the faithful into one or another Promised Land. For the most part, Old Testament principles reigned, not New, and the Prophets had a good part of the national ear.

From 1830 to 1900, over one thousand utopian colonies flourished around the country, colonies which mixed the races, like Fanny Wright's Neshoba in Tennessee, colonies built around intensive schooling like New Harmony in Indiana, colonies which encouraged free love and commonly shared sexual partners as did the Perfectionists at Oneida in upstate New York. In the wonderful tapestry of American utopian thought and practice, one unifying thread stands out clearly. Long before the notion of forced schooling became household reality, utopian architects universally recognized that schooling was the key to breaking with the past. The young had to be isolated, and drilled in the correct way of looking at things or all would fall apart when they grew up. Only the tiniest number of these intentional communities ever did solve that problem, and so almost all vanished after a brief moment. But the idea itself lingered on.

In this chapter I want to push a bit into the lure of utopia, because this strain in human nature crisscrosses the growth curve of compulsion schooling at many junctures. Think of it as a search for the formula to change human nature in order to build paradise on earth. Such an idea is in flagrant opposition to the dominant religion of the Western world, whose theology teaches that human nature is permanently flawed, that all human salvation must be individually undertaken.

Even if you aren't used to considering school this way, it isn't hard to see that a curriculum to reach the first end

would have to be different from that necessary to reach the second, and the purpose of the educator is all important. It is simply impossible to evaluate what you see in a school without knowing its purpose, but if local administrators have no real idea why they do what they do—why they administer standardized tests, for instance, then any statement of purpose made by the local school can only confuse the investigator. To pursue the elusive purpose or purposes of American schooling as they were conceived about a century ago requires that we wander afield from the classroom into some flower beds of utopian aspiration which reared their head in an earlier America.

The Necessity Of Detachment

Hertzler's *History of Utopian Thought* traces the influence of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, a book you need to know something about if you are ever to adequately understand the roots of modern schooling. Hertzler makes a good case from the testimony of its founders that the Royal Society itself arose from the book's prophetic scheme of "Salomon's House," a world university assembling the best of universal mankind under its protection. One of its functions: to oversee management of everything.

New Atlantis had immense influence in England, Germany, Italy, and France. In France it was considered the principal inspiration of the *Encyclopedia* whose connection to the American Revolution is a close one. That story has been told too many times to bear repeating here. Suffice it to say that the very same triangle-encased eye that appears on the back of the American dollar appears as the center of Solomon's Temple in early eighteenth-century French artistic representations.

One consistent requirement of utopian procedure is the *detachment* of its subjects from ordinary human affairs. Acting with detached intelligence is what utopians are all about, but a biological puzzle intrudes: detaching intelligence from emotional life isn't actually possible. The feat has never been performed, although imaginative writers are endlessly intrigued by the challenge it presents. Sherlock Holmes or Mr. Spock of *Star Trek* fame come to mind.

Utopian thinking is intolerant of variety or competition, so the tendency of modern utopians to enlarge their canvas to include the whole planet through multinational organizations becomes disturbing. Utopians regard national sovereignty as irrational and democracy as a disease unjustified by biological reality. We need one world, they say, and that one world should (reasonably) be under direction of the best utopians. Democracy degrades the hierarchy necessary to operate a rational polity. A feature of nearly all utopias has been addiction to elaborate social machinery like schooling and to what we can call *marvelous machinery*. Excessive human affection between parents, children, husbands, wives, et al., is suppressed to allow enthusiasm for machine magic to stand out in bold relief.

It is useful to remember that Britain's Royal Society was founded not in the pursuit of pure knowledge and not by university dons but by practical businessmen and noblemen concerned with increased profits and lower wages.

Enlarging The Nervous System

There is a legend that in lost Atlantis once stood a great university in the form of an immense flat-topped pyramid from which star observations were made. In this university, most of the arts and sciences of the present world were contained. Putting aside that pleasant fancy which we can find clearly reflected on the obverse of our American Great Seal, almost any early utopia holds a profusion of inside information about things to come. In 1641 Bishop

John Wilkins, a founder of the Royal Society, wrote his own utopia, *Mercury: or the Secret and Swift Messenger*. Every single invention Wilkins imagined has come about: "a flying chariot," "a trunk or hollow pipe that shall preserve the voice entirely," a code for communicating by means of noise-makers, etc. Giphantia, by de la Roche, unmistakably envisions the telephone, the radio, television, and dehydrated foods and drinks. Even the mechanisms suggested to make these things work are very like the actual ones eventually employed.

Marshall McLuhan once called on us to notice that all machines are merely extensions of the human nervous system, artifices which improve on natural apparatus, each a utopianization of some physical function. Once you understand the trick, utopian prophecy isn't so impressive. Equally important, says McLuhan, the use of machinery causes its natural flesh and blood counterpart to atrophy, hence the lifeless quality of the utopias. Machines dehumanize, according to McLuhan, wherever they are used and however sensible their use appears. In a correctly conceived demonology, the Devil would be perceived as a machine, I think. Yet the powerful, pervasive influence of utopian reform thinking on the design of modern states has brought utopian mechanization of all human functions into the councils of statecraft and into the curriculum of state schooling.

An important part of the virulent, sustained attack launched against family life in the United States, starting about 150 years ago, arose from the impulse to escape fleshly reality. Interestingly enough, the overwhelming number of prominent social reformers since Plato have been childless, usually childless men, in a dramatic illustration of escape-discipline employed in a living tableau.

Producing Artificial Wants

Beginning about 1840, a group calling itself the Massachusetts School Committee held a series of secret discussions involving many segments of New England political and business leadership.¹ Stimulus for these discussions, often led by the politician Horace Mann, was the deterioration of family life that the decline of agriculture was leaving in its wake.²

A peculiar sort of dependency and weakness caused by mass urbanization was acknowledged by all with alarm. The once idyllic American family situation was giving way to widespread industrial serfdom. Novel forms of degradation and vice were appearing.

And yet at the same time, a great opportunity was presented. Plato, Augustine, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Hobbes, Rousseau, and a host of other insightful thinkers, sometimes referred to at the Boston *Athenaeum* as "The Order of the Quest," all taught that without compulsory universal schooling the idiosyncratic family would never surrender its central hold on society to allow utopia to become reality. Family had to be discouraged from its function as a sentimental haven, pressed into the service of loftier ideals—those of the perfected State.

Mann saw that society's "guards and securities" had to increase because an unsuspected pathological phenomenon was following the introduction of mass production into life. It was producing "artificial wants." It was multiplying the temptation to accumulate *things*. But the barbarous life of the machine laborer made family ideals a hollow mockery. Morality could no longer be taught by such families. Crime and vice were certain to explode unless children could be pried away from their degraded custodians and civilized according to formulas laid down by the best minds.

Barnas Sears, Mann's Calvinist colleague, saw the rapid growth of commercial mass entertainment catering to dense urban settlements as "a current of sensuality sweeping everything before it." Former bucolics, who once looked to nature for entertainment, were now pawns in the hands of worldly wisemen vending commercial amusement. Urban confinement robbed men and women of their ability to find satisfaction outside the titillation of mechanical excitation. Whoever provided excitement became the master.

Mann's other colleague, George Boutwell, who would inherit the leadership of New England education from Sears,

argued that a course must be selected from which there could be no turning back. Urbanization spelled the collapse of worker families; there was no remedy for it. Fathers were grossly diverted by nonagricultural labor from training their own children. Claims of a right to society and fashion led to neglect by mothers, too. "As in some languages there is no word which expresses the true idea of home," said Boutwell, "so in our manufacturing towns there are many persons who know nothing of its reality."

Mann proclaimed the State must assert itself as primary parent of children. If an infant's natural parents were removed—or if parental ability failed (as was increasingly certain)—it was the duty of government to step in and fill the parent's place. Mann noted that Massachusetts had a long tradition of being "parental in government." His friend Sears described the State as "a nourishing mother, as wise as she is beneficent. Yet, should difficulties arise, the State might become stern—as befits a ruling *patriarch*." (emphasis added)

Much light on these developments is shed by Michael Katz's *The Irony of Early School Reform* and by Joel Spring's historical writings. Both writers are recommended for a dense mine of information; both strike a good balance between the perspective supplied by their personal philosophies and reportage without allegiance to any particular dogma.

The decline of American agriculture was part of a movement to replicate the centralized pattern found in Britain, which had deliberately destroyed its own small farm holdings by 1800. Agriculture had been conducted on a capitalist basis in Britain since the notorious enclosure movement prompted by the growth of farming. In its first stage, peasants were displaced to make room for large-scale pasture farming. The second displacement transformed the small farmer into the "farm hand" or the factory worker.

Capitalist farming was established in Britain side by side with a growing manufacturing industry which made it possible to rely on the import of foodstuffs from abroad. Freely imported food meant cheap food. Cheap food meant cheap labor. The development of factory farming in America (and Australia) provided an outlet for the investment of surplus capital at good rates of interest; hence the decline of small farming in America was hastened considerably by direct inducements from its former motherland. Although as late as 1934, 33 percent of American employment was still in agriculture (versus 7 percent in Great Britain), the curriculum of small farm, which encouraged resourcefulness, independence, and self-reliance, was fast giving way to the curriculum of government education which called for quite a different character.

The *Parens Patriae* Powers

The 1852 compulsory schooling legislation of Massachusetts represents a fundamental change in the jurisprudence of parental authority, as had the adoption act passed by the nearly identically constituted legislature just four years prior, the first formal adoption legislation anywhere on earth since the days of the Roman Empire. Acts so radical could not have passed silently into practice if fundamental changes in the status of husbands and wives, parents and children, had not already gravely damaged the prestige of the family unit.

There are clear signs as far back as 1796 that elements in the new American state intended to interpose themselves in corners of the family where no European state had ever gone before. In that year, the Connecticut Superior Court, representing the purest Puritan lineage of original New England, introduced "judicial discretion" into the common law of child custody and a new conception of youthful welfare hardly seen before outside the pages of philosophy books—the notion that each child had an *individual* destiny, a private "welfare" *independent of what happened to the rest of its family*.

A concept called "psychological parenthood" began to take shape, a radical notion without legal precedent that would be used down the road to support drastic forcible intervention into family life. It became one of the basic justifications offered during the period of mass immigration for a compulsion law intended to put children under the thrall of so-called scientific parenting in schools.

Judicial discretion in custody cases was the first salvo in a barrage of poorly understood court rulings in which American courts *made* law rather than interpreted it. These rulings were formalized later by elected legislatures. Rubber-stamping the *fait accompli*, they marked a restructuring of the framework of the family ordered by a judicial body without any public debate or consent. No precedent for such aggressive court action existed in

English law. The concept lived only in the dreams and speculations of utopian writers and philosophers.

The 1840 case *Mercein v. People* produced a stunning opinion by Connecticut's Justice Paige—a strain of radical strong-state faith straight out of Hegel:

The moment a child is born it owes allegiance to the government of the country of its birth, and is entitled to the protection of the government.

As the opinion unrolled, Paige further explained "with the coming of civil society the father's sovereign power passed to the chief or government of the nation." A part of this power was then transferred back to both parents *for the convenience of the State*. But their guardianship was limited to the legal duty of maintenance and education, while absolute sovereignty remained with the State.

Not since John Cotton, teacher of the Boston church in the early Puritan period, had such a position been publicly asserted. Cotton, in renouncing Roger Williams, insisted on the absolute authority of magistrates in civil *and* religious affairs, the quintessential Anglican position. In later life he even came to uphold the power of judges over conscience and was willing to grant powers of life and death to authorities to bring about conformity. Thus did the Puritan rebellion rot from within.

A few years after the Paige ruling, American courts received a second radical authorization to intervene in family matters, "the best interest of the child" test. In 1847, Judge Oakley of New York City Superior Court staked a claim that such power "is not unregulated or arbitrary" but is "governed, as far as the case will admit, by fixed rules and principles." When such fixed rules and principles were not to be found, it caused no problem either, for it was only another matter subject to court discretion.

In the fifty-four-year period separating the Massachusetts compulsion school law/adoption law and the founding of Children's Court at the beginning of the twentieth century in Chicago, the meaning of these decisions became increasingly clear. With opposition from the family-centered societies of the tidewater and hill-country South diminished by civil war, the American state assumed the *parens patriae* powers of old-time absolute kings, the notion of the political state as the primary father. And there were signs it intended to use those powers to synthesize the type of scientific family it wanted, for the society it wanted. To usher in the future it wanted.

The Plan Advances

In the space of one lifetime, the United States was converted from a place where human variety had ample room to display itself into a laboratory of virtual orthodoxy—a process concealed by dogged survival of the mythology of independence. The cowboy and frontiersman continued as film icons until 1970, living ghosts of some collective national inspiration. But both died, in fact, shortly after Italian immigration began in earnest in the 1880s.

The crucial years for the hardening of our national arteries were those between 1845 and 1920, the immigration years. Something subtler than Anglo-Saxon revulsion against Celt, Latin, and Slav was at work in that period. A utopian ideal of society as an orderly social hive had been transmitting itself continuously through small elite bodies of men since the time of classical Egypt. New England had been the New World proving ground of this idea. Now New England was to take advantage of the chaotic period of heavy immigration and the opportunity of mass regimentation afforded by civil war to establish this form of total State.

The plan advanced in barely perceptible stages, each new increment making it more difficult for individual families to follow an independent plan. Ultimately, in the second and third decades of the twentieth century—decades which gave us Adolf Hitler, Prohibition, mass IQ-testing of an entire student population, junior high schools, raccoon coats, Rudy Vallee, and worldwide depression—room to breathe in a personal, peculiar, idiosyncratic way just ran out. It was the end of Thomas Jefferson's dream, the final betrayal of democratic promise in the last new world on

the planet.

When you consider how bizarre and implausible much of the conformist machinery put in place during this critical period really was—and especially how long and successfully all sorts of people resisted this kind of encroachment on fundamental liberty—it becomes clear that to understand things like universal medical policing, income tax, national banking systems, secret police, standing armies and navies which demand constant tribute, universal military training, standardized national examinations, the cult of intelligence tests, compulsory education, the organization of colleges around a scheme called "research" (which makes teaching an unpleasant inconvenience), the secularization of religion, the rise of specialist professional monopolies sanctioned by their state, and all the rest of the "progress" made in these seventy-five years, you have to find reasons to explain them. Why then? Who made it happen? What was the point?

Children's Court

The very clear connection between all the zones of the emerging American hive-world are a sign of some organized intelligence at work, with some organized end in mind.¹ For those who can read the language of conventional symbolism, the philosophical way being followed represents the extraordinary vision of the learned company of deists who created the country coupled to the Puritan vision as it had been derived from Anglo-Normans—descendants of the Scandinavian/French conquerors of England—those families who became the principal settlers of New England. It is careless to say that bad luck, accident, or blind historical forces caused the trap to spring shut on us.

Of the various ways an ancient ideal of perfected society can be given life through institutions under control of the State, one is so startling and has been realized so closely it bears some scrutiny. As the hive-world was being hammered out in the United States after 1850, the notion of unique, irreplaceable natural families came increasingly to be seen as the major roadblock in the path of social progress toward the extraordinary vision of a machine-driven, utopian paradise. To realize such a theory in practice, families must be *on trial* with each other constantly and with their neighbors, just as a politician is ever on trial. Families should be conditional entities, not categories absolute. This had been the operational standard of the Puritan settlement in America, though hardly of any other region (unless the Quaker/Pietist sections of the middle colonies who "shunned" outcasts, even if family). If, after testing, an original mother and father did not suit, then children should be removed and transferred to parent-surrogates. This is the basis of foster care and adoption.

By 1900, through the agency of the radical new Denver/Chicago "Children's Court," one important machine to perform this transfer function was in place. Children need not be wasted building blocks for the State's purpose just because their natural parents had been. The lesson the new machine-economy was teaching reinforced the spiritual vision of utopians: perfect interchangeability, perfect subordination. People could learn to emulate machines; and by progressive approximations they might ultimately become as reliable as machinery. In a similar vein, men and women were encouraged through easy divorce laws and ever-increasing accessibility to sexually explicit imagery, to delay choosing marriage mates. With the mystery removed, the pressure to mate went with it, it was supposed. The new system encouraged "trials," trying on different people until a good fit was found.

¹The paradox that a teenage female in the year 2000 requires parental permission to be given Tylenol or have ears pierced but not, in some states, to have an abortion suggests the magnitude of the control imposed and atleast a portion of its purpose.

Mr. Young's Head Was Pounded To Jelly

The most surprising thing about the start-up of mass public education in mid-nineteenth-century Massachusetts is

how overwhelmingly parents of all classes soon complained about it. Reports of school committees around 1850 show the greatest single theme of discussion was conflict between the State and the general public on this matter. Resistance was led by the old yeoman class—those families accustomed to taking care of themselves and providing meaning for their own lives. The little town of Barnstable on Cape Cod is exemplary. Its school committee lamented, according to Katz's *Irony of Early School Reform*, that "the great defect of our day is the absence of governing or controlling power on the part of parents and the consequent insubordination of children. Our schools are rendered inefficient by the apathy of parents."

Years ago I was in possession of an old newspaper account which related the use of militia to march recalcitrant children to school there, but I've been unable to locate it again. Nevertheless, even a cursory look for evidence of state violence in bending public will to accept compulsion schooling will be rewarded: Bruce Curtis' book *Building the Education State 1836-1871* documents the intense aversion to schooling which arose across North America, in Anglican Canada where leadership was uniform, as well as in the United States where leadership was more divided. Many schools were burned to the ground and teachers run out of town by angry mobs. When students were kept after school, parents often broke into school to free them.

At Saltfleet Township in 1859 a teacher was locked in the schoolhouse by students who "threw mud and mire into his face and over his clothes," according to school records—while parents egged them on. At Brantford, Ontario, in 1863 the teacher William Young was assaulted (according to his replacement) to the point that "Mr. Young's head, face and body was, if I understand rightly, pounded literally to jelly." Curtis argues that parent resistance was motivated by a radical transformation in the intentions of schools—a change from teaching basic literacy to molding social identity.

The first effective American compulsory schooling in the modern era was a reform school movement which Know-Nothing legislatures of the 1850s put into the hopper along with their radical new adoption law. Objects of reformation were announced as follows: Respect for authority; Self-control; Self-discipline. The properly reformed boy "acquires a fixed character," one that can be planned for in advance by authority in keeping with the efficiency needs of business and industry. Reform meant the total transformation of character, behavior modification, a complete makeover. By 1857, a few years after stranger-adoption was kicked off as a new policy of the State, Boutwell could consider foster parenting (the old designation for adoption) "one of the major strategies for the reform of youth."¹ The first step in the strategy of reform was for the State to become de facto parent of the child. That, according to another Massachusetts educator, Emory Washburn, "presents the State in her true relation of a parent seeking out her erring children."

The 1850s in Massachusetts marked the beginning of a new epoch in schooling. Washburn triumphantly crowed that these years produced the first occasion in history "whereby a state in the character of a common parent has undertaken the high and sacred duty of rescuing and restoring her lost children...by the influence of the school." John Philbrick, Boston school superintendent, said of his growing empire in 1863, "Here is *real* home!" (emphasis added) All schooling, including the reform variety, was to be in imitation of the best "family system of organization"; this squared with the prevalent belief that delinquency was not caused by external conditions—thus letting industrialists and slumlords off the hook—but by deficient homes.

Between 1840 and 1860, male schoolteachers were cleansed from the Massachusetts system and replaced by women. A variety of methods was used, including the novel one of paying *women* slightly more than *men* in order to bring shame into play in chasing men out of the business. Again, the move was part of a well-conceived strategy: "Experience teaches that these boys, many of whom never had a mother's affection...need the softening and refining influence which woman alone can give, and we have, wherever practicable, substituted female officers and teachers for those of the other sex."

A state report noted the *frequency* with which parents coming to retrieve their own children from reform school were met by news their children had been given away to others, through the state's *parens patriae* power. "We have felt it to be our duty *generally* to decline giving them up to their parents and have placed as many of them as we could with farmers and mechanics," reads a portion of Public Document 20 for the state of Massachusetts,

written in 1864. (emphasis added) To recreate the feelings of parents on hearing this news is beyond my power.

The reader will recall such a strategy was considered for Hester Prynne's child, Pearl, in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. That Hawthorne, writing at mid-century, chose this as a hinge for his characterization of the fallen woman Hester is surely no coincidence.

William Rainey Harper

Three decades later at the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper, former Chautauqua wizard, began a revolution that would change the face of American university education. Harper imported the university system of Germany into the United States, lock, stock, and barrel. Undergraduate teaching was to be relegated to a form of Chautauqua show business, while research at the graduate level was where prestige academic careers would locate, just as Bacon's *New Atlantis* had predicted. Harper, following the blueprint suggested by Andrew Carnegie in his powerful "Gospel of Wealth" essays, said the United States should work toward a unified scheme of education, organized vertically from kindergarten through university, horizontally through voluntary association of colleges, all supplemented by university extension courses available to everyone. Harper wrote in 1902:

The field of education is at the present time in an extremely disorganized condition. But the forces are already in existence [to change that]. Order will be secured and a great new system established, which may be designated "The American System." The important steps to be taken in working out such a system are coordination, specialization and association.

Harper and his backers regarded education purely as a commodity. Thorstein Veblen describes Harper's revolution this way:

The underlying business-like presumption accordingly appears to be that learning is a merchantable commodity, to be produced on a piece-rate plan, rated, bought and sold by standard units, measured, counted, and reduced to staple equivalence by impersonal, mechanical tests.

Harper believed modern business enterprise represented the highest and best type of human productive activity. He believed business had discovered two cosmic principles—techniques implicit in the larger concept of survival of the fittest: consolidation and specialization. Whatever will not consolidate and specialize must perish, he believed. The conversion of American universities into a system characterized by institutional giantism and specialization was not finished in Harper's lifetime, but went far enough that in the judgment of the *New York Sun*, "Hell is open and the lid is off!"

Harper's other main contribution to the corporatization of U.S. scholarly life was just as profound. He destroyed the lonely vocation of great teacher by trivializing its importance. Research alone, objectively weighed and measured, subject to the surveillance of one's colleagues would, after Harper, be the *sine qua non* of university teaching:

Promotion of younger men in the departments will depend more largely upon the results of their work as investigators than upon the efficiency of their teaching.... In other words, it is proposed to make the work of investigation primary, the work of giving instruction secondary.

Harper was the middleman who introduced the organization and ethics of business into the world of pedagogy. Harper-inspired university experience is now virtually the only ritual of passage into prosperous adulthood in the United States, just as the Carnegie Foundation and Rockefeller's General Education Board willed it to be. Few young men or women are strong enough to survive this passage with their humanity wholly intact.

Death Dies

In 1932, John Dewey, now elevated to a position as America's most prominent educational voice, heralded the end of what he called "the old individualism." Time had come, he said, for *a new individualism* that recognized the radical transformation that had come in American society:

Associations, tightly or loosely organized, more and more define opportunities, choices, and actions of individuals.

Death, a staple topic of children's books for hundreds of years because it poses a central puzzle for all children, nearly vanished as theme or event after 1916. Children were instructed indirectly that there was no grief; indeed, an examination of hundreds of those books from the transitional period between 1900 and 1916 reveals that Evil no longer had any reality either. There was no Evil, only bad attitudes, and those were correctable by training and adjustment therapies.

To see how goals of utopian procedure are realized, consider further the sudden change that fell upon the children's book industry between 1890 and 1920. Without explanations or warning, timeless subjects disappeared from the texts, to be replaced by what is best regarded as a political agenda. The suddenness of this change was signaled by many other indications of powerful social forces at work: the phenomenal overnight growth of "research" hospitals where professional hospital-ity replaced home-style sick care, was one of these, the equally phenomenal sudden enforcement of compulsory schooling another.

Through children's books, older generations announce their values, declare their aspirations, and make bids to socialize the young. Any sudden change in the content of such books must necessarily reflect changes in *publisher* consciousness, not in the general class of book-buyer whose market preferences evolve slowly. What is prized as human achievement can usually be measured by examining children's texts; what is valued in human relationships can be, too.

In the thirty-year period from 1890 to 1920, the children's book industry became a creator, not a reflector, of values. In any freely competitive situation this could hardly have happened because the newly aggressive texts would have risked missing the market. The only way such a gamble could be safe was for total change to occur *simultaneously* among publishers. The insularity and collegiality of children's book publishing allowed it this luxury.

One aspect of children's publishing that has remained consistent all the way back to 1721 is the zone where it is produced; today, as nearly three hundred years ago, the Northeast is where children's literature happens—inside the cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. No industry shift has ever disturbed this cozy arrangement: over time, concentration became even more intense. Philadelphia's role diminished in the twentieth century, leaving Boston and New York co-regents at its end. In 1975, 87 percent of all titles available came from those two former colonial capitals, while in 1876 it had been "only" 84 percent, a marvelous durability. For the past one hundred years these two cities have decided what books American children will read.

