

EDUCATION AS POLITICS

In America, as a matter of fact, education plays a different and, politically, incomparably more important role than in other countries.

—HANNAH ARENDT,
"The Crisis in Education"

I

Education has always served political functions insofar as it affects, or at least is believed and intended to affect, the future character of the community and the state. Aristotle explicated the relationship in the classic discussion of education he included in the *Politics*. Recall his argument there: it is impossible to talk about education apart from some conception of the good life; people will inevitably differ in their conceptions of the good life, and hence they will inevitably disagree on matters of education; therefore the discussion of education falls squarely within the domain of politics. In more recent times, commentators from Thomas Jefferson to Horace Mann to John Dewey have applied these Aristotelian doctrines to the American experience, arguing the inescapable connection between education and the character of the American polity.

For Jefferson, the goals of education were to diffuse knowledge, inculcate virtue (including patriotism), and cultivate learning; he thought these ends would best be



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achieved in public schools and colleges dedicated to preparing an informed citizenry and a humanely trained leadership. Once the schools and colleges had done their work, a free and responsible press would continue the education of the public in public affairs. Horace Mann accepted these Jeffersonian propositions but went beyond them to call for a common school that would receive children of all creeds, classes, and backgrounds (Jefferson made no provision for African-Americans in his proposals, while Mann stood mute on the matter of racial mixing in the schools, and neither had much to say about the education of women) and would seek to kindle in them a spirit of amity and mutual respect that the conflicts of adult life could never destroy. For Mann, the social responsibilities of the school in an increasingly heterogeneous society were every bit as crucial to the welfare of the republic as its intellectual responsibilities.

John Dewey made those social responsibilities even more extensive, more purposive, and more explicit. He cast the school as an instrument of reform that would not only prepare young people to make informed and independent judgments but also equip them to participate actively, with others, in the continued improvement of the large-scale industrial society that was coming into being. The ideal school, Dewey maintained, would be "an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society, and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science." The task of the teacher would be to introduce children to that community life, saturating them with the spirit of service and providing them with the instruments of effective self-direction. When schools carried out that task, Dewey promised, Americans would have "the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious." Thus did



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Dewey—and with him many of the Progressives—enlarge the social responsibilities of the school and harness schooling more directly to particular social ends. In the process, education was politicized.¹

That politicization, which became ever more apparent during the twentieth century, deepened significantly during the years following World War II in all domains of education, but especially in the domain of schooling. The issues were legion and often colored by local traditions, though they tended to cluster around disagreements over political loyalty, religious orthodoxy, moral purity, and cultural quality. And with remarkable frequency they exploded into “crises”—and that quite apart from the tendency of the press to style any conflict over schooling involving more than a dozen people a crisis. Four such crises were especially emblematic of the politicization of schooling in the postwar era: the crisis over progressive education in Pasadena, California, during the late 1940s and early 1950s; the crisis over school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, during the late 1950s; the crisis over school decentralization in New York City during the late 1960s; and the crisis over moral and religious values in Kanawha County, West Virginia, during the early 1970s.

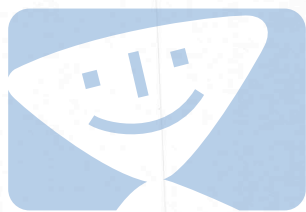
The Pasadena crisis attracted nationwide attention when in 1951 the journalist David Hulburd published *This Happened in Pasadena*, recounting the story of Willard Goslin's appointment as superintendent of schools in Pasadena in 1948, his initial efforts to introduce a number of progressive reforms into the Pasadena school curriculum in 1948 and 1949, the rise of opposition to these reforms in 1949 and 1950, and his resignation as superintendent in 1950 at the request of the same board that had appointed him two years earlier. What becomes clear from the Hulburd book is that the issues that divided the citizens of Pasadena were



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philosophical, social, and financial—they ranged from skepticism over the core curriculum to opposition to school rezoning. A number of “outside” organizations became interested in the controversies and sought to influence them—Allen Zoll’s superpatriotic National Council for American Education was one; charges of communism, socialism, and un-Americanism were hurled, and in the end Goslin’s position became untenable. James B. Conant reviewed Hulburd’s book in the *New York Times Book Review*, cautioning readers against the smear techniques that had marked the discussion of school affairs in Pasadena and warning that the same sorts of controversy could easily engulf other communities; and magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post* broadcast the story of Pasadena’s problems to a nationwide audience. In the end, the Pasadena crisis dramatized the struggle between traditionalists and modernists in education and the related issues of political and religious conservatism and liberalism that swirled around that struggle during the late 1940s and early 1950s.²

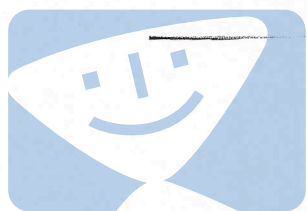
The Little Rock crisis symbolized the struggles over school desegregation that followed in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. The City of Little Rock, under the leadership of its elected school board and its superintendent, Virgil Blossom, prepared a plan in 1955 for the gradual integration of the public schools, beginning at the high school level in 1957 and moving successively to the junior high school and elementary school levels thereafter. That plan was mandated by the federal district court in 1956. As the school year was about to begin in September 1957, however, Governor Orville Faubus declared a state of emergency, called up the Arkansas National Guard, and ordered the guard to prevent the integration of Central High School in the interest of preserving public safety. The federal district court, in turn, instructed the National Guard



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to cease obstructing its order to integrate the school. The governor withdrew the guard; the black students who had been assigned to Central High School were admitted; and threats and violence immediately took over outside the school and occasionally inside as well. President Dwight Eisenhower then ordered federal troops to Arkansas to enforce the court's order and preserve the peace. The schools were kept open during the remainder of the 1957-58 academic year, and one black student was actually graduated in May. During the summer of 1958, Faubus was elected by a large majority to an unprecedented third term as governor; a defiant legislature passed a series of laws permitting the shutting down of public schools forced to integrate; and the Little Rock schools were closed. The first phase of the crisis ended in December 1958 when Blossom was summarily fired by a solidly segregationist school board. The crisis dramatized not only the fierce conflict between the segregationist White Citizens' Councils and the integrationist black churches and NAACP but also the determined use of legal and quasi-legal tactics by local, state, and federal authorities in the effort to shape educational policy. In the end, the Little Rock schools were caught between shouting mobs defying federal court rulings and paratroopers brandishing fixed bayonets to enforce those rulings—with the children, as is often the case, in the middle.

The New York City crisis of 1968 was emblematic of the struggle over school decentralization in the nation's inner cities and the conflicts that erupted between militant parents and laypeople on local school boards and organized teachers. In New York the problems in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experimental school district in Brooklyn were exacerbated by the fact that most of the local school board members and parents were black and most of the teachers involved were white. In a series of bitter confrontations that



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pitted a local school board determined to run the elementary and middle schools of its district according to its own best lights and a teachers union determined to protect the rights of its members as guaranteed by its contract, the United Federation of Teachers struck the schools of the entire city three times, the last time for five weeks. The crisis dramatized the shifting patterns of political power in those cities where blacks were becoming the dominant clientele of the public school system, where teachers and school administrators remained predominantly white, and where the schools seemed to be failing dismally in the task of educating their students. Once again, the children were caught in the middle.

