

The UNDERGROUND HISTORY
of AMERICAN EDUCATION

*An Intimate Investigation Into the
Prison of Modern Schooling*

JOHN TAYLOR GATTO

THE UNDERGROUND HISTORY OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

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FOREWORD by RON PAUL, M.D.

This book is a manifesto for home schooling families. Its message is clear: young children can learn the basics of literacy before they are teenagers: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Parents can teach these skills to their children. Once children have these basic skills, they are ready for serious reading and self-education.

The author argues that formal classroom education is a liability for students. It holds them back – not just bright students, but all students. His message to parents is this: “Your children can accomplish far more than the proponents of structured classroom education imagine.” Most parents believe this about their own children, but they lack evidence based on personal experience. This book offers evidence from a master classroom teacher who left the system.

The amazing fact of this book is this: it is an underground history written by an “above-ground” educator. The author is a former public school teacher. He won the Teacher of the Year award in New York City three years in a row: 1989, 1990, and 1991. He also won the Teacher of the Year for New York State (1991). Then, in July of that year, he resigned. He did so in a spectacular fashion: a letter to *The Wall Street Journal*: “I Quit. I Think.” He reprints it in the Author’s Prologue. He had submitted his open letter in March. He quit in July. Only then did the editors at the Journal publish his letter. At age 51, he was out of a job and had no career plans. The publication of his letter launched his new career. He began to lecture around the country. He had left his job, but had not leave his calling: teaching. Now he teaches teachers. He has become a vocal advocate of home schooling.

This book, which first appeared in 2003, asks two related questions: “Who wins? Who loses?” The author answers the second question clearly: students. His answer to the first question is what makes this book unique: the business community. This informal alliance between business and public education began in the early nineteenth century, especially in the Northeast, where the new industrialism was beginning. Business managers wanted a steady supply of reliable, literate, cooperative, and uncomplaining employees. In the early years of the twentieth century, the politically dominant form of American business had become big business. There was a new faith in time-and-motion studies of blue-collar workers. This was called “scientific management.” Employees were supposed to get their training in the nation’s schools, with their hourly bells, their lock-step grade-level advancement programs, and

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their committee-screened textbooks. He tells this story in Chapter 9.

At the same time that Frederic Taylor was spreading the gospel of scientific management, “progressive” education was being heralded by the intellectual elite as the basis of a new social order. Progressive education was not openly allied to big business, but it was in fact an extension of this outlook. The movement’s most famous proponent was the philosopher John Dewey. Gatto speaks of his first year of teaching: 1961.

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.

Amazingly, according to Gatto, Dewey called this transformation “the new individualism.” There was nothing individualistic about it.

Decade by decade, this educational system was imposed on the schools in the twentieth century. Gatto contrasts this system of teaching with that mindset described in a seminal work published in 1900: *Transit of Civilization*, which still serves as a learning inspiration for him. If you would like to download a free copy, I have posted it on the Ron Paul Curriculum site: www.bit.ly/TransitOfCivilization.

The technology of digital education has caught up with Gatto’s book. Parents can now select from a wide range of materials, teaching techniques, and outlooks. This range is going to get much wider. The old law of economics is true: “When the price declines, more is demanded.” The price keeps falling. We are in the early stages of a revolution in schooling. To understand just how radical this revolution is, read *The Underground History of American Education*.

FOREWORD

Ron Paul, M.D.
Former Congressman
Three-Time Candidate for U.S. Presidency
April 25, 2015

INTRODUCTION

The World According to Gatto by David Ruenzel

Thanks to an old hip injury, John Taylor Gatto, age 65, walks with a slight limp. But, in many ways, he is still a big presence. Big is an adjective former students use to describe Gatto, who quit his profession — and explained his reasons for doing so in the *Wall Street Journal* — almost immediately after winning the New York State Teacher of the Year Award in 1991. And big is what I think as I watch him walk across a stage in a Boston auditorium to address an audience consisting largely of defectors from the public school system. (The event is part of the *Growing Without Schooling* magazine speaker series.) With closely cropped white hair, a round face, and a thick neck, Gatto looks like a retired football tackle who spent years in the trenches. This befits a man who hails from Monongahela, the same western Pennsylvania town as Joe Montana, and who devotes his Sundays to watching NFL football.