Until 1875, about 75 percent of all children's titles dealt with some aspect of the future—usually salvation. Over the next forty years this idea vanished completely. As Comte and Saint-Simon had strongly advised, the child was to be relieved of concerning itself with the future. The future would be arranged *for* children and for householders by a new expert class, and the need to do God's will was now considered dangerous superstition by men in charge.

Another dramatic switch in children's books had to do with a character's dependence on *community* to solve problems and to give life meaning. Across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, strength, afforded by stable community life, was an important part of narrative action, but toward the end of the nineteenth century a totally new note of "self" was sounded. Now protagonists became more competent, more in control; their need for family and communal affirmation disappeared, to be replaced by a new imperative—the quest for certification by *legitimate* authority. Needs now suddenly dominant among literary characters were so-called "expressive needs": exploring,

playing, joy, loving, self-actualizing, *intriguing against one's own parents*. By the early twentieth century, a solid majority of all children's books focus on the individual child *free from the web of family and community*.

This model had been established by the Horatio Alger books in the second half of the nineteenth century; now with some savage modern flourishes (like encouraging active indifference to family) it came to totally dominate the children's book business. Children were invited to divide their interests from those of their families and to concentrate on private concerns. A few alarmed critical voices saw this as a strategy of "divide and conquer," a means to separate children from family so they could be more easily molded into new social designs. In the words of Mary Lystad, the biographer of children's literary history from whom I have drawn heavily in this analysis:

As the twentieth century continued, book characters were provided more and more opportunities to pay attention to themselves. More and more characters were allowed to look inward to their own needs and desires.

This change of emphasis "was managed at the expense of others in the family group," she adds.

From 1796 to 1855, 18 percent of all children's books were constructed around the idea of conformity to some adult norm; but by 1896 emphasis on conformity had *tripled*. This took place in the thirty years following the Civil War. Did the elimination of the Southern pole of our national dialectic have anything to do with that? Yes, everything, I think. With tension between Northern and Southern ways of life and politics resolved permanently in favor of the North, the way was clear for triumphant American orthodoxy to seize the entire field. The huge increase in conformist themes rose even more as we entered the twentieth century and has remained at an elevated level through the decades since.

What is most deceptive in trying to fix this characteristic conformity is the introduction of an apparently libertarian note of free choice into the narrative equation. Modern characters are encouraged to self-start and to proceed on what appears to be an independent course. But upon closer inspection, that course is always toward a *centrally prescribed* social goal, never toward personal solutions to life's dilemmas. Freedom of choice in this formulation arises from the *feeling* that you have freedom, not from its actual possession. Thus social planners get the best of both worlds: a large measure of control without any kicking at the traces. In modern business circles, such a style of oversight is known as management by objectives.

Another aspect of this particular brand of regulation is that book characters are shown being *innovative*, but innovative only in the way they arrive at the same destination; their emotional needs for self-expression are met harmlessly in this way without any risk to social machinery. Much evidence of centralized tinkering within the factory of children's literature exists, pointing in the direction of what might be called Unit-Man—people as work units partially broken free of human *community* who can be moved about efficiently in various social experiments. William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, thought of such an end as "laboratory research aimed at designing a rational utopia."

To mention just a few other radical changes in children's book content between 1890 and 1920: school credentials replace experience as the goal book characters work toward, and child labor becomes a label of condemnation in spite of its ancient function as the quickest, most reliable way to human independence—the way taken in fact by Carnegie, Rockefeller, and many others who were now apparently quite anxious to put a stop to it.

Children are encouraged *not to work at all until* their late teen years, sometimes not until their thirties. A case for the general superiority of youth working instead of idly sitting around in school confinement is often made prior to 1900, but never heard again in children's books after 1916. The universality of this silence is the notable thing, deafening in fact.

Protagonists' goals in the new literature, while apparently individualistic, are almost always found being pursued through social institutions—those ubiquitous "associations" of John Dewey— never through family efforts. Families are portrayed as good-natured dormitory arrangements or affectionate manager-employee relationships, but emotional commitment to family life is noticeably ignored. Significant family undertakings like starting a farm or teaching each

other how to view life from a multi-age perspective are so rare that the few exceptions stand out like monadnocks above a broad, flat plain.

Three Most Significant Books

The three most influential books ever published in North America, setting aside the Bible and *The New England Primer*, were all published in the years of the utopian transformation of America which gave us government schooling: *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly* (1852), a book which testifies to the ancient obsession of English-speaking elites with the salvation of the under-classes; *Ben-Hur* (1880), a book illustrating the Christian belief that Jews can eventually be made to see the light of reason and converted; and the last a pure utopia, *Looking Backwards* (1888), still in print more than one hundred years later, translated into thirty languages.¹

In 1944, three American intellectuals, Charles Beard, John Dewey, and Edward Weeks, interviewed separately, proclaimed Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* second only to Marx's *Das Kapital* as the most influential book of modern times. Within three years of its publication, 165 "Bellamy Clubs" sprouted up. In the next twelve years, no less than forty-six other utopian novels became best sellers.

Was it Civil War, chaos, decades of mass immigration, or a frightening series of bloody national labor strikes shattering our class-free myths that made the public ready for stories of a better tomorrow? Whatever the cause or causes, the flowering communities of actual American utopianism took on real shape in the nineteenth century, from famous ones like Owenite communities and Fourierian *phalansteres* or Perfectionist sexual stewes like Oneida, right down to little-known oddities, like Mordecai Noah's "*Ararat*," city of refuge for Jews. First they happened, then they were echoed in print, not the reverse. Nothing in the human social record matches the outburst of purely American longing for something better in community life, the account recorded in deeds *and* words in the first full century of our nationhood.

What Bellamy's book uncovered in middle-class/upper-middle-class consciousness was revealing—the society he describes is a totally *organized* society, all means of production are in the hands of State parent-surrogates. The conditions of well-behaved, middle-class childhood are recreated on a corporate scale in these early utopias. Society in Bellamy's ideal future has eliminated the reality of democracy, citizens are answerable to commands of industrial officers, little room remains for self-initiative. The State regulates all public activities, owns the means of production, individuals are transformed into a unit directed by bureaucrats.

Erich Fromm thought Bellamy had missed the strong similarities between corporate socialism and corporate capitalism—that both *converge* eventually in goals of industrialization, that both are societies run by a managerial class and professional politicians, both thoroughly materialistic in outlook; both organize human masses into a centralized system; into large, hierarchically arranged employment-pods, into mass political parties. In both, alienated corporate man—well-fed, well-clothed, well-entertained—is governed by bureaucrats. Governing has no goals beyond this. At the end of history men are not slaves, but robots. This is the vision of utopia seen complete.

¹Economist Donald Hodges' book, *America's New Economic Order*, traces the intellectual history of professionalism in management (John Kenneth Galbraith's corporate "Technostructure" in *The New Industrial State*) to *Looking Backwards* which described an emerging public economy similar to what actually happened. Hodges shows how various theorists of the utopian transition like John Dewey and Frederick Taylor shaped the regime of professional managers we live under.

No Place To Hide

How could the amazing lives of George Washington, Andrew Jackson, the John D. Rockefellers, Margaret Fuller,

Amy Lowell, my own immigrant McManuses, Gattos, Zimmers, Hoffmans, and D'Agostinos, have added up to this lifeless utopia? Like a black hole it grew, although no human being flourishes under such a regime or rests easily inside the logic of hundreds of systems intermeshing into one master system, all demanding obedience from their human parts. Here is a materialistic inverse of Ezekiel's spiritual vision of wheels within wheels.

In a *New York Times* description of the first "Edison Project" school in Sherman, Texas—a system of proprietary schools supplying a home computer for every child, e-mail, longer school days and years, and "the most high-tech school in America" (as Benno Schmidt, former president of Yale, put it)—the local superintendent gloated over what he must have regarded as the final solution to the student-control issue: "Can you imagine what this means if you're home sick? The teacher can just put stuff in the student's e-mail....There's no place to hide anymore!"

The Irony Of The Safety Lamp

Have I made too much of this? What on earth is wrong with wanting to help people, even in institutionalizing the helping urge so it becomes more reliable? Just this: the helping equation is not as simple as utopians imagined. I remember the shock I felt on many occasions when my well-meant intercession into obvious problems a kid was having were met with some variation of the angry cry, "Leave me alone!" as if my assistance actually would have made things worse. It was baffling how often that happened, and I was a well-liked teacher. Is it possible there are hills that nature or God demands we climb alone or become forever the less for having been carried over them?

The plans of true believers for our lives may well be better than our own when judged against some abstract official standard, but to deny people their personal struggles is to render existence absurd. What are we left with then besides some unspeakable Chautauqua, a liar's world which promises that if only the rules are followed, good lives will ensue? Inconvenience, discomfort, hurt, defeat, and tragedy are inevitable accompaniments of our time on earth; we learn to manage trouble by managing trouble, not by turning our burden over to another. Think of the mutilated spirit that victims of overprotective parents carry long after they are grown and gone from home. What should make you suspicious about School is its relentless *compulsion*. Why should this rich, brawling, utterly successful nation ever have needed to resort to *compulsion* to push people into school classes—unless advocates of forced schooling were driven by peculiar philosophical beliefs not commonly shared?

Another thing should concern you, that the consequences of orthodox mass schooling have never been fully thought through. To show you what I mean, consider the example of Sir Humphrey Davy, inventor of the coalmine "safety" lamp after an 1812 explosion in which ninety-two boys and men were killed. Davy's assignment to the honor roll of saintliness came from his assertion that the sole object of his concern was to "serve the cause of humanity"—a declaration made credible by his refusal to patent the device.

Let nobody deny that the safety lamp decreased the danger of explosion relative to older methods of illumination, but the brutal fact is that many more miners died because of Davy's invention. It allowed the coal industry to grow rapidly, bringing vastly more men into the mines than before, opening deeper tunnels, exposing miners to mortal dangers of which fire-damp is only one, dangers for which there is no protection. Davy's "safety" lamp brought safety only in the most ironic sense; it was a profit-enhancement lamp most of all. Its most prominent effect was to allow the growth of industry, a blessing to some, a curse to others, but far from an unambiguous good because it wasted many more lives than it saved.

Serving "the cause of humanity" through forced government schooling may also turn out to be a stranger matter than it appears, another Davy lamp in different costume.

- [The Land Of Frankenstein](#)
- [The Long Reach Of The Teutonic Knights](#)
- [The Prussian Reform Movement](#)
- [Travelers' Reports](#)
- [Finding Work For Intellectuals](#)
- [The Technology Of Subjection](#)
- [The German/American Reichsbank](#)

Prussian Fire-Discipline

On approaching the enemy, the marching columns of Prussians wheeled in succession to the right or left, passed along the front of the enemy until the rear company had wheeled. Then the whole together wheeled into line facing the enemy. These movements brought the infantry into two long well-closed lines, parade-ground precision obtained thanks to remorseless drilling. With this movement was bound up a fire-discipline more extraordinary than any perfection of maneuver. "Pelotonfeuer" was opened at 200 paces from the enemy and continued up to 30 paces when the line fell on with the bayonet. The possibility of this combination of fire and movement was the work of Leopold, who by sheer drill made the soldier a machine capable of delivering (with flintlock muzzle-loading muskets) five volleys a minute. The special Prussian fire-discipline gave an advantage of five shots to two against all opponents. The bayonet attack, if the rolling volleys had done their work, was merely "presenting the cheque for payment," as a German writer put it.

– Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, "Prussia"

The Land of Frankenstein

The particular utopia American believers chose to bring to the schoolhouse was Prussian. The seed that became American schooling, twentieth-century style, was planted in 1806 when Napoleon's amateur soldiers bested the professional soldiers of Prussia at the battle of Jena. When your business is renting soldiers and employing diplomatic extortion under threat of your soldiery, losing a battle like that is pretty serious. Something had to be done.

The most important immediate reaction to Jena was an immortal speech, the "Address to the German Nation" by the philosopher Fichte—one of the influential documents of modern history leading directly to the first workable compulsion schools in the West. Other times, other lands talked about schooling, but all failed to deliver. Simple

forced training for brief intervals and for narrow purposes was the best that had ever been managed. This time would be different.

In no uncertain terms Fichte told Prussia the party was over. Children would have to be disciplined through a new form of universal conditioning. They could no longer be trusted to their parents. Look what Napoleon had done by banishing sentiment in the interests of nationalism. Through forced schooling, everyone would learn that "work makes free," and working for the State, even laying down one's life to its commands, was the greatest *freedom* of all. Here in the genius of semantic redefinition lay the power to cloud men's minds, a power later packaged and sold by public relations pioneers Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee in the seedtime of American forced schooling.

Prior to Fichte's challenge any number of compulsion-school proclamations had rolled off printing presses here and there, including Martin Luther's plan to tie church and state together this way and, of course, the "Old Deluder Satan" law of 1642 in Massachusetts and its 1645 extension. The problem was these earlier ventures were virtually unenforceable, roundly ignored by those who smelled mischief lurking behind fancy promises of free education. People who wanted their kids schooled had them schooled even then; people who didn't didn't. That was more or less true for most of us right into the twentieth century: as late as 1920, only 32 percent of American kids went past elementary school. If that sounds impossible, consider the practice in Switzerland today where only 23 percent of the student population goes to high school, though Switzerland has the world's highest per capita income in the world.

Prussia was prepared to use bayonets on its own people as readily as it wielded them against others, so it's not all that surprising the human race got its first effective secular compulsion schooling out of Prussia in 1819, the same year Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, set in the darkness of far-off Germany, was published in England. *Schule* came after more than a decade of deliberations, commissions, testimony, and debate. For a brief, hopeful moment, Humboldt's brilliant arguments for a high-level no-holds-barred, free-swinging, universal, intellectual course of study for all, full of variety, free debate, rich experience, and personalized curricula almost won the day. What a different world we would have today if Humboldt had won the Prussian debate, but the forces backing Baron vom Stein won instead. And that has made all the difference.

The Prussian mind, which carried the day, held a clear idea of what centralized schooling should deliver: 1) Obedient soldiers to the army; 2) Obedient workers for mines, factories, and farms; 3) Well-subordinated civil servants, trained in their function; 4) Well-subordinated clerks for industry; 5) Citizens who thought alike on most issues; 6) National uniformity in thought, word, and deed.

The area of individual volition for commoners was severely foreclosed by Prussian psychological training procedures drawn from the experience of animal husbandry and equestrian training, and also taken from past military experience. Much later, in our own time, the techniques of these assorted crafts and sullen arts became "discoveries" in the pedagogical pseudoscience of psychological behaviorism.

Prussian schools delivered everything they promised. Every important matter could now be confidently worked out in advance by leading families and institutional heads because well-schooled masses would concur with a minimum of opposition. This tightly schooled consensus in Prussia eventually combined the kaleidoscopic German principalities into a united Germany, after a thousand years as a nation in fragments. What a surprise the world would soon get from this successful experiment in national centralization! Under Prussian state socialism private industry surged, vaulting resource-poor Prussia up among world leaders. Military success remained Prussia's touchstone. Even before the school law went into full effect as an enhancer of state priorities, the army corps under Blücher was the principal reason for Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, its superb discipline allowing for a surprisingly successful return to combat after what seemed to be a crushing defeat at the Little Corporal's hands just days before.³ Unschooled, the Prussians were awesome; conditioned in the classroom promised to make them even more formidable.

The immense prestige earned from this triumph reverberated through an America not so lucky in its own recent fortunes of war, a country humiliated by a shabby showing against the British in the War of 1812. Even thirty years

after Waterloo, so highly was Prussia regarded in America and Britain, the English-speaking adversaries selected the Prussian king to arbitrate our northwest border with Canada. Hence the Pennsylvania town "King of Prussia." Thirty-three years after Prussia made state schooling work, we borrowed the structure, style, and intention of those Germans for our own first compulsion schools.

Traditional American school purpose—piety, good manners, basic intellectual tools, self-reliance, etc.—was scrapped to make way for something different. Our historical destination of personal independence gave way slowly to Prussian-purpose schooling, not because the American way lost in any competition of ideas, but because for the new commercial and manufacturing hierarchs, such a course made better economic sense.

This private advance toward nationalized schooling in America was partially organized, although little has ever been written about it; Orestes Brownson's journal identifies a covert national apparatus (to which Brownson briefly belonged) already in place in the decade after the War of 1812, one whose stated purpose was to "Germanize" America, beginning in those troubled neighborhoods where the urban poor huddled, and where disorganized new immigrants made easy targets, according to Brownson. Enmity on the part of old-stock middle-class and working-class populations toward newer immigrants gave these unfortunates no appeal against the school sentence to which Massachusetts assigned them. They were in for a complete makeover, like it or not.

Much of the story, as it was being written by 1844, lies just under the surface of Mann's florid prose in his *Seventh Annual Report* to the Boston School Committee. On a visit to Prussia the year before, he had been much impressed (so he said) with the ease by which Prussian calculations could determine precisely how many thinkers, problem-solvers, and working stiff the State would require over the coming decade, then how it offered the precise categories of training required to develop the percentages of human resource needed. All this was much fairer to Mann than England's repulsive episcopal system—schooling based on social class; Prussia, he thought, was republican in the desirable, manly, Roman sense. Massachusetts must take the same direction.

¶Machiavelli had clearly identified this as a necessary strategy of state in 1532, and even explored its choreography.

¶For an ironic reflection on the success of Prussian educational ideals, take a look at Martin Van Creveld's *Fighting Power* (Greenwood Press, 1982). Creveld, the world's finest military historian, undertakes to explain why German armies in 1914–1918 and 1939–1945, although heavily outnumbered in the major battles of both wars, consistently inflicted 30 percent more casualties than they suffered, whether they were winning or losing, on defense or on offense, no matter who they fought. They were better led, we might suspect, but the actual training of those field commanders comes as a shock. While American officer selection was right out of Frederick Taylor, complete with psychological dossiers and standardized tests, German officer training emphasized individual apprenticeships, week-long field evaluations, extended discursive written evaluations by senior officers who personally knew the candidates. The surprise is, while German state management was rigid and regulated with its common citizens, it was liberal and adventuresome with its elites. After WWII, and particularly after Vietnam, American elite military practice began to follow this German model. Ironically enough, America's elite private boarding schools like Groton had followed the Prussian lead from their inception as well as the British models of Eton and Harrow.

German elite war doctrine cut straight to the heart of the difference between the truly educated and the merely schooled. For the German High Command war was seen as an art, a creative activity, grounded in science. War made the highest demands on an officer's entire personality and the role of the individual in Germany was decisive. American emphasis, on the other hand, was doctrinal, fixated on cookbook rules. The U.S. officer's manual said: "Doctrines of combat operation are neither numerous nor complex. Knowledge of these doctrines provides a firm basis for action in a particular situation." This reliance on automatic procedure rather than on creative individual decisions got a lot of Americans killed by the book. The irony, of course, was that American, British, and French officers got the same lockstep conditioning in dependence that German foot soldiers did. There are some obvious lessons here which can be applied directly to public schooling.

¶Napoleon assumed the Prussians were retreating in the direction of the Rhine after a defeat, but in truth they were only executing a feint. The French were about to overrun Wellington when Blücher's "Death's Head Hussars," driven beyond human endurance by their officers, reached the battlefield at a decisive moment. Not pausing to rest, the Prussians immediately went into battle, taking the French in the rear and right wing. Napoleon toppled, and Prussian discipline became the focus of world attention.

The Long Reach Of The Teutonic Knights

In 1876, before setting off from America to Germany to study, William H. Welch, an ambitious young Bostonian, told his sister: "If by absorbing German lore I can get a little start of a few thousand rivals and thereby reduce my competition to a few hundred more or less it is a good point to tally." Welch did go off to Germany for the coveted Ph.D., a degree which at the time had its actual existence in any practical sense only there, and in due course his ambition was satisfied. Welch became first dean of Johns Hopkins Medical School and, later, chief advisor to the Rockefeller Foundation on medical projects. Welch was one of thousands who found the German Ph.D. a blessing without parallel in late-nineteenth-century America. German Ph.D.'s ruled the academic scene by then.

Prussia itself was a curious place, not an ordinary country unless you consider ordinary a land which by 1776 required women to register each onset of their monthly menses with the police. North America had been interested in Prussian developments since long before the American Revolution, its social controls being a favorite subject of discussion among Ben Franklin's¹ exclusive private discussion group, the *Junta*. When the phony Prussian baron Von Steuben directed bayonet drills for the colonial army, interest rose even higher. Prussia was a place to watch, an experimental state totally synthetic like our own, having been assembled out of lands conquered in the last crusade. For a full century Prussia acted as our mirror, showing elite America what we might become with discipline.

In 1839, thirteen years before the first successful school compulsion law was passed in the United States, a perpetual critic of Boston Whig (Mann's own party) leadership charged that pro-proposals to erect German-style teacher seminaries in this country were a thinly disguised attack on local and popular autonomy. The critic Brownson² allowed that state regulation of teaching licenses was a necessary preliminary only if school were intended to serve as a psychological control mechanism for the state and as a screen for a controlled economy. If that was the game truly afoot, said Brownson, it should be reckoned an act of treason.

"Where the whole tendency of education is to create obedience," Brownson said, "all teachers must be pliant tools of government. Such a system of education is not inconsistent with the theory of Prussian society but the thing is wholly inadmissible here." He further argued that "according to our theory the people are wiser than the government. Here the people do not look to the government for light, for instruction, but the government looks to the people. The people give law to the government." He concluded that "to entrust government with the power of determining education which our children shall receive is entrusting our servant with the power of the master. The fundamental difference between the United States and Prussia has been overlooked by the board of education and its supporters."³

This same notion of German influence on American institutions occurred recently to a historian from Georgetown, Dr. Carroll Quigley. Quigley's analysis of elements in German character which were exported to us occurs in his book *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time*. Quigley traced what he called "the German thirst for the coziness of a totalitarian way of life" to the breakup of German tribes in the great migrations fifteen hundred years ago. When pagan Germany finally transferred its loyalty to the even better totalitarian system of Diocletian in post-Constantine Rome, that system was soon shattered, too, a second tragic loss of security for the Germans. According to Quigley, they refused to accept this loss. For the next one thousand years, Germans made every effort to reconstruct the universal system, from Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire right up to the aftermath of Jena in 1806. During that thousand-year interval, other nations of the West developed individual liberty as the ultimate center of society and its principal philosophical reality. But while Germany was dragged along in the same process, it was never convinced that individual sovereignty was the right way to organize society.

Germans, said Quigley, wanted freedom from the need to make decisions, the negative freedom that comes from a universal totalitarian structure which gives security and meaning to life. The German is most at home in military, ecclesiastical, or educational organizations, ill at ease with equality, democracy, individualism, or freedom. This was the spirit that gave the West forced schooling in the early nineteenth century, so spare a little patience while I tell you about Prussia and Prussianized Germany whose original mission was expressly religious but in time became something else.

During the thirteenth century, the Order of Teutonic Knights set about creating a new state of their own. After fifty

turbulent years of combat, the Order successfully Christianized Prussia by the efficient method of exterminating the entire native population and replacing it with Germans. By 1281, the Order's hold on lands once owned by the heathen Slavs was secure. Then something of vital importance to the future occurred—the system of administration selected to be set up over these territories was not one patterned on the customary European model of dispersed authority, but instead was built on the logic of Saracen *centralized* administration, an Asiatic form first described by crusaders returned from the Holy Land. For an example of these modes of administration in conflict, we have Herodotus' account of the Persian attempt to force the pass at Thermopylae—Persia with its huge bureaucratically subordinated army arrayed against self-directed Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans. This romantic image of personal initiative, however misleading, in conflict with a highly trained and specialized military bureaucracy, was passed down to sixty generations of citizens in Western lands as an inspiration and model. Now Prussia had established an Asiatic beachhead on the northern fringe of Europe, one guided by a different inspiration.

Between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Order of Teutonic Knights evolved by gradual stages into a highly efficient, secular civil service. In 1525, Albert of Brandenburg declared Prussia a secular kingdom. By the eighteenth century, under Frederick the Great, Prussia had become a major European power in spite of its striking material disadvantages. From 1740 onwards, it was feared throughout Europe for its large, well-equipped, and deadly standing army, comprising a formulaic 1 percent of the population. After centuries of debate, the 1 percent formula became the lot of the United States military, too, a gift of Prussian strategist von Clausewitz to America. By 1740, the mature Prussian state-structure was almost complete. During the reigns of Frederick I and his son Frederick II, Frederick the Great, the modern absolute state was fashioned there by means of immense sacrifices imposed on the citizenry to sustain permanent mobilization.