The Kanawha County, West Virginia, crisis (Kanawha County includes the city of Charleston) epitomized the struggles over fundamentalist versus modernist religious values in the schools during the 1970s and 1980s. It called to mind some of the parent-teacher conflicts of the New York City crisis, though the issues in Kanawha County were religious rather than racial. The controversy erupted during the spring of 1974 when Superintendent of Schools Kenneth V. Underwood asked the school board to adopt several series of textbooks for a language arts program that was to be inaugurated in September. The titles had been chosen by a committee of professionals associated with the Kanawha County schools from an approved state list that had been compiled in accordance with a new state requirement that textbooks for the public schools be "multiethnic." One member of the board, the wife of a local Baptist minister, charged that the books were absolutely unfit for school use, claiming that they undermined the Christian religion, employed "filthy language," featured the writings of convicted criminals, subverted traditional morality, and preached unpatriotic values. The board adopted the books



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by a vote of 3 to 2, setting the stage for a protracted disruption of the Kanawha County schools that involved boycotts, shootings, firebombings, and dynamitings and that actually closed the schools for a time owing to the superintendent's fears for the safety of the children. The disputed books were then reviewed by a committee of eighteen citizens, which concluded that they were perfectly suitable for school use. In the end, the board stuck by its decision to adopt the books but provided that no child whose parents objected to them would be forced to read them. The community remained deeply divided, and the teaching staff suffered severe demoralization. Yet again, the children were caught in the middle.

The political issues that tore the colleges and universities apart from time to time during the post-World War II era were similarly emblematic of the growing politicization of education. One might cite the conflict at the University of California between 1949 and 1952 over the imposition of a loyalty oath as a condition of employment; the controversies at a score of colleges and universities during the congressional investigations of the 1950s into the political beliefs and associations of professors and administrators; the pitched battles at Columbia, Harvard, Cornell, and other institutions between 1968 and 1971 over student activism associated with the Vietnam War, defense-related university research, and alleged race discrimination; and the somewhat more restrained but no less significant strife at Stanford, Duke, and other universities during the 1980s concerning the nature and substance of the so-called Western civilization requirement for undergraduates.

The same thing was true of the political crises over family and child-care policy—one need only scan the reports of the three regional White House Conferences on the Family in 1980 to grasp the extent to which family policy served as



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a battleground for conflicts over women's rights, gay rights, abortion rights, family planning, sex education, and child care. And the same thing was true, too, of the political crises over telecommunications policy, where controversies over morality and cultural quality, particularly with respect to children's programming, were not different from those in Kanawha County, with some viewers urging closer regulation by the Federal Communications Commission, others urging boycotts of advertisers who sponsored so-called offensive programs, and still others maintaining that all television broadcasting fell within the guarantees of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

II

Thus did education become increasingly politicized during the post-War era, and thus did various groups with differing conceptions of the good life contend with increasing vigor and occasional violence over the nature and character of education. But the question remains, Why? And the answer, I believe, lies in the longstanding American tendency to try to solve social, political, and economic problems through educational means, and in so doing to invest education with all kinds of millennial hopes and expectations. That tendency pushed educative institutions and programs toward an ever more direct relevance to the everyday affairs of ordinary men and women: it directed the attention of the schools to nurturing social, civic, and economic competences in their students; and it directed the attention of the colleges and universities, not only to preparing leaders for the various domains of life, but also to undertaking the kinds of research and service activities that would redound to the advantage of the community, the polity, and the



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economy. And in pushing educative institutions and programs toward an ever more direct relevance to everyday affairs, that tendency ended up casting education as a leading weapon in everything from the fight against race discrimination to the war on poverty to the drive for political and economic competitiveness.

The philosopher Hannah Arendt commented incisively on these matters in an essay called “The Crisis in Education” that she published during the spring of 1958. The crisis in education, she observed, was merely one aspect of a more general crisis that had overtaken the modern world “everywhere and in almost every sphere of life.” But the crisis was best observed in America, she thought, because it assumed its most extreme form there. The reason was that education played a “different and, politically, incomparably more important role [in America] than in other countries.” This was in part because of the historic need to Americanize the immigrants, she argued. But, even more important, it derived from the “extraordinary enthusiasm for the new” in American life and especially for “newcomers by birth,” namely, children and young people. Arendt saw that enthusiasm as a kind of political utopianism, an illusion that sprang directly from the historic American experience of founding a new nation—a new order of the ages, or *novus ordo seclorum*, as emblazoned on the Great Seal of the United States. It was an illusion, she believed, that could have disastrous consequences in the field of politics. She cited as an example the federal effort to correct the intolerable situation with respect to discrimination against black people in the United States. What did Washington do? It began with the children in the schools, assuming that once a miniature model of a just world had been created for children, it would go on developing naturally and automatically like the children themselves. The plan could not con-



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ceivably work, she argued, since the children would eventually grow up into a preexisting world of adults who had been incapable of solving the problem of race discrimination in the first place. And thus, she concluded, did the crisis in education ultimately announce the bankruptcy of progressive education. For Arendt, John Dewey's ideal school as "embryonic community life" could never be the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society that was "worthy, lovely, and harmonious." It could only be a utopian community completely out of touch with reality.³

Insofar as Arendt pointed to the limitations upon education's ability radically to change the world, Dewey would doubtless have agreed. One need only review his essays during the 1930s on education and politics in the *Social Frontier* to grasp this fact. Yet despite Arendt's predictions, *Brown v. Board of Education* did bring about social and political change. It brought change, first, through the extension of its principles of equality into other domains, from voting rights to fair employment to fair housing; education was not required to achieve the task of eliminating racial discrimination by itself. Of equal importance, the *Brown* decision brought changes in education that made differences in how children thought, felt, and behaved when they became adults. Jomills Henry Braddock II, Robert Crain, and James McPartland reviewed a good deal of the research literature on the effects of school desegregation in 1984 on the thirtieth anniversary of *Brown* and reported the following findings: (1) black students who had been educated in desegregated elementary and secondary schools were more likely than their counterparts from segregated schools to attend predominantly white colleges and universities; (2) black students who had been educated in desegregated schools were more likely than their counterparts from segregated schools to have white as well as black friends, to live in



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racially mixed neighborhoods, and to work in racially mixed settings; (3) white and black students who had attended desegregated schools were more likely to have positive attitudes toward future interracial situations than their counterparts from segregated schools; (4) black students who had been educated in desegregated high schools achieved better grades in college than their counterparts who had been educated in segregated high schools, and had higher graduation rates as well; (5) black students from desegregated schools had better employment opportunities than their counterparts from segregated schools, and black graduates of predominantly white colleges and universities enjoyed higher incomes than their counterparts from predominantly black institutions. The authors concluded that "the evidence already in hand tells us that the initial conception of the impact of school desegregation, as expressed in 1954 in the *Brown* decision, has been borne out. The schools are the place in which society socializes its next generation of citizens. The research findings that we have presented here suggest that the U.S. cannot afford segregated schools, if this nation is genuinely committed to providing equality of opportunity to every citizen." My own view would be to modify that statement with the qualification that the socialization of the schools worked to the extent that the schools' efforts to eliminate race discrimination connected with the expansion of desegregation in the community, the polity, and the economy, much of it mandated by government in response to a civil rights movement in which blacks had played a leading role.⁴