Always provocative, Gatto begins his talk this October evening by projecting on a screen a picture of a goofy-looking boy. Standing before a table cluttered with cereal, soups, and other packaged goods, the boy pulls absentmindedly on his ears. The image, Gatto says, represents the typical American teenager; his emotional and intellectual growth have been stunted by video games, sitcoms, and American schools, which he calls “government reservations.”

“Does organized schooling have anything to do with an increase in childishness?” he asks, his megaphone of a voice booming. He soon answers his own question: “This is the thesis that I’ll be pursuing tonight—that enormous numbers of American children have been dumbed down and made morally incomplete. . . . School extends childhood far beyond natural bounds.”

It used to be, Gatto asserts, that American children flowered into adulthood at a very young age. He quotes de Tocqueville who, after visiting the United States in 1839, noted that “in America there is, strictly speaking, no adolescence. At the close of boyhood the man appears.” But now, Gatto continues, “childhood has been artificially extended into the 20s and beyond. No one finds that picture” — he gestures to the slide of the boy — out of the norm. American teenage boys are goofy, daffy; they put funny things into their ears, and we all assume this is natural.”

Just how and why schools have stifled students, and corrupted many well-in-

tioned teachers in the process, are subjects Gatto has diligently addressed over the past 10 years in speeches, essays, and four books, including two that were just published: *A Different Kind of Teacher*, a collection of previously published writings; and *The Underground History of American Education*. Gatto is hoping the history book, which is as hefty as the Manhattan phone directory, will serve as the basis for a film. He envisions series exploring everything from the role of big business in forging factory-style schools to the alternative and homeschooling movements.

Gatto's books and ideas, like the man himself, are the source of both exaltation and exasperation. To many members of the burgeoning homeschooling movement, which is approximately 1.3¹ million strong, he is an icon; his mailbox is regularly stuffed with speaking requests and fan letters. He has delivered hundreds of lectures at colleges and alternative-education conferences across the country. And in recent years, he's addressed educators and homeschoolers in foreign countries, including Singapore, China, England, and Italy. During a trip to Japan, educators asked him, much to his amusement, if there was a way to set up a homeschooling system. What they didn't realize is that Gatto sees homeschooling as a way out of a system.

Pat Farenga, editor of *Growing Without Schooling* magazine, which is published by the John Holt Associates, told me that among alternative educators Gatto is widely regarded as a hero. "What John did for homeschoolers was to give them the imprimatur that it's OK for them to do this," he said. "A lot of them felt a nagging doubt about pulling their kids from public school. And then along comes this award-winning public school teacher who not only tells them that it's OK but that it should be done."

But Gatto's uncompromising views and combative nature sometimes annoy even those who agree with much of what he has to say. Farenga, an old friend, regrets that Gatto has portrayed the public school system as an evil empire; homeschoolers can work with public schools, Farenga said, and his daughter, who's enrolled in a Spanish class at her local school, is a good example.

Other school reformers assert that Gatto simply goes too far in his damnation of the system. Tony Wagner, a former teacher who is now co-director of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Educa-

1. Homeschoolers are estimated at 2.4 million nationwide now. Courtesy: *Education Week*, March, 2001. <http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2001/03/01/06gatto.h12.html>. Vol. 12, Issue 6, pages 27-32.

tion, said that, while Gatto has accurately diagnosed many public school ills, he's overlooked the fact that many schools have successfully reinvented themselves. "He doesn't give us any alternatives, either," Wagner, author of *How Schools Change: Lessons From Three Communities*, added. "He talks about homeschooling, but that's simply not a realistic alternative for everyone."