The historian Thomas Macauley wrote of Prussia during these years: "The King carried on warfare as no European power ever had, he governed his own kingdom as he would govern a besieged town, not caring to what extent private property was destroyed or civil life suspended. The coin was debased, civil functionaries unpaid, but as long as means for destroying life remained, Frederick was determined to fight to the last." Goethe said Frederick "saw Prussia as a concept, the root cause of a process of abstraction consisting of norms, attitudes and characteristics which acquired a life of their own. It was a unique process, supra-individual, an attitude depersonalized, motivated only by the individual's duty to the State." Today it's easy for us to recognize Frederick as a systems theorist of genius, one with a real country to practice upon.

Under Frederick William II, Frederick the Great's nephew and successor, from the end of the eighteenth century on into the nineteenth, Prussian citizens were deprived of all rights and privileges. Every existence was comprehensively subordinated to the purposes of the State, and in exchange the State agreed to act as a good father, giving food, work, and wages suited to the people's capacity, welfare for the poor and elderly, and universal schooling for children. The early nineteenth century saw Prussian state socialism arrive full-blown as the most dynamic force in world affairs, a *powerful rival to industrial capitalism*, with antagonisms sensed but not yet clearly identified. It was the moment of schooling, never to surrender its grip on the throat of society once achieved.

Franklin's great-grandson, Alexander Dallas Bache became the leading American proponent of Prussianism in 1839. After a European school inspection tour lasting several years, his Report on Education in Europe, promoted heavily by Quakers, devoted hundreds of pages to glowing description of Pestalozzian method and to the German *gymnasium*.

Brownson is the main figure in Christopher Lasch's bravura study of Progressivism, *The True and Only Heaven*, being offered there as the best fruit of American democratic orchards, a man who, having seemingly tried every major scheme of meaning the new nation had to offer, settled on trusting ordinary people as the best course into the future.

3In *Opposition to Centralization* (1839).

4Quigley holds the distinction of being the only college professor ever to be publicly honored by a major party presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, in his formal acceptance speech for the presidential nomination

The Prussian Reform Movement

The devastating defeat by Napoleon at Jena triggered the so-called Prussian Reform Movement, a transformation which replaced cabinet rule (by appointees of the national leader) with rule by permanent civil servants and permanent government bureaus. Ask yourself which form of governance responds better to public opinion and you will realize what a radical chapter in European affairs was opened. The familiar three-tier system of education emerged in the Napoleonic era, one private tier, two government ones. At the top, one-half of 1 percent of the students attended *Akadamiensschulen*,¹ where, as future policy makers, they learned to think strategically, contextually, in wholes; they learned complex processes, and useful knowledge, studied history, wrote copiously, argued often, read deeply, and mastered tasks of command.

The next level, *Realsschulen*, was intended mostly as a manufactory for the professional proletariat of engineers, architects, doctors, lawyers, career civil servants, and such other assistants as policy thinkers at times would require. From 5 to 7.5 percent of all students attended these "real schools," learning in a superficial fashion how to think in context, but mostly learning how to manage materials, men, and situations—to be problem solvers. This group would also staff the various policing functions of the state, bringing order to the domain. Finally, at the bottom of the pile, a group between 92 and 94 percent of the population attended "people's schools" where they learned obedience, cooperation and correct attitudes, along with rudiments of literacy and official state myths of history.

This universal system of compulsion schooling was up and running by 1819, and soon became the eighth wonder of the world, promising for a brief time—in spite of its exclusionary layered structure—liberal education for all. But this early dream was soon abandoned. This particular utopia had a different target than human equality; it aimed instead for frictionless efficiency. From its inception *Volksschulen*, the people's place, heavily discounted reading; reading produced dissatisfaction, it was thought. The Bell-school remedy was called for: a standard of virtual illiteracy formally taught under state church auspices. Reading offered too many windows onto better lives, too much familiarity with better ways of thinking. It was a gift unwise to share with those permanently consigned to low station.

Heinrich Pestalozzi, an odd² Swiss-German school reformer, was producing at this time a nonliterary, experience-based pedagogy, strong in music and industrial arts, which was attracting much favorable attention in Prussia. Here seemed a way to keep the poor happy without arousing in them hopes of dramatically changing the social order. Pestalozzi claimed ability to mold the poor "to accept all the efforts peculiar to their class." He offered them love in place of ambition. By employing psychological means in the training of the young, class warfare might be avoided.

A curiously prophetic note for the future development of scientific school teaching was that Pestalozzi himself could barely read. Not that he was a dummy; those talents simply weren't important in his work. He reckoned his own semiliteracy an advantage in dealing with children destined *not* to find employment requiring much verbal fluency. Seventeen agents of the Prussian government acted as Pestalozzi's assistants in Switzerland, bringing insights about the Swiss style of schooling home to northern Germany.

While Pestalozzi's raggedy schools lurched clumsily from year to year, a nobleman, von Fellenberg, refined and systematized the Swiss reformer's disorderly notes, hammering the funky ensemble into clarified plans for a worldwide system of industrial education for the masses. As early as 1808, this nonacademic formulation was introduced into the United States under Joseph Neef, formerly a teacher at Pestalozzi's school. Neef, with important Quaker patronage, became the principal schoolmaster for Robert Owen's pioneering work-utopia at New Harmony, Indiana. Neef's efforts there provided high-powered conversational fodder to the fashionable Unitarian drawing rooms of Boston in the decades before compulsory legislation was passed. And when it did pass, all credit for the political victory belonged to those Unitarians.

Neef's influence resonated across the United States after the collapse of New Harmony, through lectures given by Robert Owen's son (later a congressman, then referee of J.P. Morgan's legal contretemps with the U.S. Army³),

and through speeches and intrigues by that magnificent nineteenth-century female dynamo Scottish émigré Fanny Wright, who demanded the end of family life and its replacement by communitarian schooling. The tapestry of school origins is one of paths crossing and recrossing, and more apparent coincidences than seem likely.

Together, Owen and Wright created the successful Workingman's Party of Philadelphia, which seized political control of that city in 1829. The party incorporated strong compulsion schooling proposals as part of its political platform. Its idea to place working-class children under the philosophical discipline of highly skilled craftsmen—men comparable socially to the yeomanry of pre-enclosure England—would have attracted favorable commentary in Philadelphia where banker Nicholas Biddle was locked in struggle for control of the nation's currency with working-class hero Andrew Jackson. Biddle's defeat by Jackson quickly moved abstract discussions of a possible social technology to control working class children from the airy realms of social hypothesis to policy discussions about immediate reality. In that instant of maximum tension between an embryonic financial capitalism and a populist republic struggling to emerge, the Prussian system of pedagogy came to seem perfectly sensible to men of means and ambition.

I've exaggerated the *neatness* of this tripartite division in order to make clear its functional logic. The system as it actually grew in those days without an electronic technology of centralization was more whimsical than I've indicated, dependent partially on local tradition and resistance, partially on the ebb and flow of fortunes among different participants in the transformation. In some places, the "academy" portion didn't occur in a separate institution, but as a division inside the Realschulen, something like today's "gifted and talented *honors*" programs as compared to the common garden variety "gifted and talented" pony shows.

⌘Pestalozzi's strangeness comes through in almost all the standard biographical sketches of him, despite universal efforts to emphasize his saintliness. In a recent study, Anthony Sutton claims Pestalozzi was also director of a secret lodge of "illuminated" Freemasonry—with the code name "Alfred." If true, the Swiss "educator" was even stranger than I sensed initially.

⌘During the Civil War, Morgan sold back to the army its own defective rifles (which had been auctioned as scrap) at a 1,300 percent profit. After a number of soldiers were killed and maimed, young Morgan found himself temporarily in hot water. Thanks to Owen his penalty was the return of about *half* his profit!

Travelers' Reports

Information about Prussian schooling was brought to America by a series of travelers' reports published in the early nineteenth century. First was the report of John Griscom, whose book *A Year in Europe* (1819) highly praised the new Prussian schools. Griscom was read and admired by Thomas Jefferson and leading Americans whose intellectual patronage drew admirers into the net. Pestalozzi came into the center of focus at about the same time through the letters of William Woodbridge to *The American Journal of Education*, letters which examined this strange man and his "humane" methods through friendly eyes. Another important chapter in this school buildup came from Henry Dwight,¹ whose *Travels in North Germany* (1825) praised the new quasi-religious teacher seminaries in Prussia where prospective teachers were screened for correct attitudes toward the State.

The most influential report, however, was French philosopher Victor Cousin's to the French government in 1831. This account by Cousin, France's Minister of Education, explained the administrative organization of Prussian education in depth, dwelling at length on the system of people's schools and its far-reaching implications for the economy and social order. Cousin's essay applauded Prussia for discovering ways to contain the danger of a frightening new social phenomenon, the industrial proletariat. So convincing was his presentation that within two years of its publication, French national schooling was drastically reorganized to meet Prussian *Volksschulen* standards. French children could be stupefied as easily as German ones.

Across the Atlantic, a similar revolution took place in the brand new state of Michigan. Mimicking Prussian organization, heavily Germanic Michigan established the very first State Superintendency of Education.² With a state minister and state control entering all aspects of schooling, the only missing ingredient was compulsion

legislation.

On Cousin's heels came yet another influential report praising Prussian discipline and Prussian results, this time by the bearer of a prominent American name, the famous Calvin Stowe whose wife Harriet Beecher Stowe, conscience of the abolition movement, was author of its sacred text, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's report to the Ohio legislature attesting to Prussian superiority was widely distributed across the country, the Ohio group mailing out ten thousand copies and the legislatures of Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Virginia each reprinting and distributing the document.

The third major testimonial to Prussian schooling came in the form of Horace Mann's *Seventh Report to the Boston School Committee* in 1843. Mann's *Sixth Report*, as noted earlier, had been a paean to phrenology, the science of reading head bumps, which Mann argued was the only proper basis for curriculum design. The *Seventh Report* ranked Prussia first of all nations in schooling, England last. Pestalozzi's psychologically grounded form of pedagogy was specifically singled out for praise in each of the three influential reports I've recited, as was the resolutely nonintellectual subject matter of Prussian *Volksschulen*. Also praised were mild Pestalozzian discipline, grouping by age, multiple layers of supervision, and selective training for teachers. Wrote Mann, "There are many things there which we should do well to imitate."³

Mann's *Report* strongly recommended radical changes in reading instruction from the traditional alphabet system, which had made America literate, to Prussia's hieroglyphic-style technique. In a surprising way, this brought Mann's *Report* to general public attention because a group of Boston schoolmasters attacked his conclusions about the efficacy of the new reading method and a lively newspaper debate followed. Throughout nineteenth-century Prussia, its new form of education seemed to make that warlike nation prosper materially and militarily. While German science, philosophy, and military success seduced the whole world, thousands of prominent young Americans made the pilgrimage to Germany to study in its network of research universities, places where teaching and learning were always subordinate to investigations done on behalf of business and the state. Returning home with the coveted German Ph.D., those so degreed became university presidents and department heads, took over private industrial research bureaus, government offices, and the administrative professions. The men they subsequently hired for responsibility were those who found it morally agreeable to offer obeisance to the Prussian outlook, too; in this leveraged fashion the gradual takeover of American mental life managed itself.

For a century here, Germany seemed at the center of everything civilized; nothing was so esoteric or commonplace it couldn't benefit from the application of German scientific procedure. Hegel, of Berlin University, even proposed historicism—that history was a scientific subject, displaying a progressive linear movement toward some mysterious end. Elsewhere, Herbart and Fechner were applying mathematical principles to learning, Müller and Helmholtz were grafting physiology to behavior in anticipation of the psychologized classroom, Fritsch and Hitzig were applying electrical stimulation to the brain to determine the relationship of brain functions to behavior, and Germany itself was approaching its epiphany of unification under Bismarck.

When the spirit of Prussian *pelotonfeuer* crushed France in the lightning war of 1871, the world's attention focused intently on this hypnotic, utopian place. What could be seen to happen there was an impressive demonstration that endless production flowed from a Baconian liaison between government, the academic mind, and industry. Credit for Prussian success was widely attributed to its form of schooling. What lay far from casual view was the religious vision of a completely systematic universe which animated this Frankensteinian nation.

¹Of the legendary Dwight family which bankrolled Horace Mann's forced schooling operation. Dwight was a distant ancestor of Dwight D. Eisenhower.

²This happened under the direction of William Pierce, a man as strange in his own way as Pestalozzi. Pierce had been a Unitarian minister around Rochester, New York, until he was forced to flee across the Great Lakes to escape personal harm during the anti-Masonic furor just before the first Jackson election. Pierce was accused of concealing a lodge of Illuminati behind the facade of his church. When his critics arrived with the tar and feathers, the great educator-to-be had already flown the coop to Michigan, his tools of illumination safely in his kit and a sneer of superior virtue on his noble lip. Some say a local lady of easy virtue betrayed the vigilante party to Pierce in exchange for a few pieces of

Socinian silver, but I cannot confirm this reliably. How he came to be welcomed so warmly in Michigan and honored with such a high position might be worth investigating.

The fact is Mann arrived in Prussia *after the schools had closed for the summer*, so that he never actually saw one in operation. This did nothing to dampen his enthusiasm, nor did he find it necessary to enlighten his readers to this interesting fact. I'll mention this again up ahead.

Finding Work For Intellectuals

The little North German state of Prussia had been described as "an army with a country," "a perpetual armed camp," "a gigantic penal institution." Even the built environment in Prussia was closely regimented: streets were made to run straight, town buildings and traffic were state-approved and regulated. Attempts were made to cleanse society of irregular elements like beggars, vagrants, and Gypsies, all this intended to turn Prussian society into "a huge human automaton" in the words of Hans Rosenberg. It was a state where scientific farming alternated with military drilling and with state-ordered meaningless tasks intended for no purpose but to subject the entire community to the experience of collective discipline—like fire drills in a modern junior high school or enforced silence during the interval between class periods. Prussia had become a comprehensive administrative utopia. It was Sparta reborn.

Administrative utopias spring out of the psychological emptiness which happens where firmly established communities are nonexistent and what social cohesion there is is weak and undependable. Utopias lurch into being when utopia happens best where there is no other social and political life around which seems attractive or even safe. The dream of state power refashioning countryside and people is powerful, especially compelling in times of insecurity where local leadership is inadequate to create a satisfying social order, as must have seemed the case in the waning decades of the nineteenth century. In particular, the growing intellectual classes began to resent their bondage to wealthy patrons, their lack of any truly meaningful function, their seeming overeducation for what responsibilities were available, their feelings of superfluosity. The larger national production grew on wheels and belts of steam power. The more it produced unprecedented surpluses, the greater became the number of intellectuals condemned to a parasitic role, and the more certain it became that some utopian experiment must come along to make work for these idle hands.

In such a climate it could not have seemed out of line to the new army of homeless men whose work was only endless thinking, to reorganize the entire world and to believe such a thing not impossible to attain. It was only a short step before associations of intellectuals began to consider it their *duty* to reorganize the world. It was then the clamor for universal forced schooling became strong. Such a need coincided with a corresponding need on the part of business to train the population as consumers rather than independent producers.

In the last third of the nineteenth century, a loud call for popular education arose from princes of industry, from comfortable clergy, professional humanists and academic scientists, those who saw schooling as an instrument to achieve state and corporate purposes. Prior to 1870, the only countries where everybody was literate were Prussia, its tiny adjacent neighbor states in Nordic Scandinavia, and the United States. Despite all projects of the Enlightenment, of Napoleon, of the parliaments of England and Belgium and of revolutionaries like Cavour, the vast majority of Europeans could neither read nor write. It was not, of course, because they were stupid but because circumstances of their lives and cultures made literacy a luxury, sometimes even impossible.

Steam and coal provided the necessary funds for establishing and maintaining great national systems of elementary schooling. Another influence was the *progressivism* of the liberal impulse, never more evident than in the presence of truly unprecedented abundance. Yes, it was true that to create that abundance it became necessary to uproot millions from their traditional habitats and habits, but one's conscience could be salved by saying that popular schooling would offer, *in time*, compensations for the proletariat. In any case, no one doubted Francois Guizot's epigram: "The opening of every schoolhouse closes a jail."

For the enlightened classes, popular education after Prussia became a sacred cause, one meriting crusading zeal. In 1868, Hungary announced compulsion schooling; in 1869, Austria; in 1872, the famous Prussian system was nationalized to all the Germanies; 1874, Switzerland; 1877, Italy; 1878, Holland; 1879, Belgium. Between 1878 and 1882, it became France's turn. School was made compulsory for British children in 1880. No serious voice except Tolstoy's questioned what was happening, and that Russian nobleman-novelist-mystic was easily ignored. Best known to the modern reader for *War and Peace*, Tolstoy is equally penetrating in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, in which he viewed such problems through the lens of Christianity.

The school movement was strongest in Western and Northern Europe, the ancient lands of the Protestant Reformation, much weaker in Catholic Central and Southern Europe, virtually nonexistent at first in the Orthodox East. Enthusiasm for schooling is closely correlated with a nation's intensity in mechanical industry, and that closely correlated with its natural heritage of coal. One result passed over too quickly in historical accounts of school beginnings is the provision for a quasi-military noncommissioned officer corps of teachers, and a staff-grade corps of administrators to oversee the mobilized children. One consequence unexpected by middle classes (though perhaps not so unexpected to intellectual elites) was a striking increase in gullibility among well-schooled masses. Jacques Ellul is the most compelling analyst of this awful phenomenon, in his canonical essay *Propaganda*. He fingers schooling as an unparalleled propaganda instrument; if a schoolbook prints it and a teacher affirms it, who is so bold as to demur?

The Technology Of Subjection

Administrative utopias are a peculiar kind of dreaming by those in power, driven by an urge to arrange the lives of others, organizing them for production, combat, or detention. The operating principles of administrative utopia are hierarchy, discipline, regimentation, strict order, rational planning, a geometrical environment, a production line, a cellblock, and a form of welfarism. Government schools and some private schools pass such parameters with flying colors. In one sense, administrative utopias are laboratories for exploring the technology of subjection and as such belong to a precise subdivision of pornographic art: total surveillance and total control of the helpless. The aim and mode of administrative utopia is to bestow order and assistance on an unwilling population: to provide its clothing and food. *To schedule it*. In a masterpiece of cosmic misjudgment, the phrenologist George Combe wrote Horace Mann on November 14, 1843:

The Prussian and Saxon governments by means of their schools and their just laws and rational public administration are doing a good deal to bring their people into a rational and moral condition. It is pretty obvious to thinking men that a few years more of this cultivation will lead to the development of free institutions in Germany.

Earlier that year, on May 21, 1843, Mann had written to Combe: "I want to find out what are the results, as well as the workings of the famous Prussian system." Just three years earlier, with the election of Marcus Morton as governor of Massachusetts, a serious challenge had been presented to Mann and to his Board of Education and the air of Prussianism surrounding it and its manufacturer/politician friends. A House committee was directed to look into the new Board of Education and its plan to undertake a teachers college with \$10,000 put up by industrialist Edmund Dwight. Four days after its assignment, the majority reported out a bill to kill the board! Discontinue the Normal School experiment, it said, and give Dwight his money back:

If then the Board has any actual power, it is a dangerous power, touching directly upon the rights and duties of the Legislature; if it has no power, why continue its existence at an annual expense to the commonwealth?

But the House committee did more; it warned explicitly that this board, dominated by a Unitarian majority of 7–5 (although Unitarians comprised less than 1 percent of the state), really wanted to install a Prussian system of

education in Massachusetts, to put "a monopoly of power in a few hands, contrary in every respect to the true spirit of our democratical institutions." The vote of the House on this was the single greatest victory of Mann's political career, one for which he and his wealthy friends called in every favor they were owed. The result was 245 votes to continue, 182 votes to discontinue, and so the House voted to overturn the recommendations of its own committee. A 32-vote swing might have given us a much different twentieth century than the one we saw.

Although Mann's own letters and diaries are replete with attacks on orthodox religionists as enemies of government schooling, an examination of the positive vote reveals that from the outset the orthodox churches were among Mann's staunchest allies. Mann had general support from Congregational, Presbyterian, and Baptist clergymen. At this early stage they were completely unaware of the doom secular schooling would spell out for their denominations. They had been seduced into believing school was a necessary insurance policy to deal with incoming waves of Catholic immigration from Ireland and Germany, the cheap labor army which as early as 1830 had been talked about in business circles and eagerly anticipated as an answer to America's production problems.

The reason Germany, and not England, provided the original model for America's essay into compulsion schooling may be that Mann, while in Britain, had had a shocking experience in English class snobbery which left him reeling. Boston Common, he wrote, with its rows of mottled sycamore trees, gravel walks, and frog ponds was downright *embarrassing* compared with any number of stately English private grounds furnished with stag and deer, fine arboretums of botanical specimens from faraway lands, marble *floors* better than the *table tops* at home, portraits, tapestries, giant gold-frame mirrors. The ballroom in the Bulfinch house in Boston would be a butler's pantry in England, he wrote. When Mann visited Stafford House of the Duke of Cumberland, he went into culture shock:

Convicts on treadmills provide the energy to pump water for fountains. I have seen equipages, palaces, and the regalia of royalty side by side with beggary, squalidness, and degradation in which the very features of humanity were almost lost in those of the brute.

For this great distinction between the stratified orders of society, Mann held the Anglican church to blame. "Give me America with all its rawness and want. We have aristocracy enough at home and here I trace its foundations." Shocked from his English experience, Mann virtually willed that Prussian schools would provide him with answers, says his biographer Jonathan Messerli.

Mann arrived in Prussia when its schools were closed for vacation. He toured empty classrooms, spoke with authorities, interviewed vacationing schoolmasters, and read piles of dusty official reports. Yet from this nonexperience he claimed to come away with a strong sense of the professional competence of Prussian teachers! All "admirably qualified and full of animation!" His wife Mary, of the famous Peabodys, wrote home: "We have not seen a teacher *with a book in his hand* in all Prussia; no, not one!" (emphasis added) This wasn't surprising, for they hardly saw teachers at all.

Equally impressive, he wrote, was the wonderful *obedience* of children; these German kinder had "innate respect for superior years." The German teacher corps? "The finest collection of men I have ever seen—full of intelligence, dignity, benevolence, kindness and bearing..." Never, says Mann, did he witness "an instance of harshness and severity. All is kind, encouraging, animating, sympathizing." On the basis of imagining this miraculous vision of exactly the Prussia he wanted to see, Mann made a special plea for changes in the teaching of reading. He criticized the standard American practice of beginning with the alphabet and moving to syllables, urging his readers to consider the superior merit of teaching entire words from the beginning. "I am satisfied," he said, "our greatest error in teaching lies in beginning with the alphabet."

The heart of Mann's most famous *Report to the Boston School Committee*, the legendary *Seventh*, rings a familiar theme in American affairs. It seems *even then we were falling behind!* This time, behind the Prussians in education. In order to catch up, it was mandatory to create a professional corps of teachers and a systematic curriculum, just as the Prussians had. Mann fervently implored the board to accept his prescription...*while there was still time!* The note of hysteria is a drum roll sounding throughout Mann's entire career; together with the vilification of his opponents, it constitutes much of Mann's spiritual signature.

That fall, the Association of Masters of the Boston Public Schools published its 150-page rebuttal of Mann's *Report*. It attacked the normal schools proposal as a vehicle for propaganda for Mann's "hot bed theories, in which the projectors have disregarded experience and observation." It belittled his advocacy of phrenology and charged Mann with attempting to excite the prejudices of the ignorant. Its second attack was against the teacher-centered nonbook presentations of Prussian classrooms, insisting the psychological result of these was to break student potential "for forming the habit of independent and individual effort." The third attack was against the "word method" in teaching reading, and in defense of the traditional alphabet method. Lastly, it attacked Mann's belief that interest was a better motivator to learning than discipline: "Duty should come first and pleasure should grow out of the discharge of it." Thus was framed a profound conflict between the old world of the Puritans and the new psychological strategy of the Germans.

The German/American Reichsbank

Sixty years later, amid a well-coordinated attempt on the part of industrialists and financiers to transfer power over money and interest rates from elected representatives of the American people to a "Federal Reserve" of centralized private banking interests, George Reynolds, president of the American Bankers Association, rose before an audience on September 13, 1909, to declare himself flatly in favor of a central bank modeled after the German Reichsbank. As he spoke, the schools of the United States were being forcibly rebuilt on Prussian lines.

On September 14, 1909, in Boston, the president of the United States, William Howard Taft, instructed the country that it should "take up seriously" the problem of establishing a centralized bank on the German model. As *The Wall Street Journal* put it, an important step in the education of Americans would soon be taken to translate the "realm of theory" into "practical politics," in pedagogy as well as finance.