What about the role of education as a centerpiece in the War on Poverty during the 1960s? How effective was education in furthering the social, political, and economic goals of that effort? Three acts of Congress were central in the war: the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Elemen-



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tary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Higher Education Act of 1965. The key educational contributions of the Economic Opportunity Act were Head Start and the job training programs established under the National Youth Corps and the Job Corps. The key educational contributions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act were the Title I (later Chapter I) programs intended to provide special educational services to disadvantaged children. The key educational contributions of the Higher Education Act were the grants and loans to students attending two- and four-year colleges (they later became the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants under the Higher Education Amendments of 1972). Together these programs were intended, in the words of President Lyndon Johnson, "not only to relieve the symptoms of poverty, but to cure it and, above all, to prevent it." Once again, there were skeptics who called attention to the millennialism implicit in Johnson's hyperbole. Christopher Jencks argued in the spring of 1964, well before the three pieces of legislation had even been enacted, that educational programs were not an effective weapon against poverty, and that the way to eliminate poverty was rather to redistribute income, either directly or by subsidizing the goods and services needed by the poor—an argument he would make again eight years later in the concluding paragraphs of his book *Inequality*.⁵

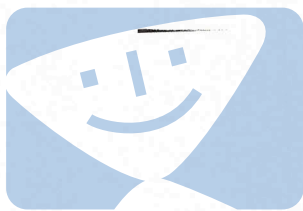
What actually happened? First, it is clear that the programs did not eliminate poverty. Even if, sufficiently financed and properly conducted, the programs had had that potential, they were increasingly starved of funds by the demands of the Vietnam War and, as a result of inadequate financing, the people who directed them were also deprived of the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Nevertheless, the programs did make significant differences. In a review undertaken in 1974, Ralph Tyler found (1) that



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there had been a steady increase in the number of ESEA Title I programs that were providing measurable improvements in the educational achievement of disadvantaged children; (2) that there had been a continuing surge in college enrollments during the late 1960s and early 1970s owing to the high birthrates of the 1950s, the larger percentages of young people graduating from high schools, and the larger percentages of high school graduates going on to college, and that, while the federal assistance made available by the Higher Education Act had clearly made a difference in the participation of black and other minority children in these developments, it was not possible to separate the factors influencing the changes; (3) that early Head Start programs had varied tremendously in their organization and philosophy and that some had clearly begun to produce positive results, but that in light of the considerable reduction in funds during the early 1970s, it was too early to make a general assessment (Tyler had only the results of the 1969 Westinghouse Learning Corporation evaluation to go by, and those results tended to be negative); and (4) that Job Corps programs had demonstrated that many young people from impoverished backgrounds could be helped to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for constructive work roles, but that the task was even more difficult and more costly than the original planners had estimated. Tyler's general conclusion was characteristically wise and prudent:

It is clear now that disadvantaged children can gain in education, but this requires changes in their total educational experiences from early childhood to adolescence. This necessitates large financial support and commitment to long term programs. The returns from these larger expenditures, however, should come not only from the contributions made to this generation of children and youth, but also to those who follow. Disadvantaged children



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who gain an education today are educated parents of the next generation. Their children will not suffer the same handicaps that they encountered. But without an adequate program for educating today's disadvantaged, there seems little likelihood that there will be fewer disadvantaged in the next generation. An adequate program reaching the 20 per cent of American children who are disadvantaged and are distributed among thousands of schools requires a long-term commitment to furnish funds and to develop programs under professional competence needed to guide them. An entire generation of children is involved, which means a 20-year effort. The experience of the 1960's suggests that the cost will be two or three times that of educating children of middle-class background. The development of programs and materials and the acquisition of professional competence to guide new programs is likely to take five to eight years. Americans are not accustomed to long-term commitments of this magnitude. It is a real challenge.

As has been pointed out, six years later L. J. Schweinhart and David Weikart, studying the outcomes of the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, found that those enrolled in the program derived long-term benefits from their participation. In later childhood and adolescence they earned higher marks in school and showed greater commitment to schooling, decreased deviant behavior at school, decreased delinquent behavior outside of school, and higher employment rates as teenagers than their peers who had not been enrolled in the program.⁶

Once again, it is important to remember that these results occurred in an educational system and in an economy that continued to expand, however variable the pace of that expansion in different periods and places, and in a polity with legal prohibitions against discrimination in education and employment, however variable the vigor of enforcement in different periods and places. The results of particular educational programs joined with more general changes in the economy and polity to which the results contributed and by which they were confirmed. There were places in the

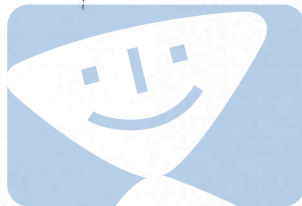


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elementary schools for graduates of the Perry Preschool Program; there were places in the high schools for recipients of services under the Title I programs authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; there were places in the colleges for recipients of the grants and loans made available under the Higher Education Act; and there were jobs—though never enough decent, well-paying jobs that held out hope for advancement—for graduates of the high schools and colleges. In the absence of those conditions, the educational programs of the War on Poverty would have been utopian at best, politically incendiary at worst.

What about the uses of education to achieve political and economic competitiveness? Let us examine two cases: the effort during the 1960s to develop educational and cultural affairs as what Philip Coombs called a “fourth dimension” of foreign policy (the first three being political, economic, and military), and the effort during the 1980s to develop education as an instrument for achieving economic competitiveness—the concern of the sixties being the challenge of the USSR., the concern of the eighties being the challenge of Japan.

It was President John Kennedy who for all intents and purposes launched the first effort. Within weeks after his inauguration, he announced that his administration intended to place greater emphasis on the human side of foreign policy, that there was no better way to assist the emerging nations to become free and viable societies than to help them “develop their human resources through education,” and that the best way in general to strengthen the bonds of understanding and friendship with other nations was through educational and cultural exchange. Kennedy envisioned a significant expansion not only of government exchange and assistance programs but also of related ef-



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forts by foundations, universities, and other private institutions. To provide a greater measure of coordination and cooperation among various government agencies as well as between the governmental and the private sectors, he announced the creation of a new assistant secretaryship of state for educational and cultural affairs in the State Department and appointed Philip Coombs to the position.⁷

There followed for seven or eight years—again, until the Vietnam War began to consume growing portions of the nation's resources—an ambitious program of technical assistance for economic development that was increasingly cast in educational terms. Scores of American universities received AID contracts to provide expertise in the domains of education, agriculture, public administration, and business administration; the Peace Corps sent thousands of volunteers to conduct schools in the developing nations of Africa and Asia; the Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie foundations invested millions of dollars in programs of education, training, and research on the problems of political and economic development, technical assistance, and international education; and the Fulbright and Smith-Mundt exchange fellowships were consolidated and expanded under the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, making possible an increased flow of scholars, scientists, artists, athletes, and students between the United States and foreign countries.