After the lecture, Gatto, wearing a tie and a navy blue suit, signs copies of his books at a table in the back of the auditorium. Several pony-tailed teenage boys, who say they left public schools to educate themselves, gather around. They strike me as the kind of independent-minded young people Gatto claims once sprouted regularly from American soil. One boy tells Gatto that he and his friends recently marched to the house of Alfie Kohn, a prominent critic of "drill and kill," to challenge Kohn's support of public schools. Another expresses anger over the standards-and-testing movement.

But then the conversation takes a turn. After one teenager smugly proclaims that overpopulation is threatening world civilization, Gatto looks incredulous for a moment and, then, making eye contact with the boy, says, "Now, why would you say something like that?" The boy looks stunned; it's as if no one has ever challenged him before. "People like to congregate where other people are," Gatto continues. "That's why there are millions of people in Manhattan. I've been across China, and I tell you, it's mostly a lot of empty space, though everyone says it's overpopulated. So I really wonder if you've thought about the assertion you're making."

The teenager stammers a bit, then goes silent. Like me, he's probably wondering why Gatto is being so antagonistic. But, as I discover later, the key to understanding the man is to look beyond his books and speeches. As thought-provoking and inspiring as they are, they don't, as Wagner pointed out, demonstrate how to improve education. For that, you have to look at Gatto's teaching career.

But, first, it helps to consider his way of thinking. Gatto's central message—the one that runs throughout the books and speeches—is that families should shake off their public school dependencies and take charge of their own educations. And homeschooling, he argues, is not the only option. He also likes the idea of small schools created by communities. Some, located in homes, might teach cooking and sewing as well as reading and writing. Others, housed in storefronts, could call on local tradespeople to help students build their own schools.

Gatto agrees with the idea that “it takes a village to raise a child,” though not one dependent upon social programs, government projects, and, of course, public schools. His village is a genuine cluster of brick-and-mortar neighborhoods populated by people who look after and teach each other, even if some bicker along the way. In *Underground History*, he writes: “When we want better families, better neighbors, better friends, and better schools we shall turn our backs on national and global systems, on expert experts and specialist specialists and begin to make our own schools one by one, far from the reach of systems.”

What’s the foundation of Gatto’s thinking? During the Boston speech, he told his audience that, early in the 19th century, the spread of industrialization demanded that people become full-time factory workers; thus “the new utopian world of forced schooling” was created. The goal, Gatto said, was to instill obedience in future workers, to “convince people that they want what the machines want most.”

As it turns out, those doing the convincing — unwittingly or not — were teachers. And they continue to do it, as far as Gatto is concerned. In *Dumbing Us Down* — his first book, published 10 years ago — is a chapter titled “The Seven-Lesson Schoolteacher,” a reprint of his New York State Teacher of the Year acceptance speech. Gatto writes that, among the lessons “universally taught” in schools are: confusion (“Everything I teach is out of context”); indifference (“When the bell rings I insist that they drop whatever it is we have been doing and move on to the next station”); and emotional dependency (“By stars and red checks, smiles and frowns, prizes, honors, and disgraces, I teach kids to surrender their will to the predestinated chain of command”).

One of the reasons Gatto thinks he escaped these pitfalls is that he lived the kind of life he’d like others to experience. He grew up in a working-class river town 25 miles south of Pittsburgh, where his grandfather was a printer, his father a cookie salesman, and his mother a self-educated woman he describes as “resourceful, imaginative, generally optimistic.” Gatto roamed the town freely, learning from everyone he met. His best teachers, he recalls, were “the high-rolling car dealer,” “the druggist wiser than the doctor,” “the psychological haberdasher,” and “the fun-loving mayor.”

As educational as his hometown was, nowhere in his writings does Gatto suggest that he knew he’d grow up to be a teacher. So, on the day after his speech, I ask him how he came to spend 30 years teaching in a public school

system for which he has expressed such deep contempt.