Dramatic, symbolic evidence of what was working deep in the bowels of the school institution surfaced in 1935. At the University of Chicago's experimental high school, the head of the Social Science department, Howard C. Hill, published an inspirational textbook, *The Life and Work of the Citizen*. It is decorated throughout with the *fasces*, symbol of the Fascist movement, an emblem binding government and corporation together as one entity. Mussolini had landed in America.

The *fasces* are strange hybridized images, one might almost say Americanized. The bundle of sticks wrapped around a two-headed axe, the classic Italian Fascist image, has been decisively altered. Now the sticks are wrapped around a *sword*. They appear on the spine of this high school text, on the decorative page introducing Part One, again on a similar page for Part Two, and are repeated on Part Three and Part Four as well. There are also fierce, military eagles hovering above those pages.

The strangest decoration of all faces the title page, a weird interlock of hands and wrists which, with only a few slight alterations of its structural members, would be a living swastika.¹ The legend announces it as representing the "united strength" of Law, Order, Science, and the Trades. Where the strength of America had been traditionally located in our First Amendment guarantee of *argument*, now the Prussian connection was shifting the locus of attention in school to *cooperation*, with both working and professional classes sandwiched between the watchful eye of Law and Order. Prussia had entrenched itself deep into the bowels of American institutional schooling.

¹Interestingly enough, several versions of this book exist—although no indication that this is so appears on the copyright page. In one of these versions the familiar totalitarian symbols are much more pronounced than in the others.

- [Coal At The Bottom Of Things](#)
- [The Demon Of Overproduction](#)
- [The Quest For Arcadia](#)
- [Managerial Utopia](#)
- [The Positive Method](#)
- [Plato's Guardians](#)
- [Far-Sighted Businessmen](#)
- [Coal Gives The Coup De Grâce](#)
- [The Spectre Of Uncontrolled Breeding](#)
- [Global Associations Of Technique](#)
- [Labor Becomes Expendable](#)
- [Burying Children Alive](#)
- [The End Of Competition](#)
- [America Is Massified](#)
- [German Mind Science](#)

Wanting coal we could not have smelted the iron needed to make our engines, nor have worked our engines when we had got them. But take away the engines and the great towns vanish like a dream. Manufacturers give place to agriculture and pasture, and not ten men can live where now ten thousand

– Thomas Huxley (1875)

Coal introduced a new race of men who work with machinery instead of their hands, who cluster together in cities instead of spreading over the land, men who trade with those of other nations as readily as with those of their own town...men whose market is no longer the city or country but the world itself.

– Henry DeBeers Gibbins (1903)

Coal At The Bottom Of Things

Where I grew up the hand of coal was everywhere. Great paddle-wheel boats pushed it up and down the river every day, driven by the heat of coal fire. Columns of barges—eight, ten, twelve to a steamboat—were as common a sight to me as police cars are to the modern Manhattan where I live a half-century later. Those barges glide majestically through my memory, piled high with coal gleaming in the sunshine, glistening in the rain, coal destined

for steel mills, coke ovens, machine works, chemical plants, coal yards and coal chutes everywhere. Long before we saw the lead barges push the river aside, we saw plumes of smoke shoot above the willows on the riverbanks. As the big paddle-wheel went crashing by, orange clouds of sulfuric rip surged up in waves from the depths of the deep green river, an angry reminder that this wasn't just water we were playing with.

On certain days the town sky darkened from coal smoke, the air so dark automobiles used headlights at midday. Some favorite games we played circled around coal: one called simply "walking the railroad ties" gave way naturally to its successor "walking the rails" as a fellow got better at the thing. But whether you hopped along the creosoted wood or teetered on the polished steel stretching in the mind to infinity, the object was to gather up black diamonds spilled from the coal cars.

At night we played ghostly games in and out of long rows of abandoned beehive coke ovens, which looked for all the world like Roman tombs. I can still hear the crunch of a battered shovel digging into the pyramid of coal in our basement and the creak of the cast-iron gate on the furnace door opening to accept another load into the flames. Squinting through medieval view slits in the grate like an armored knight's helmet paid off with a shocking blast of superheated air. Nothing could be a more awe-inspiring introduction to power for a child.

Mother, puffing her Chesterfield, would often complain about dirty air as the cigarette smoldered, about the impossibility of keeping white clothes white for even a few hours, about her wish to live in the mountains where the air was clean. And Grandmother Mossie would say cryptically, her unfiltered Chesterfield cocked, "Smoke means work." Sometimes I heard men from the beer halls talking to Pappy (my granddad) about arcane matters which summoned up the same sacred utterance, "Smoke means work."

In science class at Ben Franklin Junior High, up in the clean mountains where Mother finally arrived, coal was waiting for me. I remember Mrs. Conn with sections of coal in which fantastic fossil shapes were embedded. In the same school, a music teacher, name now forgotten, taught us to sing the song he told us miners sang as they trudged to the pits each morning:

(Sadly, Slowly)
Zum, Gollie, Gollie, Gollie,
ZUM Gaw-lee, Gaw-lee,
Zum, Gollie, Gollie, Gollie,
ZUM Gaw-lee, Gaw-lee.

Although I doubted that song was genuine because the miners I passed on the street were far from musical men, even as a boy, I loved the feeling of connection it awakened to a life far stranger than any fiction, a life going on deep inside the green hills around me while I sat at my desk in school.

Occasionally an abandoned mine, its hollow tunnels reaching out for miles like dark tentacles beneath the earth, would catch fire along an undug coal seam and burn for years, causing wisps of smoke to issue from unlikely rural settings, reminder of the fiendish world unseen below the vegetable landscape. Now and then a coal tunnel would collapse, entombing men alive down there—from which fate (all too easy to imagine for a boy with a penchant for crawling around in storm drains) the victims would sometimes be rescued on the front page of the *Sun-Telegraph*, and sometimes not. When a situation like that was pronounced hopeless and miners sat dying underground with no chance of rescue—as sailors died in the hull of the *Arizona* at Pearl Harbor—I would stare in a different light at the black lumps I usually took for granted.

Another thing I clearly remember is that years after a mine was abandoned and the community far above had lost memory of its subterranean workings, occasionally an entire unsuspecting town would begin to slump into the pit. Frantic effort to shore up old tunnels would stretch out over months, even years, the progress of creeping disaster faithfully recorded in newspapers and street corner gossip as it marched house by house toward its inexorable conclusion. Very interesting, I hear you mutter, but what on earth does all this have to do with the problem of schooling? The answer is everything, but it will take some effort to see why, so deeply buried has been the

connection between schooling in all its aspects and the nature of the nation's work.

The Demon Of Overproduction

Real school reforms have always failed, not because they represent bad ideas but because they stand for different interpretations of the purpose of life than the current management of society will allow. If too many people adopted such reforms, a social and economic catastrophe would be provoked, one at least equal to that which followed the original imposition of centralized, collective life on men, women, and children in what had been a fairly libertarian American society. Reverberations of this earlier change in schooling are still being heard. What else do you think the explosion of homeschooling in recent years means?

The reason this cataclysm, out of which we got forced schooling, has been put to the question so very little by the groups it violently damaged is that the earlier storm had a confusing aspect to it. Those who suffered most didn't necessarily experience declining incomes. The cost of the metamorphosis was paid for in liberties: loss of freedom, loss of time, loss of significant human associations—including those with one's own children—loss of a spiritual dimension, perhaps. Losses difficult to pin down. Coal, and later oil, relentlessly forced a shift in crucial aspects of social life: our relation to nature, our relation to each other, our relation to ourselves. But nowhere was the impact greater than in the upbringing of children.

Colonial and Federal period economics in America emphasized the characteristics in children that were needed for independent livelihoods—characteristics which have remained at the heart of the romantic image of our nation in the world's eyes and in our own. These characteristics, however, were recognized by thinkers associated with the emerging industrial/financial systems as danger signs of incipient *overproduction*. The very ingenuity and self-reliance that built a strong and unique America came to be seen as its enemy. Competition was recognized as a corrosive agent no mass production economy could long tolerate without bringing ruinous financial panics in its wake, engendering bankruptcy and deflation.

A preliminary explanation is in order. Prior to coal and the inventiveness coal inspired, no harm attended the very realistic American dream to have one's own business. A startling percentage of Americans did just that. Businesses were small and local, mostly subsistence operations like the myriad small farms and small services which kept home and hearth together across the land. Owning yourself was understood to be the best thing. The most radical aspect of this former economy was the way it turned ancient notions of social class privilege and ancient religious notions of exclusion on their ears.

Yet, well inside a single generation, godlike fossil fuel power suddenly became available. Now here was the rub, that power was available to industrialists but at the same time to the most resourceful, tough-minded, independent, cantankerous, and indomitable group of ordinary citizens ever seen anywhere. A real danger existed that in the industrial economy being born, too many would recognize the new opportunity, thus creating far too much of everything for any market to absorb.

The result: prices would collapse, capital would go unprotected. Using the positive method of analysis (of which more later), one could easily foresee that continuous generations of improved machinery (with never an end) might well be forthcoming once the commitment was made to let the coal genie completely out of the bottle. Yet in the face of a constant threat of overproduction, who would invest and reinvest and reinvest unless steps were taken to curtail promiscuous competition in the bud stage? The most efficient time to do that was *ab ovo*, damping down those qualities of mind and character which gave rise to the dangerous American craving for independence where it first began, in childhood.

The older economy scheduled for replacement had set up its own basic expectations for children. Even small farmers considered it important to toughen the mind by reading, writing, debate, and declamation, and to learn to

manage numbers well enough so that later one might manage one's own accounts. In the older society, competition was the tough love road to fairness in distribution. Democracy, religion, and local community were the counterpoise to excesses of individualism. In such a universe, home education, self-teaching, and teacher-directed local schoolhouses served well.

In the waning days of this family-centered social order, an industrial replacement made necessary by coal lay waiting in the wings, but it was a perspective still unable to purge itself of excess competition, unable to sufficiently accept government as the partner it must have to suppress dangerous competition—from an all-too-democratic multitude.

Then a miracle happened or was arranged to happen. After decades of surreptitious Northern provocation, the South fired on Fort Sumter. Hegel himself could not have planned history better. America was soon to find itself shoehorned into a monoculture. The Civil War demonstrated to industrialists and financiers how a standardized population trained to follow orders could be made to function as a reliable money tree; even more, how the common population could be stripped of its power to cause political trouble. These war years awakened canny nostalgia for the British colonial past, and in doing so, the coal-driven society was welcomed for the social future it promised as well as for its riches.

The Quest For Arcadia

The great mistake is to dismiss too hastily the inducements offered by industrial utopia. Defense of it on strictly humanistic grounds is usually discarded as hypocrisy, but after some reflection, I don't think it is. Remember that many philosophical and scientific minds were fellow travelers in the industrial procession. Like Adam Smith, they predicted that just beyond the grim factory smoke and the foul pits where men mined coal, a neo-Arcadian utopia beckoned—we have already witnessed its evanescent, premature embodiment in Chautauqua. Thus was the stage set for institutional schooling as it eventually emerged. This Arcadia would be possible only if men of great vision had the nerve and iron discipline to follow where rationality and science led. The crucial obstacle was this: an unknown number of generations would have to be sacrificed to industrial slavery before mankind could progress to its comfortable destiny. On the other side of that immoral divide, paradise might lie.

How to get there? Though Malthus and Darwin had shown the way to intellectually devalue human life and to do with protoplasm whatever needed to be done, the force of Western tradition, particularly Judeo-Christian tradition, was still too strong to be brushed aside. Into this paradox stepped socialism. It was a happy coincidence that while one aspect of industrial imagination, the capitalist lobe, was doing the necessary dirty work of breaking the old order and reorganizing its parts, another, softer aspect of the same industrial mind could sing the identical song, but in a different key and to a different audience.

What socialists helped capitalism to teach was that the industrial promise was *true*. The road to riches could be followed through coal smoke to an eventual paradise on earth. *Only the masters had to be changed*. In place of bosses would sit workers. Meanwhile, both sides agreed (Marx is particularly eloquent on this point) that many would have to suffer a great while, until predictable advances in social reordering would ultimately relieve their descendants.

Managerial Utopia

In an angry letter to the *Atlantic Monthly* (January 1998), Walter Greene, of Hatboro, Pennsylvania, protested the "myth of our failing schools," as he called it, on these grounds:

We just happen to have the world's most productive work force, the largest economy, the highest material standard of living, more Nobel prizes than the rest of the world combined, the best system of higher education, the best high-tech medicine, and the strongest military. These things could not have been

accomplished with second-rate systems of education.

On the contrary, the surprising truth is they could not have been accomplished to the degree they have been *without* second-rate systems of education. But here it is, writ plain, the crux of an unbearable paradox posed by scientifically efficient schooling. It works. School, as we have it, does build national wealth, it does lead to endless scientific advances. Where is Greene's misstep? It lies in the equation of material prosperity and power with *education* when our affluence is built on *schooling* (and on entrepreneurial freedom, too, of course, for those libertarian enough to seize it). A century of relentless agit-prop has thrown us off the scent. The truth is that America's unprecedented global power and spectacular material wealth are a direct product of a third-rate educational system, upon whose *inefficiency* in developing intellect and character they depend. If we educated better we could not sustain the corporate utopia we have made. Schools build national wealth by tearing down personal sovereignty, morality, and family life. It was a trade-off.

This contradiction is not unknown at the top, but it is never spoken aloud as part of the national school debate. Unacknowledged, it has been able to make its way among us undisturbed by protest. E.P. Thompson's classic, *The Making of the English Working Class*, is an eye-opening introduction to this bittersweet truth about "productive" workforces and national riches. When a Colorado coalminer testified before authorities in 1871 that eight hours underground was long enough for any man because "he has no time to improve his intellect if he works more," the coal digger could hardly have realized his very deficiency was value added to the market equation.

What the nineteenth century in the coal-rich nations pointed toward was building infrastructure for managerial utopia, a kind of society in which unelected functional specialists make all the decisions that matter. Formal periods of indoctrination and canonical books of instruction limit these specialists in their choices. The idea of managerial science is to embed managers so securely in abstract regulation and procedure that the fixed purpose of the endeavor becomes manager-proof.

Managerial utopias take tremendous effort to build. England's version of this political form was a millennium in the building. Such governance is costly to maintain *because it wastes huge amounts of human time* on a principle akin to the old warning that the Devil finds work for idle hands; it employs large numbers of incompetent and indifferent managers in positions of responsibility on the theory that *loyalty* is more important than ability to do the job. I watched this philosophy in action in public schools for thirty years.

Ordinary people have a nasty habit of consciously and unconsciously sabotaging managerial utopias, quietly trashing in whole or part the wishes of managers. To thwart these tendencies, expensive vigilance is the watchword of large systems, and the security aspect of managerial utopia has to be paid for. Where did this money originally come from? The answer was from a surplus provided by coal, steam, steel, chemicals, and conquest. It was more than sufficient to pay for a mass school experiment. Society didn't slowly evolve to make way for a coal-based economy. It was forcibly made over in double time like Prussians marching to battle Napoleon at Waterloo. An entirely successful way of life was forcibly ushered out.

Before anything could be *modern*, the damnable past had to be uprooted with its village culture, tight families, pious population, and independent livelihoods. Only a state religion had the power to do this—England and Germany were evidence of that—but America lacked one. A military establishment had power to do it, too. France, under the Directorate and Napoleon, was the most recent example of what physical force could accomplish in remaking the social order, but military power was still too dispersed and unreliable in America to employ it consistently against citizens.

As the established Protestant religion schismed and broke apart, however, America came into possession of something that would serve in its place—a kaleidoscope of utopian cults and a tradition of utopian exhortation, a full palette of roving experts and teachers, Sunday schools, lyceums, pulpits, and Chautauquas. It was a propitious time and place in which to aim for long-range management of public opinion through the utopian schooling vehicle Plato had described and that modern Prussia was actually using.

It takes no great insight or intelligence to see that the health of a centralized economy built around dense

concentrations of economic power and a close business alliance with government can't tolerate any considerable degree of intellectual schooling. This is no vain hypothesis. The recent French Revolution was widely regarded as the work of a horde of underemployed intellectuals, the American uprising more of the same. As the nineteenth century wore on, the Hungarian and Italian revolutions were both financed and partially planned from the United States using cells of marginal intellectuals, third sons, and other malcontents as a volunteer fifth column in advance of the revolutionary moment back home. Ample precedent to fear the educated was there; it was recognized that historical precedent identified thoughtful schooling as a dangerous blessing.

The Positive Method

Most of the anti-intellectual shift in schooling the young was determined by the attitudes and needs of prominent businessmen. The first exhibit for your perusal is the U.S. Bureau of Education's *Circular of Information* for April 1872, which centers around what it calls the "problem of educational schooling." With whose interests in mind did the bureau view education as a problem? The amazing answer is: from a big business perspective. By 1872, this still feeble arm of the federal government is seen filled with concern for large industrial employers at a time when those were still a modest fraction of the total economy.

According to this *Circular of Information*, "inculcating knowledge" teaches workers to be able to "perceive and calculate their grievances," thus making them "more redoubtable foes" in labor struggles. Indeed, this was one important reason for Thomas Jefferson's own tentative support of a system of universal schooling, but something had been lost between Monticello and the Capital. "Such an enabling is bound to retard the growth of industry," continues the *Circular*. There is nothing ambiguous about that statement at all, and the writer is correct, of course.

Sixteen years later (1888), we can trace the growth in this attitude from the much more candid language in the *Report of the Senate Committee on Education*. Its gigantic bulk might be summarized in this single sentence taken from page 1,382:

We believe that education is one of the principal causes of discontent of late years manifesting itself among the laboring classes.

Once we acknowledge that planned economies of nation or corporation are systems with their own operating integrity, quite sensibly antagonistic to the risks educated minds pose, much of formal schooling's role in the transformation that came is predictable. If education is indeed "one of the principal causes of discontent," it performs that subversive function innocently by developing intellect and character in such a way as to resist absorption into impersonal systems: *Here is the crux of the difference between education and schooling— the former turns on independence, knowledge, ability, comprehension, and integrity; the latter upon obedience.*

In *The Empire of Business* (1902), Andrew Carnegie, author of the Homestead siege which destroyed the steelworkers union, inveighs against "teachings which serve to imbue [children] with false ideas." From a transatlantic business perspective, education taught what was socially and economically useless, transmitting bad attitudes which turned students against the ripening scheme of centralized national management. Carnegie's new empire demanded that old-fashioned character be schooled out of children in a hurry. It would be a large mistake to assume this new empire of business of which Carnegie boasts was only a new face on old style greed. While it did take away liberty and sovereignty, it put forth serious intellectual arguments for doing so. Ordinary people were promised what Walter Greene's outraged letter quoted earlier at the beginning of this chapter tells you they got: the best space program, the best high-tech medicine, the strongest military, the highest material standard of living. These things could not have been accomplished without a kind of forced schooling that terminated most independent livelihoods. That was the price paid for a gusher of easy prosperity.

To understand this paradox better requires some insight into what inspired such *certainty* among the architects of modern schooling that this disruption would work to produce material prosperity. Their faith that wealth would inevitably follow the social mechanization of the population is founded on a magnificent insight of Francis Bacon's,

set down in startlingly clear prose back in the early seventeenth century. Thanks to the patronage of John Stuart Mill, by the mid-nineteenth century, the seeds that Bacon planted grew into the cult of scientific positivism, a movement we associate today with the name of a Frenchman, Auguste Comte. It's hard to overestimate the influence positivism had on the formation of mass schooling and on the shaping of an international corporate economy made possible by coal.

Positivism holds that if proper procedures are honored, then scientific marvels and inventions follow automatically. If you weigh and measure and count and categorize slowly and patiently, retaining the microscopic bits of data which can be confirmed, rejecting those that cannot, on and on and on and on, then genius and talent are almost irrelevant—improvements will present themselves regularly in an endless progression despite any fall-off in creative power. Advances in power and control are mainly a function of the amount of money spent, the quantity of manpower employed, and correct methodology.

Mankind can be freed from the tyranny of intelligence by faithful obedience to system! This is a shattering pronouncement, one made all the more difficult to resist because it seems to work. Even today, its full significance isn't widely understood, nor is the implacable enmity it demands toward any spiritual view of humanity.

In the positivist method, the managerial classes of the late nineteenth century, including their Progressive progeny in the social management game, knew they had a mill to grind perpetual profits—financial, intellectual, and social. Since innovations in production and organization are a principal engine of social change, and since positive science has the power to produce such innovations without end, then even during the launch of our era of scientific management it had to be clear to its architects that nonstop social turbulence would be a daily companion of exercising this power. This is what the closet philosophy of bionomics was there to explain. It preached that the evolutionarily advanced would alone be able to tolerate the psychic chaos—as for the rest, the fate of Cro-Magnon man and the Neanderthal were history's answer. And the circularity of this convenient proposition was lost on its authors.

Faced with the problem of dangerous educated adults, what could be more natural than a factory to produce safely stupefied children? You've already seen that the positive system has only limited regard for brainy people, so nothing is lost productively in dumbing down and leveling the mass population, even providing a dose of the same for "gifted and talented" children. And much can be gained in social efficiency. What motive could be more "humane" than the wish to defuse the social dynamite positive science was endlessly casting off as a byproduct of its success?

To understand all this you have to be willing to see there is no known way to stop the social mutilation positive science leaves in its wake. Society must forcibly be adapted to accept its own continuing disintegration as a natural and inevitable thing, and taught to recognize its own resistance as a form of pathology to be expunged. Once an economic system becomes dependent on positive science, it can't allow any form of education to take root which might interrupt the constant accumulation of observations which produce the next scientific advance.

In simple terms, what ordinary people call religious truth, liberty, free will, family values, the idea that life is not centrally *about* consumption or good physical health or getting rich—all these have to be strangled in the cause of progress. What inures the positivistic soul to the agony it inflicts on others is its righteous certainty that these bad times will pass. Evolution will breed out of existence unfortunates who can't tolerate this discipline.

This is the sacred narrative of modernity, its substitute for the message of the Nazarene. History will end in Chautauqua. School is a means to this end.

Plato's Guardians

Coal made common citizens dangerous for the first time. The Coal Age put inordinate physical power within the reach of common people. The power to destroy through coal-derived explosive products was an obvious dramatization of a cosmic leveling foreseen only by religious fanatics, but much more dangerous as power became

the power coal unleashed to create and to produce—available to all.

The dangerous flip side of the power to produce isn't mere destruction, but overproduction, a condition which could degrade or even ruin the basis for the new financial system. The superficial economic advantage that overproduction seems to confer—increasing sales by reducing the unit price of products through savings realized by positivistic gains in machinery, labor, and energy utilization—is more than offset by the squeezing of profits in industry, commerce, and finance. If profit could not be virtually guaranteed, capitalists would not and could not gamble on the huge and continuous investments that a positivistic science-based business system demands.

Now you can see the danger of competition. Competition pushed manufacturers to overproduction in self-defense. And for double jeopardy, the unique American entrepreneurial tradition *encouraged an overproduction of manufacturers*. This guaranteed periodic crises all along the line. Before the modern age could regard itself as mature, ways had to be found to control overproduction. In business, that was begun by the Morgan interests who developed a system of cooperative trusts among important business leaders. It was also furthered through the conversion of government from servant of the republic to servant of industry. To that end, the British government provided a clear model; Britain's military and foreign policy functioned as the right arm of her manufacturing interests.

But of what lasting value could controlling topical overproduction be—addressing it where and when it threatened to break out—when the ultimate source of overproduction in products and services was *the overproduction of minds* by American libertarian schooling and the *overproduction of characters* capable of the feat of production in the first place? As long as such a pump existed to spew limitless numbers of independent, self-reliant, resourceful, and ambitious minds onto the scene, who could predict what risk to capital might strike next? To minds capable of thinking cosmically like Carnegie's, Rockefeller's, Rothschild's, Morgan's, or Cecil Rhodes', real scientific control of overproduction must rest ultimately on the power to constrain the production of intellect. Here was a task worthy of immortals. Coal provided capital to finance it.

If the Coal Age promised anything thrilling to the kind of mind which thrives on managing the behavior of others, that promise would best be realized by placing control of everything important—food, clothing, shelter, recreation, the tools of war—in relatively few hands, creating a new race of benevolent, godlike managers, not for their own good but the good of all. Plato had called such benevolent despots "guardians." Why these men would necessarily be benevolent nobody ever bothered to explain.

Abundant supplies of coal, and later oil, cried out for machinery which would tirelessly convert a stream of low-value raw materials into a cornucopia of *things* which everyone would covet. Through the dependence of the all on the few, an instrument of management and of elite association would be created far beyond anything ever seen in the past. This powerful promise was, however, fragily balanced atop the need to homogenize the population and all its descendant generations.¹ A mass production economy can neither be created nor sustained without a leveled population, one conditioned to mass habits, mass tastes, mass enthusiasms, predictable mass behaviors. The will of both maker and purchaser had to give way to the predestinated output of machinery with a one-track mind.