There was an undeniable measure of disinterestedness about the effort, as congressional leaders like J. W. Fulbright and Wayne Hays fought unceasingly to separate educational and cultural affairs programs from the government's information and propaganda campaigns and as the sponsors and implementors of the programs in the foundations and universities sought to carry out their educational tasks in a nonpartisan, professional manner. But it was difficult from the outset to separate the educational and cul-



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tural sides of foreign policy from the political, economic, and military sides. Furthermore, the educational and cultural sides were given only a fraction of the funds allocated to the political, economic, and military sides, and their power and potency were therefore drastically limited—when a major shift appeared in political relations with the USSR or India or Iran, education was virtually powerless to make a difference. Most important, perhaps, many of the assumptions about the power of education to transform the politics and economics of third-world nations (in the terminology of the sixties, to “modernize” them) proved incorrect at best, dangerous at worse. As anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Sol Tax early pointed out, one cannot simply transplant American educative institutions to foreign cultures without producing massive unintended and unanticipated consequences, some of them exceedingly harmful in the eyes of the host country. Little wonder that twenty years later, the African educator W. Senteza Kajubi would lament the gap between expectation and achievement as he reviewed the educational development of the newly emergent African nations during the 1960s and 1970s:

In the last two decades a great deal of investment has been made in education with a view to promoting economic and social development in Africa. National governments devote very high proportions of their recurrent and development budgets to education. Organs of the United Nations, friendly governments, and philanthropic organizations have also directed large sums of money and technical assistance toward education with the hope of lessening the economic and social development gap between Africa and the rest of the world.

The green revolutions that were expected from education, however, have not yet occurred. On the contrary, the scenario that Africa presents after two decades of independence is still one of acute and worsening poverty and social and political turmoil. Al-



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though commendable achievements have been made in expanding education and health services, universal primary education is far from being achieved in most African countries, and out of every one hundred babies born to African mothers fifteen to twenty die before they see their first birthday. Even among adults, untimely death still strikes hard in Africa. Although Africa has vast virgin arable lands and enormous economic potential awaiting fuller development, abject poverty, malnutrition, kwashiorkor, and starvation are endemic and widespread throughout the continent. In other words, despite the heavy investment in education, Africa remains a problem continent and a disaster area in perpetual crisis.

In the absence of associated political, social, economic, and cultural changes in the host societies, the American educational effort had proved in large measure utopian. It is true that certain of the exchange activities that had gone forward regardless of the state of U.S.-Soviet relations had proved invaluable in advancing mutual interests during periods of relaxation in the Cold War. But even in that instance the educational value of the exchanges was ultimately dependent upon political benefits from the exchanges that appeared to be of mutual interest to both nations.⁸

What about the more recent effort to use education as an instrument to achieve economic competitiveness, particularly with Japan but also with the other booming capitalist economies of eastern and southern Asia? Although few of the data are in, I believe some observations can still be made. To begin, there can be no denying that the skills of literacy and critical thinking that are properly associated with effective school programs are essential to a modern economy and that the schools ought to be held accountable for nurturing those skills in all children. The continued advance of those skills through the entire population will undoubtedly aid the development of the American econ-

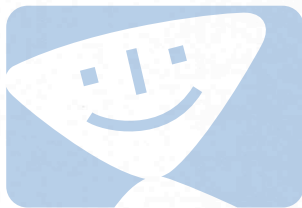


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omy. Nevertheless, American economic competitiveness with Japan and other nations is to a considerable degree a function of monetary, trade, and industrial policy, and of decisions made by the President and Congress, the Federal Reserve Board, and the federal Departments of the Treasury and Commerce and Labor. Therefore, to contend that problems of international competitiveness can be solved by educational reform, especially educational reform defined solely as school reform, is not merely utopian and millennialist, it is at best foolish and at worst a crass effort to direct attention away from those truly responsible for doing something about competitiveness and to lay the burden instead on the schools. It is a device that has been used repeatedly in the history of American education—by the proponents of vocational education in the first years of the twentieth century, when they contended that the Germans were getting ahead of the Americans in industrial efficiency; by the proponents of science education in the 1950s, when they laid the blame for Russia's being first to launch a space satellite on the weaknesses of American schools (not granting, as the quip went at the time, that the Russians' German scientists had simply gotten ahead of the Americans' German scientists); and by the proponents of academicist education in the 1980s as the antidote to the economic threat posed by Japan. The pattern bespeaks a crisis mentality inseparable from the millennial expectations Americans have held of their schools.

III

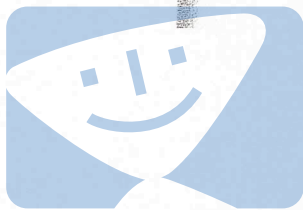
Let us recall Aristotle's dicta about education and politics. It is impossible to talk about education apart from a conception of the good life; people will inevitably differ in their



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conceptions of the good life, and hence they will inevitably differ on matters of education; therefore the discussion of education falls squarely within the domain of politics. Steeped as they were in Renaissance culture, early Americans tended to accept these dicta, and indeed some of the most cogent discussions of educational policy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were presented in the context of proposals for the political future of the new nation—one thinks immediately of John Adams, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, and, towering above them all, Thomas Jefferson. Later, as Americans moved education increasingly to the center of their political affairs, they began to argue the obverse of the Aristotelian dicta as well, namely, that when people differ in their views of education, they are really debating alternative views of the good life, of the kind of America they would prefer to live in and what it might mean to be an American, and that politics is therefore ultimately a branch of education. To recall Dewey's phrasing of the argument: education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform, and all reforms that rest simply upon the enactment of laws or the threatening of penalties or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements are, in the end, transitory and futile. For Dewey, education became the means, par excellence, not only for defining the nature of the ideal America and the character of the ideal American but also for bringing both into existence.⁹

Actually, this process of defining what it meant to be an American began well before the Revolution. The initial colonies of European immigrants, predominantly English but also Spanish, Dutch, French, Swedish, and German, were established in a land that had long been populated by a variety of Indian peoples with their own historic civilizations. The Europeans and the Indians lived side by side,



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trading with one another, occasionally warring upon one another, and inevitably learning from one another. The Europeans established their own configurations of education—households, churches, and occasionally schools and print shops—to ensure the perpetuation of their particular traditions, while the Indians continued to maintain their own ancient forms of nurturance and training. European missionaries did try to Christianize the Indians and in the process to “civilize” them, but there was no large-scale effort to assimilate them to the transplanted European communities—they were widely judged to be unassimilable. Meanwhile, large numbers of African-Americans were brought involuntarily to the colonies, to be sold into slavery. Arriving as individuals or in small family groups, they were attached to the households of Europeans and were forcibly introduced to European languages and European ways. They too were pronounced unassimilable by definition, partly because it was early decided that the slave status of the mother would automatically attach to her children and partly because the racial barrier proved far less penetrable in North America than in South America.