This is not our first meeting. The night before, we went to a Boston pub where we drank Guinness and talked football and education into the early morning hours. Prior to the speech, Gatto had driven all the way from New York City, where he and his wife, Janet, live half of the year. (The other half is spent in their farmhouse in upstate New York.)

So, by all rights, he should be exhausted. But Gatto looks fresh in his crisp, white shirt and pressed tan pants and jacket. As the interview begins, he pulls his chair 15 feet away from me. He likes to deliberate on a question, to mull it over before answering, he explains, and the physical distance helps him do that.

“It baffles me, too, why I stayed so long in teaching,” he says, finally. “Look, I was between advertising jobs — that’s what it amounted to. I was bored out of my gourd in advertising and thought I’d step out for a couple years.”

In the late ‘50s, Gatto was a young New York City copywriter scripting commercials for shaving cream, washing down steaks with icy martinis, and occasionally heading upstate to skeet shoot with clients. He enjoyed his life of luxurious dissolution for a year or two but soon came to despise advertising as a great waste of human intelligence. So in the spring of 1960, he “borrowed” the teaching license of a roommate, who’d concluded, after one day on the job, that no sane person could be a teacher. Gatto went to Harlem, where he knew the desperate need for substitute teachers would spare him any embarrassing questions about his qualifications until he got a license of his own, which he received that summer.

He soon began to run into what he terms “violently bizarre scenarios, where if you did something slightly out of the routine you’d be called on the carpet by outraged people.” Once, after Gatto had spent a period teaching a class how to tell time in Spanish, an assistant principal told him he’d screwed up a month’s worth of lesson plans. In another incident, he came across a 3rd grader who was able to read the Victorian-era works of Daniel Webster, yet she’d been assigned to a remedial reading class. Gatto went to the principal, who scolded him in patronizing tones. “Mr. Gatto, you’re very naïve,” the principal said. “Children memorize stories, and they only seem able to read.”

Surreal as his early experiences were, something about teaching captivated

Gatto. So, in 1963, he got a full-time job teaching 8th grade English at Intermediate School 44 on New York's tony Upper West Side, just two blocks from his home. "I was intrigued," he recalls. "When the door closed, I had godlike sovereignty. The classroom was my laboratory. I decided to test how far and how fast I could push the kids. Thirty years later, I had still not found the edge of the envelope. There's no limit. I had presumptive evidence that human genius is abundant."

Convinced that kids could handle even the most challenging material, Gatto decided in 1965 to teach a lesson on Herman Melville's classic, *Moby Dick*. He had only pretended to read the novel while an undergraduate at Cornell, skimming the Cliffs Notes so that he could pass the test. But now he would read it along with his students, unraveling sentences like thread from a spool. "The experience was a revelation," he recalls. "Within 60 days, simply by using seminar techniques from Ivy League colleges, my discipline problems just about vanished as students engaged with the material."

Before launching into *Moby Dick*, Gatto had established a kind of esprit de corps by telling his students that they were about to read a book usually reserved for what were considered the finest minds and most elite social classes. Nevertheless, he was certain that they could handle it, fresh as they might be, as he put it, from Dick and Jane.

"We first worked on periodic sentences," Gatto recalls. "I told them that we're used to having the subject and verb at the beginning of the sentence, but that Melville puts the important stuff at the end. I explained that this is how the Romans wrote because they thought it was the best way to make subtle points of mind. Rather than giving up, believing that only the most elite kids can do this, they simply had to hold in mind that key clauses come at the end. The minute you give kids the keys to unlock something difficult—in this case a classic text—they can enter the terrain of someone else's mind."