Nothing posed a more formidable obstacle than the American family. Traditionally, a self-sufficient production unit for which the marketplace played only an incidental role, the American family grew and produced its own food, cooked and served it; made its own soap and clothing. And provided its own transportation, entertainment, health care, and old age assistance. It entered freely into cooperative associations with neighbors, not with corporations. If that way of life had continued successfully—as it has for the modern Amish—it would have spelled curtains for corporate society.

Another factor which made ordinary citizens dangerous in a Coal Age was that coal gave rise to heavy industries whose importance for war-making made it imperative to have a workforce docile, dependable, and compliant. Too much was at stake to tolerate democracy. Coal-fired industry had such a complex organization it could be seriously disrupted by worker sabotage, and strikes could be fomented at any moment by a few dissident working men with

some training in rhetoric and a little education. The heightened importance to high-speed industry of calculating mass labor as a predictable quality rendered nonconformity a serious matter.

The danger from ordinary people is greatly magnified by the positive philosophy which drives a mass production, corporate management epoch. While it was necessary to sensitize ordinary people to the primacy of scientific needs, and to do this partially by making the study of biology, chemistry, physics, and so forth formal school lessons, to go further and reveal the insights of Bacon and Comte about how easily and inevitably Nature surrenders her secrets to anybody in possession of a simple, almost moronic *method*, was to open Pandora's box. The revolutionary character of scientific discovery discussed earlier—that it requires neither genius nor expensive equipment and is within reach of anyone—had to be concealed.

It was through schooling that this revolutionary aspect of science (once known or at least suspected by tens of thousands of small, subsistence farming families and miscalled "Yankee ingenuity") was hidden right out in the open. From the start, science teaching was what it remains today: for the ordinary student, a simplified history of scientific discovery, and for the better classes, a simple instilling of knowledge and procedures. In this transmission of factual data and chronicles, the positive method remains unseen, unsuspected, and untaught.

Taught correctly, science would allow large numbers of young people to find and practice the most effective techniques of discovery. The real gift science confers is teaching how to reach potent conclusions by common powers of observation and reasoning. But if incidental overproduction was already a crisis item in the minds of the new social planners, you can imagine what hysteria any attempt to broadcast the secrets of discovery would have occasioned.

The General Education Board said it best when it said children had to be organized and taught in a way that would *not* make them "men of science."² To that end, science was presented in as authoritarian a form as Latin grammar, involving vast tracts of memorization. Children were taught that technical competence is bought and sold as a commodity; it does not presume to direct activities, or even to inquire into their purpose. When people are brought together to build a shopping mall, a dam, or an atomic bomb, nothing in the contract gives them latitude to question what they have been paid to do, or to stir up trouble with co-workers. Recruitment into the dangerous sciences was mostly limited to those whose family background made them safe. For the rest, science was taught in a fashion to make it harmless, ineffective, and even dull.

Now my job is to open a window for you into that age of economic transformation whose needs and opportunities gave us the schools we got and still have. Thorstein Veblen said back in 1904, just a year or two before the forced schooling project began to take itself seriously, that "any theoretical inquiry into cultural life as it is running into the future must take into account the central importance of the businessman and his work." Insofar as any theorist aims to explain aspects of modern life like schools, the line of approach has to be from the businessman's standpoint, for it is business that drives the course of events.

And while I urge the reader to remember that no notion of single causes can possibly account for schooling, yet the model of modern medicine—where the notion of single causes has been brilliantly productive—can teach us something. When medicine became "modern" at the end of the nineteenth century, it did so by embracing germ theory, a conception much less "factual" than it appears. The idea in germ theory is to trace specific pathologies to single instigators. Whatever its shortcomings, this narrowing of vision frequently revealed the direction in which successful treatment lay.

Just so, the important thing in viewing the development of the modern economy is not to find in it a conspiracy against children, but *to remain detached enough to ask ourselves how the development of forced schooling could have been any different than it was*. To understand the modern economy and modern schooling, we need to see how they grow organically from coal and oil.

¹Coal explains a part of the curious fact that modern Mexico is still not a mass society in spite of its authoritarian governing class and traditional ways, while the wealthy neighboring United States is. Mexico had no coal, and while it has recently acquired oil (and NAFTA

linkage to the mass economy of North America) which will level its citizenry into a mass in time, centuries of individuation must first be overcome.

²See epigraph, Chapter Eleven, Page 221, which states the vital proposition even more clearly.

Far-Sighted Businessmen

Coal has been used for thousands of years as domestic fuel, for most of that time only in the few spots where it cropped out on the surface or was washed ashore by the sea. Any kind of plant matter can become coal, but most of what we have is the gift of the earth as it existed 350 million years ago when rushes and ferns grew tall as trees. Decay, compression, heat, and a great deal of time make the rock that burns. As it sits in your cellar it continues to putrefy; all coal gives off marsh gas or methane continuously. This is the reason coalmines blow up, a clue to even more explosive secrets locked inside its shiny blackness.

When infortuitously methane becomes mixed with 5 percent oxygen it creates a highly explosive mixture miners call firedamp. Any bright eight-year-old could create this explosive with about five minutes' training—one good reason why the mass development of intellect after the Coal Age became more problematic than it might appear on the surface. Though such a possibility was never a central cause of the rush to school, it and other facts like it were details of consequence in the background of the tapestry.

Through the early years of the eighteenth century, enormous technical problems plagued the development of coal. Once quarrying gave way to underground mining and shafts went below the water table, seepage became a nightmare. And as underground workings extended further and further from the shaft, the problem of hauling coal from where it was mined back to the shaft, and from the shaft hoisted to the surface—distances between five hundred and one thousand feet in places—posed enormous technological challenges. As did the simple matter of illumination in the dark tunnels. Collections of marsh gas might be encountered at any turn, resulting in the sudden termination of miners and all their expensive equipment.

Solving these problems took two centuries, but that effort resulted in the invention of the steam engine and the railroad as direct solutions to the dilemmas of drainage and haulage under the earth. A simple pump, "the miner's friend" patented by Savery in 1699, became Newcomen's steam pump powered by water boiled over coalfires, driving a piston device which drained British coal-mines for the next century. Priscilla Long says, "The up and down motion of this piston, transferred to the moving parts of machines and especially to the wheels of trains" changed global society. Newcomen's pump used so much coal it could only be used near coalmines, but James Watt's engine, which came along at precisely the moment the Continental Congress was meeting in 1776, was superior in every way: efficient and capable of delivering a source of power anywhere.

Industries could now be located away from coal fields because the coal industry had invented the railroad—as a way to solve its other underground problem, moving the coal from the diggings to the surface. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the haulage problem had been partially solved by laying wooden planks along coalmine tunnels as two parallel tracks upon which wagons could be drawn. These tracks, it was soon realized, had an aboveground use, too, as a transport highway from mine to sea and waterway. A century later, just after the moment some former British colonies in North America became the United States, a coal operator tied the steam engine of Watt to the task of moving coal from the seam face, and other men associated with large collieries produced the first railroad expressly for the purpose of hauling coal.

It couldn't have run very long before other uses suggested themselves. Passenger travel followed almost immediately—the world's first reliable transportation system. Once unleashed on an idea this powerful, the globally successful British engineering community had a field day extending it. By 1838, the first steamship had crossed the Atlantic; a short while later transatlantic travel was on a timetable, just as classrooms in factory schools would come to be.

The abundance of wood in the United States slowed the development of efficient railroads for an interval, as, after

all, wood was free. But as trains improved with dazzling speed, the economy that wood offered was seen as a counterfeit—wood has only half the punch of coal. By 1836, coal had driven wood from the infant railroads. Explosive growth followed at once. Trackage grew from 1,100 miles in 1836 to 2,800 miles in 1841 to 5,600 miles in 1845, to 11,000 miles in 1850, to 22,000 miles in 1855, to 44,000 miles in 1860 on the eve of the Civil War.

Could the North have overwhelmed the South so handily without railroads? Would the West have developed the same way? The railroad, byproduct of the desire to gouge coal out of the earth, was a general's best friend. And America's first working compulsory schools were given to the nation by the Boston School Committee, an elite assembly importantly underwritten by money and influence from Peabody coal and railroading interests the year after Andrew Jackson left office. Far-sighted businessmen had seen the future before anyone else.

Coal Gives The Coup De Grâce

The democracy which arises unprompted when people are on the same footing was finished with the coming of coal-fired steam locomotives. Before railroads, production was decentralized and dispersed among a myriad of local craftspeople. It was production on a small scale, mostly with local raw materials, by and for local people. Since horse-drawn vehicles couldn't reliably expect to make thirty miles a day, weather was always a vital reality in that kind of transport. Mud, snow, flooded creeks, dried-up watercourses in summer—all were forces turning people inward where they created lives of profound localness.

On the seacoast it was different. There, trading was international, and great trading families accumulated large stocks of capital, but still production wasn't centralized in factories. The pressure of idle capital, however, increasingly portended that something would come along to set this money in motion eventually. Meanwhile, it was a world in which everyone was a producer of some kind or a trader, entertainer, schoolteacher, logger, fisherman, butcher, baker, blacksmith, minister. Little producers made the economic decisions and determined the pace of work. The ultimate customers were friends and neighbors.

As mass production evolved, the job of production was broken into small parts. Instead of finishing things, a worker would do the same task over and over. Fragmenting work this way allowed it to be mechanized, which involved an astonishing and unfamiliar control of time. Human beings now worked at the machine's pace, not the reverse, and the machine's pace was regulated by a manager who no longer shared the physical task. Could learning in school be regulated the same way? The idea was too promising not to have its trial.

Workers in mass production work space are jammed closely together in a mockery of sociability, just as school kids were to be. Division of labor sharply reduced the *meaning* of work to employees. Only managers understood completely what was going on. Close supervision meant radical loss of freedom from what had been known before. Now knowledge of how to do important work passed out of local possession into the hands of a few owners and managers.

Cheap manufactured goods ruined artisans. And as if in answer to a capitalist's prayers, population exploded in the coal-producing countries, guaranteeing cheaper and cheaper labor as the Coal Age progressed. The population of Britain increased only 15 percent from 1651 to 1800, but it grew thirteen times faster in the next coal century. The population of Germany rose 300 percent, the United States 1,700 percent. It was as if having other forms of personal significance stripped from them, people turned to family building for solace, evidence they were really alive. By 1913, coalmining afforded employment to one in every ten wage earners in the United States.

Completion of the nation's railroad network allowed the rise of business and banking communities with ties to every whistle-stop and area of opportunity, increasing concentration of capital into pools and trusts. "The whole country has become a close neighborhood," said one businessman in 1888. Invention and harnessing of steam power precipitated the greatest economic revolution of modern times. New forms of power required large-scale

organization and a degree of social coordination and centralized planning undreamed of in Western societies since the Egypt of Rameses.

As the implications of coal penetrated the national imagination, it was seen more and more by employers that the English class system provided just the efficiency demanded by the logic of mechanization—everyone to his or her place in the order. The madness of Jacksonian democracy on the other hand, the irrationality of Southern sectionalism, the tradition of small entrepreneurialism, all these would have to be overcome.

Realization of the end product of a managerial, mass production economic system and an orderly social system seemed to justify any grief, any suffering. In the 1840s, British capitalists, pockets jingling with the royal profits of earlier industrial decades and reacting against social unrest in Britain and on the Continent, escalated their investments in the United States, bringing with their crowns, pounds, and shillings, a political consciousness and social philosophy some Americans thought had been banished forever from these shores.

These new colonizers carried a message that there had to be social solidarity among the upper classes for capital to work. Financial capital was the master machine that activated all other machinery. Capital had to be amassed in a few hands to be used well, and amassing capital wasn't possible unless a great degree of trust permeated the society of capitalists. That meant living together, sharing the same philosophical beliefs on big questions, marrying into each other's families, maintaining a distance from ordinary people who would certainly have to be ill-treated from time to time out of the exigencies of liberal economics. The greatest service that Edith Wharton and Henry James, William Dean Howells and a few other writers did for history was to chronicle this withdrawal of capital into a private world as the linchpin of the new system.

For the moment, however, it's only important to see how reciprocal the demands of industrialization and the demands of class snobbishness really are. It isn't so much that people gaining wealth began to disdain their ordinary neighbors as it is that such disdain is an integral part of the wealth-building process. In-group disdain of others builds team spirit among various wealth seekers. Without such spirit, capital could hardly exist in a stable form because great centralized businesses and bureaus couldn't survive without a mutual aid society of interlocking directorates which act effectively to restrain competition.

Whether this process of separation and refinement of human raw material had any important influence on the shape and purpose of forced schooling, I leave to your own judgment. It's for you to decide if what Engels termed the contradiction between the social character of production and its control by a few individuals was magnified in the United States by the creation of a national managerial class. That happened in a very short span of time in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Spectre Of Uncontrolled Breeding

School as we know it was the creation of four great coal powers whose ingenious employment of the coal-powered steam engine shrank distance and crippled local integrity and the credibility of local elites. But the United States produced almost as much coal as the other three school-bound nations put together, as you can see from figures for coal production in 1905: 1) United States—351 million tons; 2) United Kingdom—236 million tons; 3) Germany—121 million tons; 4) France—35 million tons.

Prior to the advent of coal-based economics, mass society was a phenomenon of the Orient, spoken of with contempt in the West. Even as late as 1941, I remember a barrage of adult discourse from press, screen, radio, and from conversations of elders that Japan and China had no regard for human life, by which I presume they meant individual human life. "*Banzai!*" was supposed to be the cry of fanatical Japanese infantrymen eager to die for the Emperor, but Western fighting men, in the words of H.G. Wells' wife, were "thinking bayonets." For that reason Germany was much more feared than Japan in WWII.

With the advent of coal and steam engines, modern civilization and modern schooling came about. One of the great

original arguments for mass schooling was that it would tame and train children uprooted from families broken by mining and factory work. In sophisticated spots like Unitarian Boston and Quaker/Anglican Philadelphia, school was sold to the upper classes as a tool to keep children from rooting themselves in the culture of their own industrially debased parents.

The full impact of coal-massified societies on human consciousness is caught inadvertently in Cal Tech nuclear scientist Harrison Brown's *The Challenge of Man's Future* (1954), a book pronounced "great" by fellow Nobel Prize-winning geneticist Hermann Müller. Brown examines carefully the probability that the human carrying capacity of the planet is between 50 and 200 billion people, before summarizing the reasons *this fact is best kept secret*:

If humanity had its way, it would not rest content until the earth is covered completely and to a considerable depth with a writhing mass of human beings, much as a dead cow is covered with a pulsating mass of maggots.

Brown's metaphors reveal something of the attitude that raised schooling in the first place on the industrial base of coal, steam, and steel. Among other things, the new institution would be an instrument to prevent mass humanity from "having its way."

This essay, characteristic of many such syntheses issuing from foundation and corporate-sponsored university figures of reputation through the century, as well as from public intellectuals like H.G. Wells, was written on the island of Jamaica which to Brown "appears to be a tropical paradise," but his scientific eye sees it is actually "the world in miniature" where "the struggle for survival goes on" amidst "ugliness, starvation, and misery." In this deceptive utopia, the "comfortable and secure" 20 percent who live in a "machine civilization" made possible by coal and oil, are actually "in a very precarious position," threatened by the rapid multiplication of "the starving." Such paranoia runs like a backbone through Western history, from Malthus to Carl Sagan.

Only the United States can stop the threat of overbreeding, says Nobel laureate Brown. "The destiny of humanity depends on our decisions and upon our actions." And what price should we pay for safety? Nothing less than "world authority with jurisdiction over population." The penalty for previous overproduction of the unfit had become by 1954 simply this, that "...thoughts and actions must be ever more strongly limited." Brown continued, "[We must create a society] where social organization is all-pervasive, complex and inflexible, and where the state completely dominates the individual." What is "inflexible" social organization but a class system? Remember your own school. Did a class system exist there? I can see you through my typewriter keys. You're nodding.

Global Associations Of Technique

In 1700 it took nineteen farmers to feed one nonfarmer, a guarantee that people who minded other people's business would only be an accent note in general society. One hundred years later England had driven its yeoman farmers almost out of existence, converting a few into an agricultural proletariat to take advantage of machine-age farming practices only sensible in large holdings. By 1900, one farmer could feed nineteen, releasing eighteen men and women for disposal otherwise. Schools during this period, however, remained trapped in the way things used to be, unable to deliver on their inherent potential as massifiers.

Between 1830 and 1840, the decade in which the Boston School Committee came into existence, a fantastic transformation built out of steam and coal became visible. When the decade began, the surface aspect of the nation was consistent with the familiar life of colonial times, the same relationships, the same values. By its end, modern American history begins. Chicago, a frontier fort in 1832, was by 1838 a flourishing city with eight daily steamboat connections to Buffalo, the Paris of Lake Erie.

But something to rival steam-driven transport in importance appeared at almost the same time: cheap steel. The embryonic steel industry which had come into existence in the eighteenth century revolutionized itself in the

nineteenth when the secret of producing steel cheaply was revealed. Formerly steel had been bought dearly in small quantities by smelting iron ore with coke, converting the resulting iron pigs into wrought iron by puddling. This was followed by rolling and then by processing fine wrought iron through a further step called cementation. Steel made this way could only be used for high-grade articles like watch springs, knives, tools, and shoe buckles.

The first part of the new steel revolution followed from discovery of the Bessemer process in 1856. Now steel could be made directly from pig iron. In 1865 the Siemens-Martin open hearth technique gave a similar product of even more uniform quality than Bessemer steel. The next advance occurred in 1879 when Thomas and Gilchrist discovered how to use formerly unsuitable phosphoric iron ore (more common than nonphosphoric) in steelmaking, yielding as its byproduct valuable artificial fertilizer for agriculture. These two transformations made possible the substitution of steel for wrought iron and opened hundreds of new uses. Steel rails gave a huge push to railway construction, and structural steelwork marked a stupendous advance in engineering possibilities, allowing a radical reconception of human society. Capital began to build for itself truly global associations which made national sovereignty irrelevant for a small class of leaders as long as a century ago.³ And that fact alone had great relevance for the future of schooling. As steel articulated itself rationally, vertical integration became the order of the day. Iron and steel reached backwards to control coalmines and coking plants and forward to acquire rolling mills, plant mills, wire-drawing facilities, galvanized iron and tin plate establishments, rod mills, etc. Small under-takings were sucked inexorably into large trusts.

Every one of the most modern developments in technique and organization pioneered by steel was echoed in the new factory schools: increase in the size of the plant; integration of formerly independent educational factors like family, church, library, and recreational facility into a coalition dominated by professional schooling; the specialization of all pedagogical labor; and the standardization of curriculum, testing, and acceptable educational behavior. What confused the issue for the participant population is that parents and students still believed that efficiency in the development of various literacies was the goal of the school exercise. Indeed, they still do. But that had ceased to be the purpose in big cities as early as 1905. Schooling was about efficiency. Social efficiency meant standardizing human units.

Surprisingly enough to those who expect that institutional thinking will reflect their own thought only on a larger scale, what is an asset to a mass production economy is frequently a liability to an individual or a family. Creating value in children for a mass production workplace through schooling meant degrading their intellectual growth and discouraging any premature utility to the larger society. Ellwood P. Cubberley inadvertently spilled the beans in his classic *Public Education in the United States* when he admitted compulsion schooling would not work as long as children were allowed to be useful to the real world. Ending that usefulness demanded legislation, inspectors, stiff penalties, and managed public opinion.

New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, North Carolina, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Rhode Island led the charge to seal off the escape route of useful work for children, just as they once led the drive for compulsion schooling in the first place. The child labor rhetoric of the day was impressively passionate, some of it genuinely felt and needed, but the cynical aspect can be detected in a loophole created for show business children—"professional children" as they are called in the argot. Whether the "work" of an actor-child is less degrading than any other kind of work is a question not difficult for most people to answer.

³This is the simplest explanation for events which would otherwise fall beyond the reach of the mind to understand—such as the well-documented fact that legendary German armaments maker Krupp sold its cannon to France during World War I, shipping them to the enemy by a circuitous route clouded by clerical thaumaturgy, or that the Ford Motor Company built tanks and other armaments for the Nazi government *during* WWII, collecting its profits through middle men in neutral Spain. Ford petitioned the American government for compensation of damages suffered by its plants in wartime bombing raids, compensation it received by Act of Congress with hardly a dissenting vote. Nor were Krupp and Ford more than emblems of fairly common practice, even if one unknown to the common citizenry of combatant nations.

Labor Becomes Expendable

One dramatic illustration of the positive philosophy in action is written in coal dust. As a heat source, coal seems a simple trade-off: we accept environmental degradation and the inevitable death and crippling of a number of coalminers (350,000 accidental deaths since 1800, 750,000 cases of black lung disease, and an unknown number of permanent and temporary injuries) in exchange for warmth in cold weather and for other good things. But all sorts of unpredictable benefits flowed from the struggle to make the business of keeping warm efficient, and the world of forced schooling was dictated by coal.

Consider the romantic gaslight era which by 1870, as far away as Denver and San Francisco, graced the nights of American villages and cities with magical illumination made possible by coal gas produced when coal is purified into coke. In addition to allowing the steel industry to replace the iron industry, this major unforeseen benefit turned night into day as settlements blazed with light. And with illumination, coal had only just begun to share its many secrets. It was also a storehouse of chemical wealth out of which the modern chemical industry was born. Coke ovens produced ammonia liquor as a byproduct from which agricultural fertilizer is easily prepared; it's also a basis for cheap, readily available, medium-yield explosives.

Coal yields benzol and tars from which our dyes and many modern medicines are made; it yields gas which can be converted into electrical energy; it yields perfumes and dozens of other useful things. During the production of coal gas, sulphur—the source of sulfuric acid vital to many chemical processes—is collected. Coal tar can further be refined into kerosene. From 1850 to 1860, the German scientist August Wilhelm von Hoffmann, working at the Royal College of Chemistry in England, made discoveries inspired by coal's extraordinary hidden potential which elevated chemistry into a national priority in those countries which maintained extra-territorial ambitions like the United States. By 1896, heavier-than-air flight had been achieved long before the Wright brothers when a pilotless steam airplane *with a forty foot wingspan* began making trips along the Potomac River near Washington in full view of many important spectators.

As great as coal and steam engines were at stimulating social ferment, they met their master in oil and the internal combustion engine. Coal is twice as efficient an energy source as wood; oil twice as efficient as coal. Oil made its debut just as the Civil War began. As with coal, there had been ancient references to this form of liquid coal in Strabo, Dioscorides, and Pliny. Records exist of its use in China and Japan in the Pre-Christian era (Marco Polo described the oil springs of Baku at the end of the thirteenth century). All that was needed was an engine adapted to its use.

The first patent for the use of gasoline motive power was issued in England in 1794. By 1820 at Cambridge University men knew how to use gas to move machinery. By 1860 gas engines were in limited use all over Europe, four hundred in Paris alone. The first American exploitation of any importance occurred at Seneca Lake, New York, in 1859, not a long ride from the ancestral home of the Rockefeller family in the town of Bainbridge. Following the lead of coal, oil was soon producing a fossil-fuel transformation of American society, even though irregular supply kept oil from achieving its dominant place in the energy pantheon quickly. But by 1898 the supply problem was solved. Twelve years later, oil replaced coal as the energy of choice, delivering advantages by weight, saving labor in transit, storage, and extraction, and just as with coal, undreamed of bonus benefits were harvested from oil. In 1910, a windfall of 3 million horsepower hours was generated from waste gas alone, thrown off by oil used in blast furnace operation.

Burying Children Alive

Think of coalmines as vast experimental laboratories of human behavior testing the proposition that men, women, and children will do virtually anything—even allow themselves to be consigned to damp dangerous tunnels under the ground for all the sunlight hours in order to have real work to do as part of the community of mankind. If the American Revolution could be said (as the *Declaration* held) to demonstrate a self-evident truth, that all were

"endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," the coal revolution tested the contrary proposition—just how far those rights could be taken away if exchanged for work. Work was shown by this unworldly occupation to be a value as necessary to human contentment as liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In lieu of alternatives, people would indeed bury themselves alive to get it.

And coal was a continuous, highly visible object lesson about just how thoroughly the concerns of unseen outside interests could be imposed on childhood. For over a century, the best profits had come from using young children as coalminers. By 1843, when Horace Mann visited coal-dependent Prussia to gather background for his *Seventh Report*, boys and girls between the ages of five and eight were at work in every coalmine in America. Fifty percent of all coalminers were children.