During the seventeenth century, the dominant pattern was one of small, competing ethnoreligious communities, each seeking to reproduce itself through the traditional institutions of education, primarily households and churches. It was in the eighteenth century, however, that a discernible British-American provincial community came into being. Its origins lay in several sources. For one thing, despite the diversity of the seventeenth-century population, the English had predominated from the beginning; and the substantial Scots and Scotch-Irish immigrations of the eighteenth century, coupled with the British victories in the intercolonial wars, went far toward securing the dominance of the English language and of English laws and



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institutions. Beyond that, the growing experience of inter-colonial cooperation in military, commercial, and religious affairs after the 1750s did much to create a common American identity. Although individuals still described themselves as Scotsmen or Germans or Pennsylvanians or New Englanders, they increasingly thought of themselves as Americans too. Finally, British-American churches, schools, libraries, and printing presses, supported in substantial measure by British money gathered and disbursed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, were more numerous and more powerful than those of other provincial communities, and one result was the predominance of the English language and culture.

The appearance of an emergent British-American provincial community created for the first time a culture in which what was American was defined partly in contradistinction to what was not. One sees the phenomenon in the early eighteenth century when Benjamin Franklin warned that the British-American community would soon be overwhelmed by the large German influx into Pennsylvania. It would become a German colony, Franklin predicted, unless steps were taken to assimilate the Germans to British-American ways. It was in light of such fears that Franklin and a number of his associates set out to establish a system of charity schools expressly created for the purpose of absorbing the German immigrants. Not surprisingly, the Germans resisted the effort, and under the leadership of the printer Christopher Saur, they ultimately defeated it. In fact, the most important outcome of Franklin's project was probably in stimulating the Germans to redouble their efforts to perpetuate their own language and culture. In the end, however, the Germans were assimilated, not instantly but over several generations, and not through charity schools deliberately organized for that purpose but



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through growing participation in the political, economic, and cultural affairs of the larger American community of which they were part.

All this changed radically with the founding of the republic. The very existence of the new nation implied a fuller definition of nationality, and the very idea of self-government implied a more stringent definition of citizenship. Educational theorists in every quarter proclaimed the need for a new kind of training in knowledge, virtue, and patriotism that would equip the people to perform the duties of citizenship intelligently, responsibly, and with the public interest uppermost in mind. During the course of such argument, a distinctively American *paideia*, or self-conscious culture, emerged. It united the ethos of evangelical Protestantism, the values of the Old and New Testaments, the spirit of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, and the political philosophy of the *Federalist* papers, with the aspirations invoked on the obverse side of the Great Seal by two Latin aphorisms, *Annuuit coeptis* ("He [God] has favored our undertakings") and *Novus ordo seclorum* ("A new order of the ages"). The country had its symbols—Brother Jonathan, Uncle Sam, and the Stars and Stripes; it had its patron saints, of whom George Washington was the most illustrious; and it had its popular celebrations, notably the Fourth of July.

Given the emergence of that distinctive *paideia*, the situation for new immigrants changed significantly. Whereas occasional pressure for assimilation had been brought to bear on newcomers during the eighteenth century, relentless pressure for assimilation became the norm during the nineteenth. Moreover, as had been the case with the Germans during the 1750s, the more different the newcomers from the British-American model, the more intense the manifestations of concern. Accordingly, the arrival of large numbers of impoverished Irish and German immigrants



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during the 1840s, many of them Roman Catholics, evoked heavy pressure for what came to be called Americanization. The Reverend Mr. Lyman Beecher called upon the Protestant churches to save the country from sin in general and popery in particular—by which he meant the Catholic newcomers. Horace Mann called upon the schools to transform immigrant ragamuffins into sturdy young republicans. And Henry J. Raymond used the columns of the *New York Times* to instruct “our adopted citizens” in “the duty of thoroughly Americanizing themselves.” The fact that the newcomers did not worship in Beecher’s churches, tended to drop out of Mann’s schools, and rarely read Raymond’s *Times* seemed irrelevant. The native-born Americans who did patronize those institutions heard—and approved—the message.¹⁰

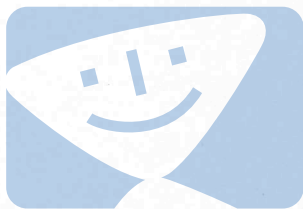
For the immigrants, the choices were frequently poignant: the dynamics of Americanization were essentially the dynamics of a discordant education. The Irish Catholic families of New York City, crowding into increasingly homogeneous immigrant neighborhoods, maintained their own configurations of Irish households, churches, schools, newspapers, and benevolent societies. New York City, on the other hand, offered public schools, a variety of churches and newspapers, and a dazzling array of social and vocational apprenticeships, most of them unavailable to the Irish. For children and adults alike, the pulls of conflicting loyalties, divergent ambitions, and alternative opportunities were incessant, with the result that the shaping of any particular individual depended upon a complex variety of factors, one of which was invariably luck. Many of the same conflicts were experienced by the Germans who settled in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, although the range of churches, newspapers, and social and vocational opportunities there was infinitesimal in comparison with that of New York, and



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indeed for a time the German leaders of Lancaster hoped that the county would remain a German enclave within the larger American community. Much the same might also be said for the Norwegian or Swedish Reformed immigrants who settled on the farmlands of Wisconsin and Minnesota and, later, for the Chinese and Japanese immigrants who settled in the cities of California and Washington and the Mexican immigrants who settled in the towns of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Given the persistence of discordant education throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, several additional points might be made. First, for all the stridency of American nationalism as it developed, the American *paideia* of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to be loosely and variously defined, with the result that even when immigrants attempted to advance the process of Americanization, as many did, the American society to which they were supposed to be assimilating often proved confusing and elusive. There seemed to be no doubt about the need to learn English, understand the Constitution, and live productively within the law; but beyond that both the models and the principles were frequently unclear. There was much talk after Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* was produced in 1908 of the merging of diverse nationalities into a new American whole, and there were always people who were ready to define that new American whole with absolute precision, most often along Anglo-American lines. But whether a Jew who spoke perfect English could be an American, or a Roman Catholic who understood the Constitution, or a bilingual Hispanic who lived productively within the law, or a Mormon whose ancestors had come over on the Mayflower, or an Indian whose ancestors had met the Mayflower, remained matters of doubt and controversy. Furthermore, the American culture itself was



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constantly being leavened and enriched by immigrant contributions as well as by a steady borrowing of European (and to a lesser extent, Asian and African) cultural forms so that immigrants who did contemplate what it might mean to be an American occasionally saw reflected back upon themselves some of the very ideas they had expected to abandon in the process of Americanization.