In essence, Gatto was telling his students that, by mastering the material, they could demonstrate that they, in fact, have "the finest minds." This co-optive tactic has been used by many outstanding teachers, including Jaime Escalante, who told his students from the barrios of Los Angeles that they had *ganas* (desire, want) and could therefore master calculus. But, like Escalante, Gatto was not just employing a rhetorical tactic; he also had a deep

faith in his students' abilities to achieve at extraordinary levels.

"Essentially, I treated kids at 13 like fully grown human beings," Gatto recalls. "I discovered that 12- and 13-year-olds could handle complex abstractions to the same extent my mind could. It got to the point where I was so excited I couldn't sleep. I was dying to get into school so that I could find out what the goddamn kids were going to teach me next."

But why, I ask, did students respond so emphatically to his teaching and not the teaching of others? What was so unusual about his approach?

"It's a question of responding to this young human life as if it's of equal importance to yours," he says without hesitation. "If you do that, kids will teach you all kinds of things because they're not trapped in all these conventional patterns that you're trapped in as an older person. The kids' reflections were important to unlocking parts of myself that were conditioned. Even at 65, I still run into these conditioned places in myself—I didn't see what was there."

One of Gatto's former students is Roland Legiardi-Laura, the filmmaker who is helping his mentor put together a documentary on education. Gatto considers Legiardi-Laura an embodiment of the self-made American. An orphan by the age of 16, he went on to manage the Nuyorican Poet's Café into prominence, renovate a former 19th-century boys' home in the East Village, and make two documentary films. *Azul*, his movie about the Nicaraguan passion for poetry, won several awards.

"The important thing about John is that he felt joy when he learned something from you," Legiardi-Laura told me. "He grew excited if you had an idea of value that he hadn't thought of before. He never condescended to us, and he always treated us as equals."

Legiardi-Laura was an 8th grader 35 years ago, but he still remembers Gatto's class in detail. Aside from *Moby Dick*, the students read 10 other books and produced book reports that were so comprehensive that he admits to recycling some of them in high school. The students also memorized soliloquies from *Hamlet*, tackled individual projects (Legiardi-Laura's was on the Warsaw Ghetto), and analyzed several newspapers so they could see how stories were spun from one paper to the next.

“John was demanding of us but never nasty or bitter,” he recalled. “Even the laggards worked in his class.”

Speaking in a similar vein, other former students used many of the same adjectives to describe Gatto: passionate, intense, energetic, different, and kind among them. Wendy Ziegler, an artist in Petaluma, California, provided perhaps the most original characterization: “There was a spiritual as well as an intellectual side to John, so that it was like being around a prime mover.”

While Gatto was never a conventional teacher, he did in the early years of his career make up tests, give spot quizzes, and assign grades. Even then, though, his approach was not typical. Janet Griffin, who now lives in upstate New York, said that Gatto graded papers like no one else. “If you wrote a paper that had just one brilliant point, you’d get an A plus plus plus. This was just because you saw a gem, discovered something new,” she explained. “You see, what always counted with John is that you broke through somewhere. So he’d find something that came out of your brain, your soul, and grade you on that.”

Nevertheless, A pluses were not handed out liberally. Hannah Lamb, who was in Gatto’s English class during the 1983-84 school year, said that he gave her quite a few F’s. Yet somehow, she added, “he affected me more than any other teacher. I’m certain a lot of it had to do with his expectation that we, even as middle school students, would be able to function competently in the adult world.”

I asked Lamb what kind of career she ended up having.

“I’m a 5th grade teacher in New York City,” she said, “though I know I’m not as effective as John was. I wish I had his kind of forceful personality.”

If Gatto had spent his entire career at School 44 he might have been considered a gifted teacher but not necessarily a great one; after all, the students were mostly upper-middle-class Manhattanites. But, after more than 15 years, he left the school, in part because his wife was then on the local school board, and he didn’t want anyone suggesting he might use her position to get “a sweet teaching deal.”