Children were employed as *trappers* to open and shut doors guiding air through the mine, as *fillers* to fill carriages as grown men knocked coal from the seams, and as *hurriers* to push trucks along to the workers at the foot of the shaft. In some places trucks were *pulled* instead of *pushed*, and little girls were employed as *pullers* because their small size was in harmony with the diminutive tunnels, and because they were more dependable than boys. An excerpt from a Pittsburgh newspaper of the day is instructive:

A girdle is put round the naked waist, to which a chain from the carriage is hooked, and the girls crawl on their hands and knees, drawing the carriage after them.

One quiet stream in my own family background was the McManus family from West Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, Irish immigrants in the 1840s. Census records list some of them as coal-miners. My grandmother was Moss McManus before she became Moss Zimmer. She never talked about the past or recalled a single ancestor except one, a McManus licensed as a Mississippi River pilot in a document signed by Abraham Lincoln which still floats around somewhere in the family. What of all those coalminers, Moss? No memories for your grandson? I suppose the answer is she was ashamed. Coalmining was something that ignorant, shanty-boat Irish did, not a fit occupation for lace-curtain Irish, as Moss tried so hard to be in the face of long odds.

Long after the owners of mines, mills, and factories had abandoned piety except on ceremonial occasions, miners would pray for the strength to endure what had to be endured. Their children would pray with them. Here are the words of a little eight-year-old girl—exactly the age of my own granddaughter Moss as I write this—who worked as a coal miner a hundred years ago. Worked, perhaps, for the famously civilized Dwigths and Peabodys of New England:

I'm a trapper in the Gamer Pit. I have to trap without a light and I'm scared. I go at four and sometimes half past three in the morning and come out at five and a half past. I never go to sleep. Sometimes I sing when I've light, but not in the dark, I dare not sing then.

Isn't the most incredible part of that the fact she could write so eloquently with no formal schooling at all? The year was 1867. A newspaper of that year observed:

Chained, belted, harnessed like dogs in a go-cart, black, saturated with wet and more than half-naked—crawling upon their hands and feet and dragging their heavy loads behind them—they presented an appearance indescribably disgusting and unnatural.

The confinement of American children to warehouse schools less than a half-century later had been pioneered by the Massachusetts experiment we associate with Horace Mann in the decade just before the Civil War. No other state followed Massachusetts' lead for a long time, but everywhere children were engaged in mining and factory work. In Massachusetts, the essential practice in confinement was underway, a prelude to universal acceptance of schooling as the natural burden of childhood.

Schools were the anti-matter twins of mines and mills: the latter *added* children to the labor market, schools *subtracted* them. Both were important functions of a new, centralized command economy. By 1900, direct child labor had been rendered unnecessary by the swift onset of mechanization, except in those anomalous areas like

theater, carnival, advertising, and modeling where special pleading to keep children at work would succeed during the general campaign to insulate children from common life.

The End Of Competition

By 1905, industrial corporations employed 71 percent of all wage earners, mining enterprises 10 percent more. At exactly the moment forced-schooling legislation in America was being given its bite by the wholesale use of police, social service investigators, and public exhortation, corporate capitalism boiled up like sulphur in the Monongahela to color every aspect of national life. Corporate spokesmen and academic interpreters, often the same people, frequently explained what was happening as a stage in the evolution of the race. A Johns Hopkins professor writing in 1900 said that what was really happening behind the smokescreen of profit-making was "the sifting out of genius" and "the elimination of the weak."

The leading patent attorney in the nation speaking in the same year said nothing, including the law, could stem the new tide running, the only realistic course was "acquiescence and adjustment." Charles Willard of Sears & Roebuck was the speaker. Willard suggested the familiar American competitive system "is not necessarily meant for all eternity." Business was wisely overthrowing competitive wastefulness which produced only "panic, overproduction, bad distribution and uncertainty, replacing it with protected privilege for elected producers."

The principles of the business revolution which gave us schooling are still virtually unknown to the public. Competition was effectively crippled nearly a century ago when, profoundly influenced by doctrines of positivism and scientific Darwinism, corporate innovators like Carnegie and Morgan denounced competition's evils, urging the mogul class to reconstruct America and then the world, in the *cooperative* corporate image. "Nothing less than the supremacy of the world lies at our feet," said Carnegie prophetically. Adam Smith's competitive, self-regulating market would be the death of the new economy if not suppressed because it encouraged chronic overproduction.

Henry Holt, the publisher, speaking in 1908, said there was "too much enterprise." The only effective plan was to put whole industries under central control; the school industry was no exception. Excessive overproduction of brains is the root cause of the overproduction of everything else, he said.

James Livingston has written an excellent short account of this rapid social transformation, called *Origins of the Federal Reserve System*, from which I've taken some lessons. Livingston tells us that the very language of proponents of corporate America underwent a radical change at the start of the century. Business decisions began to be spoken of almost exclusively as courses of purposeful *social* action, not mere profit-seeking. Charles Phillips of the Delaware Trust wrote, for instance, "The banker, the merchant, the manufacturer, and the agent of transportation *must unite* to create and maintain that reasonable distribution of opportunity, of advantage, and of profit, which alone can forestall revolution." (emphasis added) It hardly requires genius to see how such a directive would play itself out in forced schooling.

In 1900, in his book *Corporations and the Public Welfare*, James Dill warned that the most critical social question of the day was figuring out how to get rid of the small entrepreneur, yet at the same time retain his loyalty "to a system based on private enterprise." The small entrepreneur had been the heart of the American republican ideal, the soul of its democratic strength. So the many school training habits which led directly to small entrepreneurship had to be eliminated.

Control of commodity *circulation* by a few demanded similar control in commodity *production*. To this end, immediate sanctions were leveled against older practices: first, destruction of skilled worker craft unions which, up to the Homestead steel strike in 1892, had regulated the terms of work in a factory. Inside a decade, all such unions were rendered ineffective with the single exception of the United Mine Workers. Second, professionalization of mental labor to place it under central control also was speedily accomplished through school requirements and licensing legislation.

In the emerging world of corporate Newspeak, education became schooling and schooling education. The positive philosophy freed business philosophers like Carnegie from the tyranny of feeling they had always to hire the best and brightest on their own independent terms for company operations. Let fools continue to walk that dead-end path. Science knew that obedient and faithful executives were superior to brilliant ones. Brains were needed, certainly, but like an excess of capsicum, too much of the mental stuff would ruin the national digestion. One of the main points of the dramatic shift to mass production and mass schooling was to turn Americans into a mass population.

America Is Massified

Older American forms of schooling would never have been equal to the responsibility coal, steam, steel, and machinery laid upon them. As late as 1890, the duration of the average school year was twelve to twenty weeks. Even with that, school attendance hovered between 26 and 42 percent nationwide with the higher figure only in a few places like Salem, Massachusetts.

Yet America had to be massified, and quickly. Since the end of the nineteenth century, American government and big business had been fully committed, without public fanfare, to creating and maintaining a mass society. Mass society demands tight administration, close management to an extreme degree. Humanity becomes undependable, dangerous, childlike, and suicidal under such discipline. Holding this contradiction stable requires managers of systematic schooling to withdraw trust, to regard their clientele as hospital managers might think of potentially homicidal patients. Students, men under military discipline, and employees in post offices, hospitals, and other large systems are forced into a condition of less than complete sanity. They *are* dangerous,⁴ as history has shown again and again.

There are three indisputable triumphs of mass society we need to acknowledge to understand its strength: first, mass production offers *relative* physical comfort to almost all—even the poor have food, shelter, television as a story-teller to raise the illusion of community; second, as a byproduct of intense personal surveillance in mass society (to provide a steady stream of data to the producing and regulating classes) a large measure of personal security is available; third, mass society offers a predictable world, one with few surprises—anxieties of uncertainty are replaced in mass society with a rise in ennui and indifference.

⁴When I first began to write this section, another of the long stream of post office massacres of recent years had just taken place in New Jersey. Vengeance by a disgruntled employee. In the same state a hospital attendant has been charged with murdering as many as a hundred of his patients by lethal injection, also a more common occurrence than we want to imagine, and two rich boys at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, the site of a much-boasted-of scientific management revolution in 1994, had shot and killed thirteen of their classmates before taking their own lives. Human variation cannot be pent up for long in enormous synthetic systems without striving to somehow assert the "I" of things. Massified populations cannot exercise self-control very well since they depend on constant oversight to behave as required. When external controls are removed, anything becomes possible.

German Mind Science

Back at the beginning of the nineteenth century, wise men and women, honorable individuals themselves, came with sadness to realize that for all the foreseeable future, more and more ordinary people would need to give their entire lives to a dark hole in the ground or in service to a mind-destroying machine if a coal-fired dream world was to happen. People who grew up in the clean air and the folk society of villages did not make good workers for the screaming factories or the tunnels underground, or the anthill offices.

What was needed was some kind of halfway house that would train individuals for the halfway lives ordinary people would be more and more called upon to lead. In a utopia of machinery and steam, there could be free lunch

for unprecedented numbers—but only if there were chains, bread, and water for the rest, at least for some unknown while. Plans for such a halfway institution as forced schooling (think of it as a training factory or a training mine) came together in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, drawn by the best minds, for the best motives. They inflicted stupendous damage on the libertarian rights and privileges bequeathed to Americans by the nation's founders.

Profits from the industrial engine signed the checks for many nineteenth-century educational experiments like New Lanark in Scotland and New Harmony in Indiana. They bought Fanny Wright her school advocacy platform and helped her impose it on the Philadelphia Workingman's Party agenda in 1829. Many of the nineteenth-century experimental social colonies looked upon themselves as early emanations of utopia, previews whispering to men and women what might be, if only they turned their backs on the past and schooled for a new day. The brevity of these experiments did nothing to discourage their successors.

The coal of Westphalia in association with the iron of Lorraine welded the scattered states of Germany into a ferocious utopian empire in the last half of the nineteenth century. That empire, birthplace of successful, mass forced schooling, made war upon the world, spreading its conception of research universities and its Spartan state philosophy of universal indoctrination and subordination all over the planet. In 1868, Japan adopted large parts of the Prussian constitution together with the Prussian style of schooling. The garment that coal fashioned for Aryan children was worn enthusiastically by coal-free Nipponese as their own.

German mental science came to rule the classrooms of the world in the early twentieth century, nowhere more thoroughly than in coal-rich and oil-rich America. America provided a perch from which to study people closely and resources with which to find ways to bring them into compliance. Even without intense ideological motivation driving the project, the prospect of a reliable domestic market which could be milked in perpetuity would have been incentive enough to propel the school project, I believe.

These new studies growing out of the coal-swollen ranks of leisured academic lives suggested there should be radical changes in the mental diet of children. A plan emerged piecemeal in these years to be slowly inserted into national schooling. Seen from a distance a century later, it is possible to discern the still shimmering outline of a powerful strategy drawing together at least ten elements:

Removal of the active literacies of writing and speaking which enable individuals to link up with and to persuade others.

Destruction of the narrative of American history connecting the arguments of the Founding Fathers to historical events, defining what makes Americans different from others besides wealth.

Substitution of a historical "social studies" catalogue of facts in place of historical narrative.

Radical dilution of the academic content of formal curriculum which familiarized students with serious literature, philosophy, theology, etc. This has the effect of curtailing any serious inquiries into economics, politics, or religion.

Replacement of academics with a balanced-diet concept of "humanities," physical education, counseling, etc., as substance of the school day.

Obfuscation or outright denial of the simple, code-cracking drills which allow fluency in reading to anyone.

The confinement of tractable and intractable students together in small rooms. In effect this is a leveling exercise

with predictable (and pernicious) results. A deliberate contradiction of common-sense principles, rhetorically justified on the grounds of psychological and social necessity.

Enlargement of the school day and year to blot up outside opportunities to acquire useful knowledge leading to independent livelihoods; the insertion of misleading surrogates for this knowledge in the form of "shop" classes which actually teach little of skilled crafts.

Shifting of oversight from those who have the greatest personal stake in student development—parents, community leaders, and the students themselves—to a ladder of strangers progressively more remote from local reality. All school transactions to be ultimately monitored by an absolute abstraction, the "standardized" test, correlating with nothing real and very easily rigged to produce whatever results are called for.

Relentless low-level hostility toward religious interpretations of meaning.

There you have the brilliant formula used to create a coal-fired mass mind.

Before his sudden death, I watched my beloved bachelor friend and long-time fellow schoolteacher Martin Wallach slowly surrender to forces of massification he had long resisted. One day in his late fifties he said, "There isn't any reason to go out anymore. They send food in; I have three hundred channels. Everything is on TV. I couldn't see it all if I had two lifetimes. With my telephone and modem I can get anything. Even girls. There's only trouble outside anyway." He fell dead a year later taking out his garbage.

Welcome to utopia. We don't pray or pledge allegiance to anything here, but condoms and Ritalin are free for the asking.

Rest in peace, Martin.

- [Frederick W. Taylor](#)
- [The Adoption Of Business Organization By Schools](#)
- [The Ford System And The Kronstadt Commune](#)
- [The National Press Attack On Academic Schooling](#)
- [The Fabian Spirit](#)
- [The Open Conspiracy](#)
- [An Everlasting Faith](#)
- [Regulating Lives Like Machinery](#)
- [The Gary Plan](#)
- [The Jewish Student Riots](#)
- [The Rockefeller Report](#)
- [Obstacles On The Road To Centralization](#)

On the night of June 9, 1834, a group of prominent men "chiefly engaged in commerce" gathered privately in a Boston drawing room to discuss a scheme of universal schooling. Secretary of this meeting was William Ellery Channing, Horace Mann's own minister as well as an international figure and the leading Unitarian of his day. The location of the meeting house is not entered in the minutes nor are the names of the assembly's participants apart from Channing. Even though the literacy rate in Massachusetts was 98 percent, and in neighboring Connecticut, 99.8 percent, the assembled businessmen agreed the present system of schooling allowed too much to depend upon chance. It encouraged more entrepreneurial exuberance than the social system could bear.

– The minutes of this meeting are Appleton Papers collection, Massachusetts Historical Society

Frederick W. Taylor

The first man on record to perceive how much additional production could be extracted from close regulation of labor was Frederick Winslow Taylor, son of a wealthy Philadelphia lawyer. "What I demand of the worker," Taylor said, "is not to produce any longer by his own initiative, but to execute punctiliously the orders given down to their minutest details."

The Taylors, a prominent Quaker family from Germantown, Pennsylvania, had taken Freddy to Europe for three years from 1869 to 1872, where he was attending an aristocratic German academy when von Moltke's Prussian *blitzkrieg* culminated in the French disaster at Sedan and a German Empire was finally proclaimed, ending a thousand years of disunion. Prussian schooling was the widely credited forge which made those miracles possible. The jubilation which spread through Germany underlined a presumably fatal difference between political systems which disciplined with ruthless efficiency, like Prussia's socialist paradise, and those devoted to whimsy and luxury, like France's. The lesson wasn't lost on little Fred.

Near the conclusion of his *Principles of Scientific Management* 1 (1911), published thirty-nine years later, Taylor summarized the new managerial discipline as follows:

- A regimen of science, not rule of thumb.
- An emphasis on harmony, not the discord of competition.
- An insistence on cooperation, not individualism.
- A fixation on maximum output.
- The development of each man to his greatest productivity.

Taylor's biographers, Wrege and Greenwood, wrote:

He left us a great legacy. Frederick Taylor advanced a total system of management, one which he built from pieces taken from numerous others whom he rarely would credit.... His genius lies in being a missionary.

After Taylor's death in 1915, the *Frederick W. Taylor Cooperators* were formed to project his Scientific Management movement into the future. Frank Copley called Taylor "a man whose heart was aflame with missionary zeal." Much about this Quaker-turned-Unitarian, who married into an Arbella-descended Puritan family before finally becoming an Episcopalian, bears decisively on the shape schooling took in this country. Wrege and Greenwood describe him as: "often arrogant, somewhat caustic, and inflexible in how his system should be implemented.... Taylor was cerebral; like a machine he was polished and he was also intellectual.... Taylor's brilliant reasoning was marred when he attempted to articulate it, for his delivery was often demeaning, even derogatory at times."

Frank Gilbreth's *Motion Study* says:

It is the never ceasing marvel concerning this man that age cannot wither nor custom stale his work. After many a weary day's study the investigator awakes from a dream of greatness to find he has only worked out a new proof for a problem Taylor has already solved. Time study, the instruction card, functional foremanship, the differential rate piece method of compensation, and numerous other scientifically derived methods of decreasing costs and increasing output and wages—these are by no means his only contributions to standardizing the trades.

To fully grasp the effect of Taylor's industrial evangelism on American national schooling, you need to listen to him play teacher in his own words to Schmidt at Bethlehem Steel in the 1890s:

Now Schmidt, you are a first-class pig-iron handler and know your business well. You have been handling at a rate of twelve and a half tons per day. I have given considerable study to handling pig-iron, and feel you could handle forty-seven tons of pig-iron per day if you really tried instead of twelve and a half tons.

Skeptical but willing, Schmidt started to work, and all day long, and at regular intervals, was told by the men who stood over him with a watch, "now pick up a pig and walk. Now sit down and rest. Now walk—rest," etc. He worked when he was told to work, and rested when he was told to rest, and at half

past five in the afternoon had his forty-seven tons loaded on the car.

The incident described above is, incidentally, a fabrication. There was no Schmidt except in Taylor's mind, just as there was no close observation of Prussian schools by Mann. Below, he testifies before Congress in 1912:

There is a right way of forcing the shovel into materials and many wrong ways. Now, the way to shovel refractory stuff is to press the forearm hard against the upper part of the right leg just below the thigh, like this, take the end of the shovel in your right hand and when you push the shovel into the pile, instead of using the muscular effort of the arms, which is tiresome, throw the weight of your body on the shovel like this; that pushes your shovel in the pile with hardly any exertion and without tiring the arms in the least.

Harlow Person called Taylor's approach to the simplest tasks of working life "a meaningful and fundamental break with the past." Scientific management, or Taylorism, had four characteristics designed to make the worker "an interchangeable part of an interchangeable machine making interchangeable parts."

Since each quickly found its analogue in scientific schooling, let me show them to you:³ 1) A mechanically controlled work pace; 2) The repetition of simple motions; 3) Tools and technique selected for the worker; 4) Only superficial attention is asked from the worker, just enough to keep up with the moving line. The connection of all to school procedure is apparent.

"In the past," Taylor wrote, "Man has been first. In the future the system must be first." It was not sufficient to have physical movements standardized; the standardized worker "must be happy in his work," too, therefore his thought processes also must be standardized.⁴ Scientific management was applied wholesale in American industry in the decade after 1910. It spread quickly to schools.

In the preface to the classic study on the effects of scientific management on schooling in America, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*,⁵ Raymond Callahan explains that when he set out to write, his intent was to explore the origin and development of business values in educational administration, an occurrence he tracks to about 1900. Callahan wanted to know *why* school administrators had adopted business practices and management parameters of assessment when "Education is not a business. The school is not a factory."

Could the inappropriate procedure be explained simply by a familiar process in which ideas and values flow from high-status groups to those of lesser distinction? As Callahan put it, "It does not take profound knowledge of American education to know that educators are, and have been, a relatively low-status, low-power group." But the degree of intellectual domination shocked him:

What was unexpected was the extent, not only of the power of business-industrial groups, but of the strength of the business ideology...and the extreme weakness and vulnerability of school administrators. I had expected more professional autonomy and I was completely unprepared for the extent and degree of capitulation by administrators to whatever demands were made upon them. I was surprised and then dismayed to learn how many decisions they made or were forced to make, not on educational grounds, but as a means of appeasing their critics in order to maintain their positions in the school. [emphasis added]

¹The actual term "scientific management" was created by famous lawyer Louis Brandeis in 1910 for the Interstate Commerce Commission rate hearings. Brandeis understood thoroughly how a clever phrase could control public imagination.

²Gilbreth, the man who made the term "industrial engineering" familiar to the public, was a devotee of Taylorism. His daughter wrote a best seller about the Gilbreth home, *Cheaper By The Dozen*, in which her father's penchant for refining work processes is recalled. Behind his back, Taylor ran Gilbreth down as a "fakir."

³List adapted from Melvin Kranzberg and Joseph Gies, *By the Sweat of Thy Brow*.

⁴Taylor was no garden-variety fanatic. He won the national doubles tennis title in 1881 with a racket of his own design, and pioneered slip-on shoes (to save time, of course). Being happy in your work was the demand of Bellamy and other leading socialist thinkers, otherwise you

would have to be "adjusted" (hence the expression "well-adjusted"). Taylor concurred.

Callahan's analysis why schoolmen are always vulnerable is somewhat innocent and ivory tower, and his recommendation for reform—to effectively protect their revenue stream from criticism on the part of the public—is simply tragic; but his gathering of data is matchless and his judgment throughout in small matters and large is consistently illuminating.

The Adoption Of Business Organization By Schools

In 1903, *The Atlantic Monthly* called for adoption of business organization by schools and William C. Bagley identified the ideal teacher as one who would rigidly "hew to the line." Bagley's ideal school was a place strictly reduced to rigid routine; he repeatedly stressed in his writing a need for "unquestioned obedience."

Before 1900, school boards were large, clumsy organizations, with a seat available to represent every interest (they often had thirty to fifty members). A great transformation was engineered in the first decade of the twentieth century, however, and after 1910 they were dominated by businessmen, lawyers, real estate men, and politicians. Business pressure extended from the kindergarten rung of the new school ladder all the way into the German-inspired teacher training schools. *The Atlantic Monthly* approved what it had earlier asked for, saying in 1910, "Our universities are beginning to run as business colleges."

Successful industrial leaders were featured regularly in the press, holding forth on their success but seldom attributing it to book learning or scholarship. Carnegie, self-educated in libraries, appears in his writings and public appearances as the leading school critic of the day; echoing Carnegie, the governor of Michigan welcomed an NEA convention to Detroit with his injunction: "The demand of the age is for practical education." The State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Michigan followed the governor:

The character of our education must change with the oncoming of the years of this highly practical age. We have educated the mind to think and trained the vocal organs to express the thought, and we have forgotten the fact that in four times out of five the practical man expresses his thought by the hand rather than by mere words.

Something was cooking. The message was clear: academic education had become a strange kind of national emergency, just as had been prophesied by the Department of Education's *Circular of Information* in 1871 and 1872. Twenty years later Francis Parker praised the elite Committee of Ten under Harvard president Charles Eliot for rejecting "tracking," the practice of school class assignment based upon future social destination. The committee had come down squarely for common schools, an ideal that Parker said was "worth all the pains necessary to produce the report. The conclusion is that there should be no such thing as class education." Parker had noticed the start of an attempt to provide common people with only partial education. He was relieved it had been turned back. Or so he thought.

The pronouncements of the Committee of Ten turned out to be the last gasp of the common school notion apart from Fourth of July rhetoric. The common school was being buried by the determination of new tycoon-class businessmen to see the demise of an older democratic-republican order and its dangerous libertarian ideals. If "educators," as they were self-consciously beginning to refer to themselves, had any misunderstanding of what was expected by 1910, NEA meetings of that year were specifically designed to clear them up. Attendees were told the business community had judged their work to date to be "theoretical, visionary, and impractical":

All over the country our courses are being attacked and the demand for revision is along the line of fitting mathematical teaching to the needs of the masses.

In 1909, Leonard Ayres charged in *Laggards in Our Schools* that although these institutions were filled with "retarded children," school programs were, alas, "fitted...to the unusually bright one." Ayres invented means for

measuring the efficiency of school systems by computing the dropout/holdover rate—a game still in evidence today. This was begging the question with a vengeance but no challenge to this assessment was ever raised.

Taylor's system of management efficiency was being formally taught at Harvard and Dartmouth by 1910. In the next year, 219 articles on the subject appeared in magazines, hundreds more followed: by 1917 a bibliography of 550 school management-science references was available from a Boston publisher. As the steel core of school reform, scientific management enjoyed national recognition. It was the main topic at the 1913 convention of the Department of Superintendence. Paul Hanus, professor of education at Harvard, launched a series of books for the World Book Company under the title School Efficiency Series, and famous muckraker J.M. Rice published his own *Scientific Management in Education* in 1913, showing local "ward" schooling an arena of low-lives and grifters.

Frederick Taylor's influence was not limited to America; it soon circled the globe. *Principles of Scientific Management* spread the efficiency mania over Europe, Japan, and China. A letter to the editor of *The Nation* in 1911 gives the flavor of what was happening:

I am tired of scientific management, so-called. I have heard of it from scientific managers, from university presidents, from casual acquaintances in railway trains; I have read of it in the daily papers, the weekly paper, the ten-cent magazine, and in the *Outlook*. I have only missed its treatment by Theodore Roosevelt; but that is probably because I cannot keep up with his writings. For 15 years I have been a subscriber to a magazine dealing with engineering matters, feeling it incumbent on me to keep in touch but the touch has become a pressure, the pressure a crushing strain, until the mass of articles on shop practice and scientific management threatened to crush all thought out of my brain, and I stopped my subscription.