Second, as successive generations of immigrants came to the United States, the character of the discordant education involved in the process of Americanization changed, as the educative agencies maintained by immigrant communities for the perpetuation of their own cultures were themselves transformed by Americanization. More and more, they became agencies not only for the transmission of immigrant culture to immigrant children but also for the mediation of American culture to the immigrant community. Thus, by the 1890s, the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches were being torn apart by ecclesiastical and doctrinal controversies over differing attitudes toward accommodation to American ways; the German Jews of New York City were supporting educative institutions for the express purpose of Americanizing the more recently arrived East European Jews; and the Yiddish press was publishing regular columns of advice on how to get along in the new country. The immigrants themselves were not unaware of these developments; and, while some applauded, others withdrew into orthodoxy, purging their educative institutions of corrupting American forms and insulating themselves against corrupting American influences.

Finally, the problems of race persisted. Just as African-Americans and Indians had been defined as unassimilable, so were immigrants from Asia. The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution did bestow citizenship upon "all persons born or naturalized in the United



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States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof." But discrimination against African-Americans continued, while Indians were judged subject to the jurisdiction, not of the United States, but of their tribal "nations." Even after 1924, when the Indians were granted full citizenship by special congressional legislation, their status as wards of the federal government left their situation ambiguous. As for the Chinese and Japanese, the first generations of immigrants were denied naturalization, while their American-born children were hesitantly accepted as citizens—the deplorable treatment of the Nisei during World War II poignantly documented that hesitancy. It would take the civil rights revolutions of the 1950s and 1960s to shatter the historic assumption that people might transcend the barriers of class, religion, and ethnicity to become full-fledged American, but not the barriers of race.¹¹

Two profoundly ironic developments of the early twentieth century wrought a fundamental transformation in what it meant to be an American. First, the same upsurge of nativism that led Congress in 1907 to create the Dillingham Commission to investigate the problems of immigration (the commission's forty-one-volume report, published in 1911, purported to document the "inferiority" of the "new" immigrants) and that later led Congress drastically to curtail immigration through the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 also set in motion the vast educational campaign known as the "Americanization movement." Under the leadership of the educator Peter Roberts, the YMCA began as early as 1908 to conduct a wide range of Americanization activities in scores of cities across the country, and at the prodding of the Progressive reformer Frances Kellor and her Committee for Immigrants in America, the United States Bureau of Education established a Division of Immigrant Education (financed by funds Kellor raised from



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her wealthy friends) in 1914. The United States Chamber of Commerce formed an Immigration Committee during the winter of 1915–16; the National Education Association created a Department of Immigrant Education in 1921; and churches, schools, businesses, and community centers across the country organized comprehensive Americanization programs, including civics courses for immigrant youngsters, literacy classes for immigrant adults, and Americanization Day celebrations for immigrant families. The campaign extended well into the 1920s and in the end seemed to succeed, if for no other reason than that the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 had cut off most of the clientele at the source.

Second, just as the Americanization movement was getting under way, and partly in response to it, a vigorous national debate arose over precisely what it meant to be an American, and therefore what was involved in the process of Americanization. Whereas few voices outside the immigrant community itself had previously been heard questioning the assumption that immigrants needed to abandon their language, culture, and traditions in order to become Americans, a growing number of native-born as well as immigrant intellectuals now rejected that assumption in favor of more pluralistic and multicultural definitions of Americanism. Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr organized the Labor Museum at Hull House to dramatize the significance and worth of immigrant traditions to immigrant children. John Dewey and Horace Kallen wrote of the need to redefine Americanism so that it would come to mean not the abandonment of one identity in favor of another but rather the combining or orchestration of diverse identities. And the young writer Randolph Bourne, in a 1916 essay entitled “Trans-national America,” sharply attacked both the melting pot definition of Americanism and

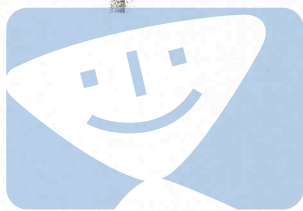


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the Americanization movement that was propagating it, and called instead for a cosmopolitan, international definition that would be in the making rather than already made.¹²

The ironies inherent in a vigorous Americanization effort that coincided, on the one hand, with legislation restricting immigration, and, on the other hand, with the development of a new cultural pluralism very much shaped the ways in which the problems of what it meant to be an American would be defined during and immediately after World War II. The great immigrations seemed to be over after 1924, and Americanization quickly waned as a burning national issue. True, there were small but significant influxes of immigrants during the next two or three decades—of Jews during the 1930s and 1940s, of Hungarians during the 1950s, and of Central and South Americans during the entire period. But as late as 1965 when she issued a second edition of her book *And Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America*, Margaret Mead proclaimed that all Americans, whatever their origins, had become “third generation in character structure,” by which she meant that they no longer needed to outdistance their parents because they were representative of other cultures but only because they were out of date.

The leading social concerns of the era centered not on the integration of foreign-born immigrants into the American community but rather on the integration of native-born minorities on some sort of decent and equitable basis. Probably the most popular effort to formulate an American *paideia* in this era appeared in the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal’s classic study of American race relations, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, where he explicated the complex of “valuations” he called the “American Creed,” which he summed up as “liberty,



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equality, justice, and fair opportunity for everybody.” He saw this creed—one might substitute the term *paideia*—as a commonly held pattern of beliefs (variously arranged and variously practiced by different groups and different individuals) that derived from Christianity, the Enlightenment, the English legal tradition, and American constitutionalism, and he argued that it was universally acknowledged (if not adhered to) and served as a prime moving force in American life. He saw the “American dilemma” as the contradiction between the creed that most Americans professed and their failure to afford the most elemental civil and political rights to African-Americans—in Myrdal’s words, “The status accorded the Negro in America represents nothing more and nothing less than a century-long lag of public morals.” Not surprisingly, Myrdal saw the most important agenda of Americans as one of bringing their practices into conformity with their creed.¹³

For all the incisiveness of the Mead and Myrdal analyses, two large social developments of the postwar era drastically altered the climate of belief with respect to Americanization. The first was the new ethno-religiosity, the second was the new immigration. Together they not only changed popular definitions of what it meant to be an American, they also revived pressures for a more traditional style of Americanization centered on fluency in English, knowledge of the Constitution and of American civic practice, and the ability to live productively within the law.