In an article from *Izvestia* dated April 1918, Lenin urged the system upon Russians.

His jargon-enriched *Classroom Management* (1907) was reprinted thirty times in the next 20 years as a teacher training text. Bagley's metaphors drawn from big business can fairly be said to have controlled the pedagogical imagination for the entire twentieth century.

The Ford System And The Kronstadt Commune

"An anti-intellectual, a hater of individuals," is the way Richard Stites characterizes Taylor in *Revolutionary Dreams*, his book on the utopian beginning of the Soviet Era. Says Stites, "His system is the basis for virtually every twisted dystopia in our century, from death under the Gas Bell in Zamiatin's *We* for the unspeakable crime of deviance, to the maintenance of a fictitious state-operated underground in Orwell's 1984 in order to draw deviants into disclosing who they are."

Oddly enough, an actual scheme of dissident entrapment was the brainchild of J.P. Morgan, his unique contribution to the Cecil Rhodes-inspired "Round Table" group. Morgan contended that revolution could be subverted permanently by infiltrating the underground and subsidizing it. In this way the thinking of the opposition could be known as it developed and fatally compromised. Corporate, government, and foundation cash grants to subversives might be one way to derail the train of insurrection that Hegelian theory predicted would arise against every ruling class.

As this practice matured, the insights of Fabian socialism were stirred into the mix; gradually a socialist *leveling* through practices pioneered in Bismarck's Prussia came to be seen as the most efficient control system for the masses, the bottom 80 percent of the population in advanced industrial states. For the rest, an invigorating system of *laissez-faire* market competition would keep the advanced breeding stock on its toes.

A large portion of the intellectual Left jumped on Taylor's bandwagon, even as labor universally opposed it. Lenin

himself was an aggressive advocate:

The war taught us much, not only that people suffered, but especially the fact that those who have the best technology, organization, discipline and the best machines emerge on top; it is this the war has taught us. It is essential to learn that without machines, without discipline, it is impossible to live in modern society. It is necessary to master the highest technology or be crushed.

But even in Russia, workers resisted Taylorish methods. The rebellion of the Kronstadt Commune in 1921 charged that Bolsheviks were "planning to introduce the sweat labor system of Taylor." They were right.

Taylor distilled the essence of Bismarck's Prussian school training under whose regimen he had witnessed firsthand the defeat of France in 1871. His American syntheses of these disciplines made him the direct inspiration for Henry Ford and "Fordism." Between 1895 and 1915, Ford radically transformed factory procedure, relying on Taylorized management and a mass production assembly line marked by precision, continuity, coordination, speed, and standardization. Ford wrote two extraordinary essays in the 1920s, "*The Meaning of Time*," and "*Machinery, The New Messiah*," in which he equated planning, timing, precision, and the rest of the scientific management catalogue with the great moral meaning of life:

A clean factory, clean tools, accurate gauges, and precise methods of manufacture produce a smooth working efficient machine [just as] clean thinking, clean living, and square dealing make for a decent home life.

By the 1920s, the reality of the Ford system paralleled the rules of a Prussian infantry regiment. Both were places where workers were held under close surveillance, kept silent, and punished for small infractions. Ford was unmoved by labor complaints. Men were disposable cogs in his machine. "A great business is really too big to be human," he commented in 1929. Fordism and Taylorism swept the Soviet Union as they had swept the United States and Western Europe. By the 1920s the words *fordizatsiya* and *teilorizatsiya*, both appellations describing good work habits, were common across Russia.

The National Press Attack On Academic Schooling

In May of 1911, the first salvo of a sustained national press attack on the academic ambitions of public schooling was fired. For the previous ten years the idea of school as an oasis of mental development built around a common, high-level curriculum had been steadily undermined by the rise of educational psychology and its empty-child/elastic-child hypotheses. Psychology was a business from the first, an aggressive business lobbying for jobs and school contracts. But resistance of parents, community groups, and students themselves to the new psychologized schooling was formidable.

As the summer of 1911 approached, the influential *Educational Review* gave educators something grim to muse upon as they prepared to clean out their desks: "Must definite reforms with measurable results be foresworn," it asked, "that an antiquated school system may grind out useless produce?" The magazine demanded *quantifiable* proof of school's contributions to society—or education should have its budget cut. The article, titled "An Economic Measure of School Efficiency," charged that "The advocate of pure water or clean streets shows by how much the death rate will be altered with each proposed addition to his share of the budget—only a teacher is without such figures." An editorial in *Ladies Home Journal* reported that dissatisfaction with schools was increasing, claiming "On every hand signs are evident of a widely growing distrust of the effectiveness of the present educational system..." In Providence, the school board was criticized by the local press for declaring a holiday on the Monday preceding Decoration Day to allow a four-day vacation. "This cost the public \$5,000 in loss of possible returns on the money invested," readers were informed.

Suddenly school critics were everywhere. A major assault was mounted in two popular journals, *Saturday*

Evening Post and *Ladies Home Journal*, with millions each in circulation, both read by leaders of the middle classes. The Post sounded the anti-intellectual theme this way:

"Miltonized, Chaucerized, Vergilized, Shillered, physicked and chemicaled, the high school....should be of no use in the world—particularly the business world."

Three heavy punches in succession came from *Ladies Home Journal*: "The case of Seventeen Million Children—Is Our Public-School System Providing an Utter Failure?" This declaration would seem difficult to top, but the second article did just that: "Is the Public School a Failure? It Is: The Most Momentous Failure in Our American Life Today." And a third, written by the principal of a New York City high school, went even further. Entitled "The Danger of Running a Fool Factory," it made this point: that education is "permeated with errors and hypocrisy," while the Dean of Columbia Teachers College, James E. Russell added that "If school cannot be made to drop its *mental development obsession* the whole system should be abolished." [emphasis mine]

The Fabian Spirit

To speak of scientific management in school and society without crediting the influence of the Fabians would do great disservice to truth, but the nature of Fabianism is so complex it raises questions this essay cannot answer. To deal with the Fabians in a brief compass as I'm going to do is to deal necessarily in simplifications in order to see a little how this charming group of scholars, writers, heirs, heiresses, scientists, philosophers, bombazines, gazebos, trust-fund babies, and successful men and women of affairs became the most potent force in the creation of the modern welfare state, distributors of its characteristically dumbed-down version of schooling. Yet pointing only to this often frivolous organization's eccentricity would be to disrespect the incredible accomplishments of Beatrice Webb and her associates, and their decisive effort on schooling. Mrs. Webb is the only woman ever deemed worthy of burial in Westminster Abbey.

What nineteenth-century Transcendentalists and Muggletonians hoped to be in reordering the triumvirate of society, school, and family, twentieth-century Fabians actually were. Although far from the only potent organization working behind the scenes to radically reshape domestic and international life, it would not be too far out of line to call the twentieth century the Fabian century. One thing is certain: the direction of modern schooling for the bottom 90 percent of our society has followed a largely Fabian design—and the puzzling security and prestige enjoyed at the moment by those who speak of "globalism" and "multiculturalism" are a direct result of heed paid earlier to Fabian prophecies that a welfare state, followed by an intense focus on internationalism, would be the mechanism elevating corporate society over political society, and a necessary precursor to utopia. Fabian theory is the *Das Kapital* of financial capitalism.

Fabianism always floated above simplistic politics, seeking to preempt both sides. The British Labour Party and its post-WWII welfare state are Fabianism made visible. This is well understood; not so easily comprehended are signs of an aristocratic temper—like this little anti-meritocratic Fabian gem found in a report of the British College of Surgeons:

Medicine would lose immeasurably if the proportion of such students [from upper-class and upper-middle-class homes] were to be reduced in favour of precocious children who qualify for subsidies [i.e., scholarship students].

Even though meritocracy is their reliable cover, social stratification was always the Fabian's real trump suit. Entitlements are another Fabian insertion into the social fabric, even though the idea antedates them, of course.

To realize the tremendous task Fabians originally assigned themselves (a significant part of which was given to schooling to perform), we need to reflect again on Darwin's shattering books, *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), each arguing in its own way that far from being blank slates, children are written

upon indelibly by their race of origin, some "favored" in Darwin's language, some not. A powerful public relations initiative of recent years has attempted to separate Darwin from "social Darwinism," but it cannot be done because Darwin himself is the prototypical social Darwinist. Both books taken together issued a license for liberal upper classes to justify forced schooling. From an evolutionary perspective, schools are the indoctrination phase of a gigantic breeding experiment. Working-class fantasies of "self-improvement" were dismissed from the start as sentimentality that evolutionary theory had no place for.

What Darwin accomplished with his books was a freeing of discussion from the narrow straitjacket it had worn when society was considered a matter of internal associations and relationships. Darwin made it possible to consider political affairs as a prime *instrument of social evolution*. Here was a pivotal moment in Western thought, a changing of the guard in which secular purpose replaced religious purpose, long before trashed by the Enlightenment.

For the poor, the working classes, and middle classes in the American sense,⁷ this change in outlook, lauded by the most influential minds of the nineteenth century, was a catastrophe of titanic proportions, especially for government schoolchildren. Children could no longer simply be parents' darlings. Many were (biologically) a racial menace. The rest had to be thought of as soldiers in genetic combat, the moral equivalent of war. For all but a relative handful of favored families, aspiration was off the board as a scientific proposition.

For governments, children could no longer be considered individuals but were regarded as categories, rungs on a biological ladder. Evolutionary science pronounced the majority useless mouths waiting for nature to dispense with entirely. Nature (as expressed through her human agents) was to be understood not as cruel or oppressive but beautifully, functionally *purposeful*—a neo-pagan perspective to be reflected in the organization and administration of schools.

Three distinct and conflicting tendencies competed in the nineteenth-century theory of society: first was the empirical tendency stemming from John Locke and David Hume which led to that outlook on the study of society we call pragmatism, and eventually to behavioristic psychology; the second line descended from Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Savigny, and others and led to the organic theory of the modern state, the preferred metaphor of Fabians (and many later systems theorists); the third outlook comes to us out of Rousseau, Diderot, d'Alembert, Bentham, the Mills, and leads almost directly to the utilitarian state of Marxist socialism. Each of these postures was savagely assailed over time by the development of academic Darwinism. After Darwin, utopia as a human-friendly place dies an agonizing death. The last conception of utopia after Darwin which isn't some kind of hellish nightmare is William Morris' *News from Nowhere*.

With only niggling reservations, the Fabian brain trust had no difficulty employing force to shape recalcitrant individuals, groups, and organizations. Force in the absence of divine injunctions is a tool to be employed unsentimentally. Fabian George Bernard Shaw established the principle wittily in 1920 when he said that under a Fabian future government:

You would not be allowed to be poor. You would be forcibly fed, clothed, lodged, taught, and employed whether you like it or not. If it were discovered that you have not character and industry, you might possibly be executed in a kindly manner.

- *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*

Fabianism came into existence around the year 1884, taking its name from Roman general Fabius Cunctator who preserved the Roman state by defeating Hannibal, chipping away at Hannibal's patience and will to win by avoiding combat. Darwin was the weird holy man Fabians adored, the man who gave them their *principle*, a theory inspirationally equal to god-theory, around which a new organization of society could be justified.

Society, after Darwin, was incontrovertibly about good breeding. That was the only true goal it had, or scientifically could have. Before Darwin, the view of historical development which fit best with Anglo/American tradition was a conception of individual *rights* independent of any theory of reciprocal *obligations* to the State; the duty of leaders was to Society, not to Government, a crucial distinction in perfect harmony with the teachings of Reformation

Christianity, which extended to all believers a conception of *individual* duty, *individual* responsibility, and a free will right to decide for oneself beyond any claims of states. John Calvin proclaimed in his *Institutes* that through natural law, the judgment of *conscience alone* was able to distinguish between justice and injustice. It's hard for secular minds to face, but the powerful freedoms of the West, unmatched by any other society at any other time, are rooted deeply in a religion so radical, so demanding it revolts the modern temper.

For Protestant Christians, salvation was uniquely a matter between God and the individual. The mind of northern Europe had for centuries been fixed on the task of winning liberties for the individual against the State. Notable individual freedoms were taken from the State beginning symbolically at Runnemedes in 1215. By 1859, six and a half centuries later, in the Age of Darwin, individual rights were everywhere in the Anglo-Saxon world understood *to transcend theories of obligation to the State*. Herbert Spencer embodies this attitude, albeit ambiguously. For Spencer, Darwinian evolution promised rights only to the strong. It is well to keep in mind that his brief for liberty masks a rigorously exclusionary philosophy, particularly when he sounds most like Thomas Paine. The first and second amendments of our own constitution illustrate just how far this freedom process could carry. Say what you please before God and Man; protect yourself with a gun if need be from government interference.

Spencer was the reigning British philosopher from 1870 to 1900. In the *Westminster Review* of January 1860, he wrote: "The welfare of citizens cannot rightly be sacrificed to some supposed benefit of the State, the State is to be maintained solely for the benefit of citizens.¹⁰ The corporate life in society must be subservient to the lives of its parts, instead of the lives of the parts being subservient to the corporate life." Spencer had an even greater vogue in America, influencing every intellectual from Walt Whitman to John Dewey and becoming the darling of corporate business. Early in 1882 a grand dinner was held in his honor by the great and powerful who gathered to hear scientific proof of Anglo-Saxon fitness for rule—and a brief for moral relativism. This dinner and its implications set the standard for twentieth-century management, including the management of schooling. A clear appraisal of the fateful meal and its resonance is given in E. Digby Baltzell's *The Protestant Establishment*, a well-bred look at the resurgence of the Anglican outlook in America.

This attitude constituted a violent contradiction of German strong-state, state-as-first-parent doctrine which held that interests of the individual as individual are without significance. But derogation of individual rights was entirely consistent with Darwinian science. The German authoritarian preference received an invigorating restorative with Darwin's advent. Natural selection, the operational principle of Darwinism, was held to reach individuals only indirectly—through the action of society. Hence society becomes a natural subject for regulation and intervention by the State.

To illustrate how reverberant a drum the innocent-sounding locution "natural selection"¹¹ can really be, translated into social practice, try to imagine how denial of black dignities and rights and the corresponding degradation of black family relationships in America because of this denial, might well be reckoned an evolutionarily *positive* course, in Darwinian terms. By discouraging Negro breeding, eventually the numbers of this most disfavored race would diminish. The state not only had a vested interest in becoming an active agent of evolution, it could not help but become one, willy-nilly. Fabians set out to write a sensible evolutionary agenda when they entered the political arena. Once this biopolitical connection is recognized, the past, present, and future of this seemingly stumbling movement takes on a formidable coherence. Under the dottiness, lovability, intelligence, high social position, and genuine goodness of some of their works, the system held out as humanitarian by Fabians is grotesquely deceptive; in reality, Fabian compassion masks a real aloofness to humanity. It is purely an intellectual project in scientific management.

Thomas Davidson's *History of Education* seen through this lens transmutes in front of our eyes from the harmlessly addled excursion into romantic futurism it seems to be into a manual of frightening strategic goals and tactical methods. Fabians emerged in the first years of the twentieth century as great champions of social efficiency in the name of the evolutionary destiny of the race. This infused a powerful secular theology into the movement, allowing its members to revel privately in an ennobling destiny. The Fabian program spread quickly through the best colleges and universities under many different names, multiplying its de facto membership among young men and women blissfully unaware of their induction. They were only being modern. H.G. Wells called it "the open

conspiracy" in an essay bearing the same title, and worth your time to track down.

As the movement developed, Fabians became aristocratic friends of other social-efficiency vanguards like Taylorism or allies of the Methodist social gospel crowd of liberal Christian religionists busy substituting Works for Faith in one of the most noteworthy religious reversals of all time. Especially, they became friends and advisors of industrialists and financiers, travelers in the same direction. This cross-fertilization occurred naturally, not out of petty motives of profit, but because by Fabian lights evolution had progressed furthest among the international business and banking classes!

These laughing gentry were impressively effective at whatever they turned their hands to because they understood principles of social leverage. Kitty Muggeridge writes:

If you want to pinpoint the moment in time when the very first foundation of the Welfare State was laid, a reasonable date to choose would be the last fortnight of November in 1905 when Beatrice Webb was appointed to the Royal Commission on the Poor Law, and she convinced her protégé, Albert Beveridge, to join a committee for dealing with employment.

During Mrs. Webb's tenure on the Royal Commission, she laid down the first blueprint of cradle-to-grave social security to eradicate poverty "without toppling the whole social structure." She lived to see Beveridge promulgate her major ideas in the historic *Beveridge Report*, from which they were brought to life in post-WWII Britain and the United States.

Fabian practitioners developed Hegelian principles which they co-taught alongside Morgan bankers and other important financial allies over the first half of the twentieth century. One insightful Hegelianism was that to push ideas efficiently it was necessary first to co-opt both political Left *and* political Right. Adversarial politics—competition—was a loser's game.¹² By infiltrating all major media, by continual low-intensity propaganda, by massive changes in group orientations (accomplished through principles developed in the psychological-warfare bureaus of the military), and with the ability, using government intelligence agents and press contacts, to induce a succession of crises, they accomplished that astonishing feat.

⁷In the British sense, middle classes are a buffer protecting elites from the poor; our own statistical income-based designation leads to a more eclectic composition, and to somewhat less predictability of attitudes and values.

⁸The origins are disputed but it was an offshoot of Thomas Davidson's utopian group in New York, "The Fellowship of the New Life"—an American export to Britain, not the other way around. The reader should be warned I use the term "Fabian" more indiscriminately with less concern for actual affiliation through the rest of the book than I do here. Fabianism was a *zeitgeist* as well as a literal association, and thousands of twentieth-century influentials have been Fabians who might be uncomfortable around its flesh and blood adherents, or who would be puzzled by the label.

⁹The spelling preferred by baronial descendants of the actual event. See Chapter Twelve.

¹⁰Contrast this with John F. Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" Inaugural of 1960 which measured the distance we had retreated since the Civil War. It's useful to remember, however, that Spencer reserved these feelings only for the Elect.

¹¹In 1900, Sidney Sherwood of Johns Hopkins University joined a host of prominent organizations and men like Andrew Carnegie in declaring the emergence of the corporate system as the highest stage in evolution. Sherwood suggested the modern corporation's historic task was to sort out "genius," to get rid of "the weak." This elimination is "the real function of the trust," and the formation of monopoly control is "natural selection of the highest order." Try to imagine how this outlook played out in corporate schooling.

¹²The most dramatic example of abandoning competition and replacing it with cooperation was the breath-taking monopolization of first the nation's, then the world's oil supply by Standard Oil under the personal direction of John D. Rockefeller Sr. Rockefeller despised the competitive marketplace, as did his fellow titans of finance and industry, J.P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie. Rockefeller's negotiating team was instructed to accommodate any company willing to enter his cartel, to destroy any that resisted.

The Open Conspiracy

When I speak of Fabianism, or of any particular Fabians, actual or virtual like Kurt Lewin, once head of Britain's Psychological Warfare Bureau, or R.D. Laing, once staff psychologist at the Tavistock Institute, I have no interest in mounting a polemic against this particular conceit of the comfortable intelligentsia. Fabian strategy and tactics have been openly announced and discussed with clarity for nearly a century, whether identified as Fabian or not. Nothing illegal about it. I do think it a tragedy, however, that government school children are left in the dark about the existence of influential groups with complex social agendas aimed at their lives.

I've neglected to tell you so far about the role *stress* plays in Fabian evolutionary theory. Just as Hegel taught that history moves faster toward its conclusion by way of warfare, so evolutionary socialists were taught by Hegel to see *struggle* as the precipitant of evolutionary improvement for the species, a necessary purifier eliminating the weak from the breeding sweepstakes. Society evolves slowly toward "social efficiency" all by itself; society under stress, however, evolves much faster! Thus the deliberate creation of crisis is an important tool of evolutionary socialists. Does that help you understand the government school *drama* a little better, or the well-publicized doomsday scenarios of environmentalists?

The London School of Economics is a Fabian creation. Mick Jagger spent time there; so did John F. Kennedy. Once elitist, the *Economist*, now a worldwide pop-intellectual publication, is Fabian, as is *The New Statesman* and Ruskin Labor College of Oxford. The legendary Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations, premier mind-bending institutions of the world, are Fabian. Theodor Adorno, an important if barely visible avatar of the therapeutic state, and a one-time eminence at Tavistock, traveled the Fabian road as well.

You needn't carry a card or even have heard the name Fabian to follow the wolf-in-sheep's-clothing flag. Fabianism is mainly a value-system with progressive objectives. Its social club aspect isn't for coalminers, farmers, or steam-fitters. We've all been exposed to many details of the Fabian program without realizing it. In the United States, some organizations heavily influenced by Fabianism are the Ford Foundation, the Russell Sage Foundation, the Stanford Research Institute, the Carnegie Endowments, the Aspen Institute, the Wharton School, and RAND. And this short list is illustrative, not complete. Tavistock underwrites or has intimate relations with thirty research institutions in the United States, all which at one time or another have taken a player's hand in the shaping of American schooling.

Once again, you need to remember we aren't conspiracy hunting but tracking an idea, like microchipping an eel to see what holes it swims into in case we want to catch it later on. H.G. Wells, best known of all early Fabians, once wrote of the Fabian project:

The political world of the Open Conspiracy must weaken, efface, incorporate and supersede existing governments....The character of the Open Conspiracy will then be plainly displayed. It will be a world religion. This large, loose assimilatory mass of groups and societies will definitely and obviously attempt to swallow up the entire population of the world and become a new human community....The immediate task before all people, a planned World State, is *appearing at a thousand points of light* [but]...generations of propaganda and education may have to precede it. (emphasis added)

Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote his famous signature book "Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technetronic Era" in 1970, a piece reeking with Fabianisms: dislike of direct popular power, relentless advocacy of the right and duty of evolutionarily advanced nations to administer less developed parts of the world, revulsion at populist demands for "selfish self-government" (homeschooling would be a prime example), and stress on collectivism. Brzezinski said in the book:

It will soon be possible to assert almost continuous control over every citizen and to maintain up-to-date files containing even the most personal details about health and personal behavior of every citizen, in

addition to the more customary data. These files will be subject to instantaneous retrieval by the authorities. Power will gravitate into the hands of those who control information.

In his essay, Brzezinski called common people, "an increasingly purposeless mass." And, of course, if the army of children collected in mass schooling is really "purposeless," what argument says it should exist at all?

13The government-created crisis, masquerading as an unexpected *external* provocation, is elementary Hegelian strategy. If you want to take Texas and California from Mexico, first shoot a few Americans while the press disinforms the nation that Mexican depredations against our nationals have to be stopped; if you want Cuba as a satrapy, blow up an American battleship and pin it on the Cubans. By this strategy, a nation which has decided to suspend its democratic traditions with a period of martial law (under which permanent social reordering would occur) might arrange a series of "terrorist" attacks upon itself which would justify the transformation as a defense of general public safety.

14In the "world peace" phenomenon so necessary to establish a unitary world order lies a real danger, according to evolutionists, of species deterioration caused by inadvertent preservation of inferior genes which would otherwise be killed or starved. Hence the urgency of insulating superior breeding stock from pollution through various strategies of social segregation. Among these, forced classification through schooling has been by far the most important.

An Everlasting Faith

Fabianism was a principal force and inspiration behind all major school legislation of the first half of the twentieth century. And it will doubtless continue to be in the twenty-first. It will help us understand Fabian influence to look at the first Fabian-authored consideration of public schooling, the most talked-about education book of 1900, Thomas Davidson's peculiar and fantastic *History of Education*.

The *Dictionary of American Biography* describes Davidson as a naturalized Scot, American since 1867, and a follower of William Torrey Harris, federal Commissioner of Education—the most influential Hegelian in North America. Davidson was also first president of the Fabian Society in England, a fact not thought worthy of preservation in the biographical dictionary, but otherwise easy enough to confirm. This news is also absent from Pelling's *America and The British Left*, although Davidson is credited there with "usurping" the Fabians.

In his important monograph "Education in the Forming of American Society," Bernard Bailyn, as you'll recall, said anyone bold enough to venture a history of American schooling would have to explain the sharp disjunction separating these local institutions as they existed from 1620 to 1890 from the massification which followed afterwards. In presenting his case, Bailyn had cause to compare "two notable books" on the subject which both appeared in 1900. One was Davidson's, the other Edward Eggleston's.

Eggleston's *Transit of Civilization* Bailyn calls "a remarkably imaginative effort to analyze the original investment from which has developed Anglo-Saxon culture in America by probing the complex states of knowing and thinking, of feeling and passion of the seventeenth century colonists." The opening words of Eggleston's book, said Bailyn, make clear the central position of education in early America. Bailyn calls *Transit* "one of the subtlest and most original books ever written on the subject" and "a seminal work," but he notes how quickly it was "laid aside by American intelligentsia as an oddity, irrelevant to the interests of the group then firmly shaping the historical study of American education."

For that group, the book of books was Davidson's *History of Education*. William James called its author a "knight-errant of the intellectual life," an "exuberant polymath." Bailyn agrees that Davidson's "was a remarkable book":

Davidson starts with "The Rise of Intelligence" when "man first rose above the brute." Then he trots briskly through "ancient Turanian," Semitic, and Aryan education, picks up speed on "civic education" in Judaea, Greece, and Rome, gallops swiftly across Hellenistic, Alexandrian, Patristic, and Muslim education; leaps

magnificently over the thorny barriers of scholasticism, the mediaeval universities, Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter-Reformation, and then plunges wildly through the remaining five centuries in sixty-four pages flat.

It was less the frantic scope than the purpose of this strange philosophical essay that distinguished it in the eyes of an influential group of writers. Its purpose was to dignify a newly self-conscious profession called *Education*. Its argument, a heady distillation of conclusions from Social Darwinism, claimed that *modern education was a cosmic force leading mankind to full realization of itself*. Davidson's preface puts the intellectual core of Fabianism on center stage:

My endeavor has been to present education as the last and highest form of evolution.... By placing education in relation to the whole process of evolution, as its highest form, I have hoped to impart to it a dignity which it could hardly otherwise receive or claim...when it is recognized to be the highest phase of the world-process. "World process" here is an echo of Kant and Hegel, and for the teacher to be the chief agent in that process, both it and he assumes a very different aspect.

Here is the intellectual and emotional antecedent of "creation spirituality," Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's assertion that evolution has become a *spiritual* inevitability in our time.

Suddenly mere schooling found itself elevated from its petty, despised position on the periphery of the known universe into an intimate involvement in the cosmic destiny of man, a master key too important to be left to parents. By 1906, Paul Monroe of Teachers College could write in his *Text-book in the History of Education* that knowledge of the "purpose of education" was to supply the teacher with "fundamentals of an everlasting faith as broad as human nature and as deep as the life of the race."

This *History of Education*, according to Bailyn, "came to be taught as an introductory course, a form of initiation, in every normal school, department of education, and teachers college in the country":

The story had to be got straight. And so a few of the more imaginative of that energetic and able group of men concerned with mapping overall progress of "scientific" education, though not otherwise historians, took over the management of the historical work in education. With great virtuosity they drew up what became the patristic literature of a powerful academic ecclesia.

The official history of education:

grew in almost total isolation from the major influences and shaping minds of twentieth-century historiography; and its isolation proved to be self-intensifying: the more parochial the subject became, the less capable it was of attracting the kinds of scholars who could give it broad relevance and bring it back into the public domain. It soon displayed the exaggeration of weakness and extravagance of emphasis that are the typical results of sustained inbreeding.

These "educational missionaries" spoke of schools as if they were monasteries. By limiting the idea of education to formal school instruction, the public gradually lost sight of what the real thing was. The questions these specialists disputed were as irrelevant to real people as the disputes of medieval divines; there was about their writing a condescension for public concerns, for them "the whole range of education had become an *instrument of deliberate social purpose*." (emphasis added) After 1910, divergence between what various publics expected would happen, in government schools and what the rapidly expanding school establishment intended to *make* happen opened a deep gulf between home and school, ordinary citizen and policymaker.

Regulating Lives Like Machinery

The real explanation for this sudden gulf between NEA policies in 1893 and 1911 had nothing to do with intervening feedback from teachers, principals, or superintendents about what schools needed; rather, it signaled

titanic forces gathering outside the closed universe of schooling with the intention of altering this nation's economy, politics, social relationships, future direction, and eventually the terms of its national existence, using schools as instruments in the work.

Schoolmen were never invited to the policy table at which momentous decisions were made. When Ellwood P. Cubberley began tentatively to raise his voice in protest against radical changes being forced upon schools (in his history of education), particularly the sudden enforcement of compulsory attendance laws which brought amazing disruption into the heretofore well-mannered school world, he quickly pulled back without naming the community leaders—as he called them—who gave the actual orders. This evidence of impotence documents the pedagogue status of even the most elevated titans of schooling like Cubberley. You can find this reference and others like it in *Public Education in the United States*.

Scientific management was about to merge with systematic schooling in the United States; it preferred to steal in silently on little cat's feet, but nobody ever questioned the right of businessmen to impose a business philosophy to tamper with children's lives. On the cantilever principle of interlocking directorates pioneered by Morgan interests, scientific school management flowed into other institutional domains of American life, too. According to Taylor, application of mechanical power to production could be generalized into every arena of national life, even to the pulpit, certainly to schools. This would bring about a realization that people's lives could be regulated very much like machinery, without sentiment. Any expenditure of time and energy demanded rationalization, whether first-grader or coalminer, behavior should be mathematically accounted for following the new statistical procedures of Galton and Karl Pearson.

The scientific management movement was backed by many international bankers and industrialists. In 1905, the vice president of the National City Bank of New York, Frank Vanderlip, made his way to the speaker's podium at the National Education Association's annual convention to say:

I am firmly convinced the economic success of Germany can be encompassed in a single word—schoolmaster. From the economic point of view the school system of Germany stands unparalleled.

German schools were psychologically managed, ours must be, too. People of substance stood, they thought, on the verge of an ultimate secret. How to write upon the empty slates of empty children's minds in the dawning era of scientific management. What they would write there was a program to make dwarf and fractional human beings, people crippled by implanted urges and habits beyond their understanding, men and women who cry out to be managed.

The Gary Plan

Frederick Taylor's gospel of efficiency demanded complete and intensive use of industrial plant facilities. From 1903 onwards, strenuous efforts were made to achieve full utilization of space by forcing year-round school on society. Callahan suggests it was "the children of America, who would have been unwilling victims of this scheme, who played a decisive role in beating the original effort to effect this back."

But east of Chicago, in the synthetic U.S. Steel company town of Gary, Indiana, Superintendent William A. Wirt, a former student of John Dewey's at the University of Chicago, was busy testing a radical school innovation called the Gary Plan soon to be sprung on the national scene. Wirt had supposedly invented a new organizational scheme in which school subjects were *departmentalized*; this required movement of students from room to room on a regular basis so that all building spaces were in constant use. Bells would ring and just as with Pavlov's salivating dog, children would shift out of their seats and lurch toward yet another class.

In this way children could be exposed to many nonacademic socialization experiences and much scientifically engineered physical activity, and it would be a bonus value from the same investment, a curriculum apart from

so-called basic subjects which by this time were being looked upon as an actual menace to long-range social goals. Wirt called his system the "work-study-play" school, but outside of Gary it was referred to simply as "the Gary Plan." Its noteworthy economical feature, rigorously scheduling a student body twice as large as before into the same space and time, earned it the informal name "platoon school."

While the prototype was being established and tested on children of the new industrial proletariat in Gary, the plan itself was merchandised from newsstand, pulpit, and lecture circuit, lauded in administrative circles, and soundly praised by first pedagogical couple John and Evelyn Dewey in their 1915 book, *Schools of Tomorrow*. The first inkling Gary might be a deliberate stepchild of the scientific management movement occurred in a February 1911 article by Wirt for *The American School Board Journal*, "Scientific Management of School Plants." But a more thorough and forceful exposition of its provenance was presented in the *Elementary School Teacher* by John Franklin Bobbit in a 1912 piece titled "Elimination of Waste in Education."

Bobbit said Gary schools were the work of businessmen who understood scientific management. Teaching was slated to become a specialized scientific calling conducted by pre-approved agents of the central business office. Classroom teachers would teach the same thing over and over to groups of traveling children; special subject teachers would deliver their special subjects to classes rotating through the building on a precision time schedule.

Early in 1914, the Federal Bureau of Education, then located in the Interior Department, strongly endorsed Wirt's system. This led to one of the most dramatic and least-known events in twentieth-century school history. In New York City, a spontaneous rebellion occurred on the part of the students and parents against extension of the Gary Plan to their own city. While the revolt had only short-lived effects, it highlights the demoralization of private life occasioned by passing methods of industry off as education.

Bobbit was the influential schoolman who reorganized the Los Angeles school curriculum, replacing formal history with "Social Studies." Of the Bobbitized set of educational objectives, the five most important were 1) Social intercommunication 2) Maintenance of physical efficiency 3) Efficient citizenship 4) General social contacts and relationships 5) Leisure occupations. My own favorite is "efficient citizenship," which bears rolling around on the point of one's bayonet as the bill is presented for payment.

The Jewish Student Riots

Less than three weeks before the mayoral election of 1917, rioting broke out at PS 171, an elementary school on Madison Avenue near 103rd Street in New York City which had adopted the Gary Plan. About a thousand demonstrators smashed windows, menaced passersby, shouted threats, and made school operation impossible. Over the next few days newspapers downplayed the riot, marginalizing the rioters as "street corner agitators" from Harlem and the Upper East Side, but they were nothing of the sort, being mainly immigrant parents. Demonstrations and rioting spread to other Gary Plan schools, including high schools where student volunteers were available to join parents on the picket line.

At one place, five thousand children marched. For ten days trouble continued, breaking out in first one place then another. Thousands of mothers milled around schools in Yorkville, a German immigrant section, and in East Harlem, complaining angrily that their children had been put on "half-rations" of education. They meant that mental exercise had been removed from the center of things. Riots flared out into Williamsburg and Brownsville in the borough of Brooklyn; schools were stoned, police car tires slashed by demonstrators. Schools on the Lower East Side and in the Bronx reported trouble also.

The most notable aspect of this rioting was its source in what today would be the bottom of the bell-curve masses...and they were complaining that school was too easy! What could have possessed recently arrived immigrants to defy their betters? Whatever it was, it poisoned the promising political career of mayoral incumbent, John Purroy Mitchel, a well-connected, aristocratic young progressive who had been seriously mentioned as presidential timber. Although Teddy Roosevelt personally campaigned for him, Mitchel lost by a two-to-one

margin when election day arrived shortly after the riots were over, the disruptions widely credited with bringing Mitchel down. In all, three hundred students were arrested, almost all Jewish. I identify their ethnicity because today we don't usually expect Jewish kids to get arrested in bulk.

To understand what was happening requires us to meet an entity calling itself the Public Education Association. If we pierce its associational veil, we find that it is made up of bankers, society ladies, corporation lawyers and, in general, people with private fortunes or access to private fortunes. The PEA announced in 1911 an "*urgent need*" to transform public schools into child welfare agencies. (emphasis added) Shortly afterward, Mitchel, a member of the PEA, was elected mayor of New York. Superintendent Wirt in Gary was promptly contacted and offered the New York superintendency. He agreed, and the first Gary schools opened in New York City in March 1915.

Bear in mind there was no public debate, no warning of this radical step. Just seventy-five days after the Gary trial began, the financial arm of New York City government declared it a total success, authorizing conversion of twelve more schools. (The original trial had only been for two.) This was done in June at the end of the school year when public attention was notoriously low. Then in September of 1915, after a net one hundred days of trial, Comptroller Prendergast issued a formal report *recommending extension of the Gary Plan into all schools of New York City!* He further recommended lengthening the school day and the school year.

At the very time this astonishing surprise was being prepared for the children of New York City in 1915, a series of highly laudatory articles sprouted like zits all over the periodical press calling the Gary Plan the answer to our nation's school prayers. One characteristic piece read, "*School must fill the vacuum of the home, school must be life itself as once the old household was a life itself.*" (emphasis added) Like Rommel's Panzer columns, true believers were on the move. At the same time press agents were skillfully manipulating the press, officers of the Rockefeller Foundation, a body which supported the Gary Plan wholeheartedly, were appointed without fanfare as members of the New York City Board of Education, compliments of Mayor Mitchel.

Immediately after Prendergast's report appeared calling for total Gary-ization of public schooling, a book written by a prominent young protégé of John Dewey directed national attention to the Gary miracle "where children learn to play and prepare for vocations as well as to study abstractions." Titled *The Gary Schools*, its author, Randolph Bourne, was among the most beloved columnists for *The New Republic* in the days when that magazine, product of J.P. Morgan banker Willard Straight's personal patronage, took some of its editorial instruction directly from the tables of power in America.

In light of what happened in 1917, you might find it interesting to have your librarian scare up a copy of Bourne's *Gary Schools* so you can study how a well-orchestrated national propaganda campaign can colonize your mind. Even as Bourne's book was being read, determined opposition was forming.

In 1917, in spite of grassroots protest, the elite Public Education Association urged the opening of forty-eight more Gary schools (there were by that time thirty-two in operation). Whoever was running the timetable on this thing had apparently tired of gradualism and was preparing to step from the shadows and open the engine full throttle. A letter from the PEA director (*New York Times*, 27 June, 1917) urged that more Gary schools must be opened. An earlier letter by director Nudd struck an even more hysterical note: "The situation is acute, no further delay." This Hegelian manufactured crisis was used to thaw Board of Estimate recalcitrance, which body voted sufficient funds to extend the Gary scheme through the New York City school system.

School riots followed hard on the heels of that vote. European immigrants, especially Jews from Germany (where collectivist thinking in the West had been perfected), knew exactly what the scientific Gary Plan would mean to their children. They weren't buying. In the fallout from these disturbances, socialite Mitchel was thrown out of office in the next election. The Gary schools themselves were dissolved by incoming Mayor Hylan who called them "a scheme" of the Rockefeller Foundation: "a system by which Rockefellers and their allies hope to educate coming generations in the 'doctrine of contentment,' another name for social serfdom."

The Rockefeller Report

The Gary tale is a model of how managed school machinery can be geared up in secret without public debate to deliver a product parents don't want. Part One of the Gary story is the lesson we learned from the impromptu opinion poll of Gary schooling taken by housewives and immigrant children, a poll whose results translated into riots. Having only their native wit and past experience to guide them, these immigrant parents concluded that Gary schools were caste schools. Not what they expected from America. They turned to the only weapon at their disposal—disruption—and it worked. They shrewdly recognized that boys in elite schools wouldn't tolerate the dumbing down their own were being asked to accept. They knew this would *close* doors of opportunity, not open them.

Some individual comments from parents and principals about Gary are worth preserving: "too much play and time-wasting," "they spend all day listening to the phonograph and dancing," "they change class every forty minutes, my daughter has to wear her coat constantly to keep it from being stolen," "the cult of the easy," "a step backwards in human development," "focusing on the group instead of the individual." One principal predicted if the plan were kept, retardation would multiply *as a result of minimal contact between teachers and students*. And so it has.

Part Two of the Gary story is the official Rockefeller report condemning Gary, circulated at Rockefeller headquarters in 1916, *but not issued until 1918*. Why this report was suppressed for two years we can only guess. You'll recall Mayor Hylan's charge that the Rockefeller Foundation moved heaven and earth to force its Gary Plan on an unwitting and unwilling citizenry, using money, position, and influence to such an extent that a New York State Senate Resolution of 1916 accused the foundation of moving to gain complete control of the New York City Board of Education. Keep in mind that Rockefeller people were active in 1915, 1916, and 1917, lobbying to *impose* a Gary destiny on the public schools of New York City even after its own house analyst pointed to the intellectual damage these places caused.

The 1916 analytical report leapfrogged New York City to examine the original schools as they functioned back in Gary, Indiana. Written by Abraham Flexner,¹⁶ it stated flatly that Gary schools were a total failure, "offering insubstantial programs and a general atmosphere which habituated students to inferior performance." Flexner's analysis was a massive repudiation of John Dewey's shallow *Schools of Tomorrow* hype for Gary.

Now we come to the mystery. *After* this bad idea crashed in New York City in 1917, the critical Rockefeller report held in house since 1916 was issued in 1918 to embarrass critics who had claimed the whole mess was the idea of the Rockefeller project officers. So we know in retrospect that the Rockefeller Foundation was aware of serious shortcomings *before* it used its political muscle to impose Gary on New York. Had the Flexner report been offered in a timely fashion before the riots, it would have spelled doom for the Gary Plan. Why it wasn't has never been explained.

The third and final part of the Gary story comes straight out of *Weird Tales*. In all existing accounts of the Gary drama, none mentions the end of Superintendent Wirt's career after his New York defeat. Only Diane Ravitch (in *The Great School Wars*) even bothers to track Wirt back home to Gary, where he resumed the superintendency and became, she tells us, a "very conservative schoolman" in his later years. Ah, what Ravitch missed!

The full facts are engrossing: seventeen years after Wirt left New York City, a government publication printed the next significant chapter of the Wirt story. Its title: *Hearings, House Select Committee to Investigate Certain Statements of Dr. William Wirt, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, April 10 and 17, 1934*. It seems that Dr. Wirt, while in Washington to attend a school administrators meeting in 1933, had been invited to an elite private dinner party at the home of a high Roosevelt administration official. The dinner was attended by well-placed members of the new government, including A.A. Berle, a famous "inner circle" brain-truster. There, Wirt heard that the Depression was being artificially prolonged by credit rigging, until little people and businessmen were shaken enough to agree to a plan where government must dominate business and commerce in the future!

All this he testified to before Congress. The transformation was to make *government* the source of long-term

capital loans. Control of business would follow. Wirt testified he was told Roosevelt was only a puppet; that his hosts had made propaganda a science, that they could make newspapers and magazines beg for mercy by taking away much of their advertising; that provided they were subservient, leaders of business and labor would be silenced by offers of government contracts for materials and services; that colleges and schools would be kept in line by promises of federal aid until such time as they were under safe control; and that farmers would be managed by letting key operators "get their hands in the public trough."

In the yellow journalism outburst following Wirt's disclosure, *Berle admitted everything*. But he said they were just pulling Wirt's leg! Pulling the leg of the one-time nationally acclaimed savior of public education. *Time* magazine, *The New York Times*, and other major media ridiculed Wirt, effectively silencing him.

Of Wirt's earlier New York foray into the engineering of young people, New York City mayor Hylan was quoted vividly in *The New York Times* of March 27, 1922:

The real menace to our republic is this invisible government which like a giant octopus sprawls its slimy length over city, state and nation.... It has seized in its tentacles our executive officers, our legislative bodies, our schools, our courts, our newspapers, and every agency created for the public protection.... To depart from mere generalizations, let me say that at the head of this octopus are the Rockefeller Standard Oil interests.

Like many of the rest of you, I was conditioned early in adult life to avoid conspiracy talk and conspiracy takers by the universal scorn heaped upon the introduction of such arguments into the discourse. All "responsible" journalistic media, and virtually all of the professoriate allowed public access through those media, respond reflexively, and negatively, it seems, to any hint of a dark underside to our national life. With that in mind, what are we to make of Mayor Hylan's outburst or for that matter, the statements of three senators quoted later on this page?

Don't expect me to answer that question for you. But do take a deep breath and make the effort to read Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, written back in the 17th century but easily located in every library of any size in the United States, for some enlightenment in your ruminations.

During the crucial years of the school changeover from academic institution to behavioral modification instrument, the radical nature of the metamorphosis caught the attention of a few national politicians who spoke out, but could never muster enough strength for effective opposition. In the *Congressional Record* of January 26, 1917, for instance, Senator Chamberlain of Oregon entered these words:

They are moving with military precision all along the line to get control of the education of the children of the land.

Senator Poindexter of Washington followed, saying:

The cult of Rockefeller, the cult of Carnegie...as much to be guarded against in the educational system of this country as a particular religious sect.

And in the same issue, Senator Kenyon of Iowa related:

There are certain colleges that have sought endowments, and the agent of the Rockefeller Foundation or the General Education Board had gone out and examined the curriculum of these colleges and compelled certain changes....

It seems to me one of the most dangerous things that can go on in a republic is to have an institution of this power apparently trying to shape and mold the thought of the young people of this country.

Senator Works of California added:

These people...are attempting to get control of the whole educational work of the country.

If it interests you, take a look. It's all in the *Congressional Record* of January 26,1917.

16A man considered the father of twentieth-century American systematic medicine and a longtime employee of the Rockefeller Foundation.

Obstacles On The Road To Centralization

Three major obstacles stood in the way of the great goal of using American schools to realize a scientifically programmed society. The first was the fact that American schooling was locally controlled. In 1930, when the massive socializing scheme was swinging into high gear, helped substantially by an attention-absorbing depression, this nation still had 144,102 local school boards.¹⁷ At least 1.1 million *elected* citizens of local stature made decisions for this country's schools out of their wisdom and experience. Out of 70 million adults between the ages of thirty and sixty-five, one in every sixty-three was on a school board (thirty years earlier, the figure had been one in twenty). Contrast either ratio with today's figure of one in five thousand.

The first task of scientifically managed schooling was to transfer management from a citizen yeomanry to a professional elite under the camouflage of consolidation for economy's sake. By 1932, the number of school districts was down to 127,300; by 1937 to 119,018; by 1950 to 83,719; by 1960 to 40,520; by 1970 to 18,000; by 1990 to 15,361. Citizen oversight was slowly squeezed out of the school institution, replaced by homogeneous managerial oversight, managers screened and trained, watched, loyalty-checked by Columbia, Stanford, Chicago, the Cleveland Conference, and similar organizations with private agendas for public schooling.

The second obstacle to an ideological takeover of schools was the historic influence of teachers as role models. Old-fashioned teachers had a disturbing proclivity to stress development of intellect through difficult reading, heavy writing assignments, and intense discussion. The problem of proud and independent teachers was harder to solve than the reading problem. As late as 1930 there were still 149,400 one-room/one-teacher schools in America, places not only cheap to operate but successful at developing tough-minded, independent thinkers. Most of the rest of our schools were small and administrator-free, too. The idea of principals who *did not teach* came very late in the school game in most places. The fantastic notion of a parasitic army of assistant principals, coordinators, and all the rest of the various familiar specialists of institutional schooling didn't exist at all until 1905, except in the speculations of teacher college dreamers.

Two solutions were proposed around 1903 to suppress teacher influence and make instruction teacher-proof. The first was to grow a heretofore unknown administrative hierarchy of nonteaching principals, assistant principals, subject coordinators and the rest, to drop the teacher's status rank. And if degrading teacher status proved inadequate, another weapon, the standardized test, was soon to be available. By displacing the judgmental function from a visible teacher to a remote bastion of educational scientists somewhere, no mere classroom person could stray very far from approved texts without falling test scores among his or her students signaling the presence of such a deviant.¹⁸ Both these initiatives were underway as WWI ended.

The third obstacle to effective centralization of management was the intimate neighborhood context of most American schools, one where school procedures could never escape organic oversight by parents and other local interests. Not a good venue from which to orchestrate the undermining of traditional society. James Bryant Conant, one of the inventors of the poison gas, Lewisite, and by then chairman of a key Carnegie commission, reported in an ongoing national news story after the Sputnik moment that it was the small size of our schools causing the problem. Only large schools, said Conant, could have faculty and facilities large enough to cover the math and science we (presumably) lacked and Russia (presumably) had. The bigger the better.

In one bold stroke the American factory school of Lancaster days was reborn. Here a de-intellectualized Prussian-style curriculum could reign undetected. From 1960 to 1990, while student population was increasing 61

percent, the number of school administrators grew 342 percent. In constant dollars, costs shot up 331 percent, and teachers, who had fallen from 95 percent of all school personnel in 1915 to 70 percent in 1950, now fell still further, down and down until recently they comprised *less than 50 percent* of the jobs in the school game. School had become an employment project, the largest hiring hall in the world, bigger than agriculture, bigger than armies.

One other significant set of numbers parallels the absolute growth in the power and expense of government schooling, but inversely. In 1960, when these gigantic child welfare agencies called schools were just setting out on their enhanced mission, 85 percent of African American children in New York were from intact, two-parent households. In 1990 in New York City, with the school budget drawing \$9,300 a kid for its social welfare definition of education, that number dropped below 30 percent. School and the social work bureaucracies had done their work well, fashioning what looked to be a permanent underclass, one stripped of its possibility of escape, turned against itself. Scientific management had proven its value, although what that was obviously depended on one's perspective.

~~17~~Down from 355,000 in 1900.

~~18~~None of this apparatus of checks and balances ever worked exactly as intended. A degraded, demoralized teaching staff (and even many demoralized administrators) lacks interest or even energy to police the system effectively. Gross abuses are legion, the custom almost everywhere; records are changed, numbers regularly falsified. A common habit in my day was to fill out phony lunch forms *en masse* to make schools eligible for *Title I* monies. The chief legal officer for the state of California told me in Sacramento a few years ago that his state was unable to effectively monitor the compulsory attendance laws, a truth I can vouch for from firsthand experience.