The new ethno-religiosity had several sources. As early as 1955, Will Herberg in *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in Religious Sociology* put forward the thesis of America as “triple melting pot,” citing in support of his interpretation the aphorism of the late historian Marcus Lee Hansen to the effect that what the second generation wanted to forget, the third generation wanted to remember, or what the children



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of immigrants wanted to leave behind in an effort to adapt to American ways, the grandchildren of immigrants were attempting to find again in their quest for identity within American society. Downplaying ethnicity in favor of religiosity, Herberg portrayed three great religious communities—equally legitimate, equally American, and equally committed to a common set of moral ideas and spiritual values—as Americanizing communities, each, incidentally, entitled to its own publicly supported schools as instruments of that Americanizing process. Other scholars like Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Nathan Glazer, and Milton Gordon put forward an alternative view that was in many ways the converse of Herberg's, namely, the thesis of America as "multiple melting pot" with a series of transformed and transforming ethnic groups as Americanizing communities. It was but a short analytical leap to combine the analyses and focus on the historic inseparability of particular ethnic groups and the religions they espoused—for example, East-European Jews, Irish Catholics, and African-American Protestants.¹⁴

A second source for the new ethnoreligiosity was the black-led civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. As ethnic pride—centering on African-American history, African-American studies, and African-American consciousness—mounted in the African-American community, and as an increasingly self-conscious "black power" element began to advance political and social equality for African-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, Italians, and Asians followed suit. They began organizing their own legal defense and education organizations, promoting their own ethnic history, ethnic studies, and ethnic consciousness, and mounting their own efforts to advance political and social equality for their adherents. In the process, African-Americans themselves were increasingly transformed into



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an ethnic group, while a variety of ethnic groups were increasingly transformed into political interest groups. The result was a widespread political, social, and ideological affirmation of ethnicity that transformed the meaning of what it meant to be an American. The influence of pluralism was immeasurably advanced, symbolized best by the development of so-called bilingual-bicultural education programs in the schools as mandated by the United States Supreme Court decision in the case of *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and authorized by the Education Amendments of 1974, with their provisions for bilingual-bicultural education programs for *all* children of limited English-speaking ability, for "capacity building" grants to aid in the development of teacher training programs, curriculum development, and research activities, and for the development of ethnic heritage study centers.

The new immigration began in the 1950s as large numbers of individuals from the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Canada came to the United States, many as sojourners, others as permanent residents. Those from Puerto Rico were already citizens; those from other countries came illegally as well as legally, moving back and forth across American borders with sufficient ease and in sufficient numbers so that the official figures from the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service conformed less and less to reality. In 1965, the Hart-Celler Act abolished the national origins quota arrangement and the prohibition against nationals of the Asia-Pacific Triangle and provided that applicants were to be admitted on a first-come-first-served basis. The result was a significant rise in the total number of immigrants, legal and illegal, as well as a shift in their origins to include large numbers from south and southeast Asia and the Middle East. The official numbers from the Immigration and Naturalization Service indi-



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cated that 4.2 million arrived during the 1970s, but estimates of the actual number ranged from 6 to 10 million, with most of the illegal newcomers arriving as sojourners from Mexico and the Caribbean.

When the new immigration combined with the new ethno-religiosity, the result was, on the one hand, a strengthening of the trend toward pluralism, and, on the other, a revival of traditional demands for Americanization. In states like California, Colorado, Arizona, and Florida, English-only movements arose out of fear of Hispanic separation and domination. At the national level, opposition to programs of bilingual-bicultural education intensified—Secretary of Education William J. Bennett lambasted them as ill-conceived and ineffectual during his 1984–1988 incumbency. And there were renewed demands for additional emphasis in the schools on the teaching of civics in general and of American history in particular. Every indicator in the early 1980s pointed toward the beginning of a new nationwide Americanization movement not unlike the one that flourished during the second and third decades of the century, and toward a return to definitions of what it meant to be an American that closely resembled those of the earlier era.

The politics of the emerging Americanization controversy, however, was neither as simple nor as predictable as had earlier been the case. The leader of the California English-only movement was former senator S. I. Hayakawa, a Canadian-born American citizen of Asian background; and the opposition included many native-born white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Black ethnic groups in Los Angeles pressed vigorously for school desegregation throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; Hispanic groups during the 1970s and 1980s preferred segregated schools with effective programs of bilingual-bicultural education. More gen-



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erally, the new ethnoreligiosity was sufficiently all-embracing that one might have every reason to expect division within as well as among ethnic groups on issues of Americanization. In the end, as Dewey had suggested, a debate over education was really a debate over the kind of America people wanted to live in and over what it might mean to be an American. Politics had indeed become a branch of education.

IV

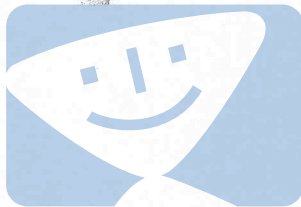
Education cannot take the place of politics, though it is inescapably involved in politics, and education is rarely a sufficient instrument for achieving political goals, though it is almost always a necessary condition for achieving political goals. Given the demands of the American democratic system on citizen participation, certain educational tasks must be performed by child care centers, schools, colleges, television broadcasters, and other educative institutions if citizens are to acquire the knowledge, values, skills, and experience to act intelligently and responsibly on matters of public concern. Given the demands of the emerging American economy on workers at all levels, there are certain educational tasks that must be performed by child care centers, schools, colleges, workplaces, and other educative institutions if men and women are to acquire the knowledge, values, skills, and experience to contribute effectively and efficiently to that economy. And given the role the United States is likely to play in the world of the twenty-first century, there are certain educational tasks that must be performed by child care centers, schools, colleges, television broadcasters, workplaces, and other educative institutions if individuals of all ages are to learn to live peacefully



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and productively with other peoples who are different culturally, independent politically, and yet interdependent economically. The decisions Americans make on these questions will have everything to do with how America fares internationally during the years ahead, and they will ultimately determine what it means to be an American. Indeed, definitions of what it means to be an American will inevitably depend, as Randolph Bourne suggested more than a half century ago, on the interaction between national America and transnational America.

That said, we know far less than we need to know about how to conduct the educational programs that will be required if we are to proceed with confidence. We face the task in our public schools of educating millions of children—fully a third to a half of the enrollment during the decades ahead—drawn from segments of the population with whom our schools have not done well during the past quarter century—the African-Americans, the Hispanics, and the poor who now constitute the majority of our inner-city populations. And we face that task as the demands of the polity, the economy, and the world-at-large become more advanced, more complex, and more insistent by the day. We face similar demands with respect to education in families, workplaces, and other institutions for adults, including colleges, for which we have an even less dependable body of knowledge. Moreover, we have not yet begun to explore or exploit the potential of telecommunications and computer technology, about which we know least but which we may ultimately need most. Margaret Mead once proposed in an article in the *Harvard Business Review* that we divide all education into primary and secondary phases, with primary education referring to “the stage of education in which all children are taught what they need to know in order to be fully human in the world in which they are



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growing up—including the basic skills of reading and writing and a basic knowledge of numbers, money, geography, transportation and communication, the law, and the nations of the world,” and secondary education referring to “an education that is based on primary education and that can be obtained in any amount and at any period during the individual’s whole lifetime.” In that paradigm, which is the only paradigm sufficient to the world in which we now live, I believe telecommunications and computer technology will surely be a key element of secondary education.¹⁵

In all these domains, the role of educational research must be central, and yet our performance in that domain has been anything but reassuring. During the first sixty years of the twentieth century, educational research in the United States went forward in a patchwork quilt of institutions—colleges and universities, state departments of education, the research bureaus of local school systems, laboratory schools, not-for-profit organizations like the Educational Testing Service and the National Education Association, and commercial firms like IBM and the American Book Company. By and large, the effort was poorly supported. There was little communication among the scholars working in these various organizations and hence little replication and criticism of experiments and little cumulation of results; and there was even less communication between the scholars and the practitioners whose work their research was supposed to influence for the better. Furthermore, as my colleague Ellen Condliffe Lagemann has made clear, what started out as a complex of “plural worlds of educational research” at the beginning of the century was rapidly transformed during the second and third decades of the century into a single “mainstream” of research that featured quantification, measurement, and reliance on a narrow range of paradigms drawn almost wholly



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from contemporary psychology.¹⁶

With the development of the federal initiatives in education that formed the heart of the New Frontier and Great Society programs of the 1960s, there were major efforts to reform the situation. For one thing, there was a steady rise in federal appropriations for educational research, from \$4.5 million in 1960 to \$32.8 million in 1965 to \$100.8 million in 1970 to \$245.0 million in 1972. For another, the National Science Foundation in collaboration with the United States Office of Education and a number of philanthropic foundations sponsored a variety of curriculum development programs conducted by teams of academic specialists and educationists interested in upgrading and modernizing the curriculum of the elementary and secondary schools. In addition, under the leadership of Francis Keppel and Harold Howe II as commissioners of education during the 1960s, the federal government established a number of regional education laboratories committed to large programs of educational research and dissemination in particular sections of the country, as well as a series of more specialized educational research centers dedicated to systematic inquiry into particular problems—for example, the problems of elementary education, educational finance and governance, and the education of the handicapped. In addition, under Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, provision was made for fellowships to assist in the training of educational researchers not only by schools and departments of education but also by departments of sociology, anthropology, economics, psychology, and human development—the effort was patently to broaden the scope of the educational research enterprise. Finally, in 1972, Congress created the National Institute of Education to gather together the federal research efforts and focus them on certain research and development needs



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such as improving student achievement in the basic educational skills; enhancing the ability of schools to provide equal educational opportunity for individuals of limited English-speaking ability, for women, and for the socially and economically disadvantaged; overcoming problems of finance, productivity, and management in educational institutions; and preparing young people and adults for productive careers.

However high-minded the aspirations of the reformers, they were soon chastened by reality. The so-called new curricula in mathematics, physics, biology, and chemistry developed with NSF, OE, and foundation support proved relatively successful with more able students but relatively unsuccessful with the less able. The regional education laboratories, originally envisioned as educational equivalents of the Brookhaven National Laboratory in physics, proved egregiously uneven in the quality of their personnel, programs, management, productivity, research findings, and dissemination activities. Twenty such laboratories were in operation by September 1966, slightly over a year after President Johnson signed the legislation authorizing their establishment, and, together with the research and development centers, they quickly became a lobbying group for the lion's share of federal R & D funds and have remained so ever since. The research scholars trained under the provisions of Title IV of ESEA came into the academic marketplace during the demographic and financial downturn in the fortunes of schools and departments of education in the 1970s and at precisely the time federal support for educational research began to decline in constant dollars. And the National Institute of Education got off to a shaky start during the Nixon and Ford administrations, peaked during the Carter administration, and was abolished during the second Reagan administration, its functions absorbed into



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the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

As is well known, a report from the United States General Accounting Office in 1987 on the research and information-gathering efforts of the United States Department of Education from the early 1970s through the mid-1980s indicated, first, that support for research during that period had decreased more than 70 percent in constant dollars, despite the fact that between 1980 and 1984 the federal investment in education had increased by 38 percent and federal support for research in general by about 4 percent, and, second, that the federal dollars actually spent on educational research were increasingly concentrated on programmatic and institutional support for the laboratories and centers, with a consequent decrease in the funds available to individual scholars and groups of scholars initiating their own research projects. Finally, although one could point to a number of domains in which research under the federal initiative had extended and deepened knowledge in the field of education—domains as varied as the social organization of schools, the cognitive development of children, the individualizing of instruction, the measurement of academic achievement, and the teaching of reading and writing—the traditional gap between researchers and practitioners remained as wide as ever. As William James pointed out almost a century ago, research findings in and of themselves rarely tell practitioners precisely what to do; they serve rather as a resource to be drawn upon as particular situations and circumstances require. Beyond that, it is extremely difficult to create in educational institutions the conditions under which practitioners have the time, the opportunity, the interest, and the encouragement to take hold of tested knowledge, make it their own, and translate it into wisdom about how to carry on their work.¹⁷

More than ever before in our history, we need system-



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atic, dependable knowledge about teaching and learning in school and nonschool contexts, concerning elementary and advanced subject matter, and with respect to the extraordinary range of racial, religious, and ethnic groups that constitute the American people. We need basic research, applied research, and policy research from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives; we need to know much more than we now know about how to put the results of that research into the hands of practitioners during their initial training and throughout their careers; and we need to learn how to draw practitioners far more closely into the conduct of that research than we have in the past. In short, we can no longer proceed on the time-honored assumption that some youngsters will inevitably fail in school and that some adults will inevitably remain illiterate and ignorant. Yet we face the stark fact that while the Department of Defense has a research budget that represents some 12 percent of its total budget, the Department of Education has a research budget that represents just under 2 percent of its total budget. Until this situation is changed markedly, it is sheer nonsense to talk about excellence in American education. Ultimately, I believe the sponsorship of educational research on a large-scale and enduring basis must become a prime responsibility of the federal government.¹⁸

In the end, we must place our education programs on a sufficiently solid basis of tested knowledge so that educational opportunity for all people becomes a genuine opportunity to master the knowledge and skills and to learn the values, attitudes, and sensibilities that will enable them to live happily and productively in the modern world. What is at stake is our vision of the kinds of human beings we would hope Americans to be in the last years of the twentieth and first years of the twenty-first centuries, and of the kinds of



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education that will help bring those human beings into existence. John Dewey liked to define the aim of education as growth, and when he was asked growth toward what, he liked to reply, growth leading to more growth. That was his way of saying that education is subordinate to no end beyond itself, that the aim of education is not merely to make parents, or citizens, or workers, or indeed to surpass the Russians or the Japanese, but ultimately to make human beings who will live life to the fullest, who will continually add to the quality and meaning of their experience and to their ability to direct that experience, and who will participate actively with their fellow human beings in the building of a good society. To create such an education will be no small task in the years ahead, but there is no more important political contribution to be made to the health and vitality of the American democracy and of the world community of which the United States is part.¹⁹

NOTES

1. John Dewey, *The School and Society* [1899], in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, edited by Jo Ann Boydston (15 vols.; Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976-1983), 1:19, 20.

2. David Hulburd, *This Happened in Pasadena* (New York: Macmillan, 1951); and James B. Conant, "The Superintendent Was the Target," *New York Times Book Review*, April 29, 1951, 1, 27.

3. Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Education," *Partisan Review* (Fall 1958): 494, 495.

4. Jomills Henry Braddock II, Robert L. Crain, and James M. McPartland, "A Long-Term View of School Desegregation: Some Recent Studies of Graduates as Adults," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 66 (December 1984):259-264. See also the discussion in Christine H. Rossell and Willis D. Hawley, eds., *The Consequences of School Desegregation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983). As part of a comprehensive analysis of what social scientists have learned about how much a neighborhood or school's mean socioeconomic status affects a child's



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