So, in 1981, Gatto moved on to Lincoln Academy (now Horizons Middle School), then considered a dumping ground for kids with behavior prob-

lems. But a year or two later, the school began attracting “good” kids from stable families whom Gatto didn’t consider much of a challenge. After trying another middle school for a while, he took a job teaching 8th graders at Booker T. Washington Junior High in Spanish Harlem.

The school was predominantly African American and Hispanic, with more than half the students coming from families at or near the poverty level. It was at Booker T. Washington that Gatto became a celebrity, winning the New York City Teacher of the Year Award in 1989, 1990, and 1991, as well as the New York State Teacher of the Year award in 1991. Over the years, he’d infuriated many school administrators with his criticisms of the system, but his accomplishments—which were sometimes covered by the press—could not be denied. Some of his students at Booker T. Washington, for example, were finalists and winners in major essay competitions sponsored by the school district. Others made their marks in the “real world” by doing things such as founding a flea market, launching a letter-writing campaign to fund the building of the John Lennon Strawberry Fields Memorial in Central Park, and starting a food co-op.

Asked if teaching mostly poor, at-risk kids offered special challenges—and perhaps raised the level of his game—Gatto demurs, saying that, as he had in the past, he treated the kids at Booker T. Washington “like fully grown human beings.” He admits, however, that this wasn’t always his tack.

Early in his career, Gatto says, he was delivering a lecture on Calvinistic predestination—the belief that a select group of people are elected at birth to be saved—when an African American student fell asleep and slipped to the floor. “I kicked at the soles of his feet, like a cop waking a tramp,” he recalls. “I was angry about his inattention. The kid fights back, but not with his fists. He says: ‘I learned all this stuff in the 3rd grade. How the ladies who sew and clean houses were meant to do this. How your genes and chromosomes determine everything, and you can’t escape.’ This kid had written in his head a Ph.D. thesis that could be turned into a book.”

A few uninterested parties aside, many of Gatto’s students worshiped their teacher, who, trying to dispel any myths, told me at the beginning of our interview, “I have no intention of being turned into a guru.” But a former colleague who taught with Gatto on and off for 15 years, told me, “John was very much the Pied Piper.” His students literally followed him down corridors, peppering him with questions. In short, they considered him their fear-

less leader. But having young people look to him for validation amounted to a cardinal violation of Gatto's principles.

So he made "anti-guruhood a conscious teaching, its examination part of my curriculum," he tells me. Beginning in the late '70s, he established—first at School 44 and later at Lincoln Academy—an experimental school within a school. At Lincoln, more than 50 students participated by doing independent projects, with Gatto serving as guide.

By way of example, he explains how he handled any student who was so good at impersonating teachers, the kid would have his classmates in stitches. "I'd go up to him," Gatto recalls, "and he'd probably say, 'I'm sorry, I won't do it anymore.' And I would answer: 'No, no, you're good at it. There must be 500 actor studios in New York, and I can get you hooked up with one of them. But I'll expect you to write something about it, to produce something of value to other people.' When that's the negotiation, you bat close to one thousand. You have nothing to lose."

By fudging attendance records and encouraging students to exit quickly and quietly, Gatto also allowed his kids to venture outside of school, where many were involved in community service. Others polled New Yorkers on various subjects, interned with everyone from dressmakers to newspaper editors, and visited museums. One girl slipped past a security guard at the New Yorker magazine in an attempt to query William Shawn, the legendary and reclusive editor. She got the interview.

During his final years of teaching, Gatto stepped outside of tradition altogether. Jamaal Wilson, one of his students in 1991, wrote an article that year for *Children's Express Quarterly*. Reprinted in *A Different Kind of Teacher*, it recounts a typical week for a Gatto class: one day each for independent study and apprenticeships; another day for community service, which had each student "helping others, not being a parasite," Wilson writes; and the remaining two days for class, during which students "practiced dialectics, which is thinking where you automatically assume that anything an authority tells you is dead wrong."

There's no question that Gatto bent, and sometimes broke, the rules—a subject he refuses to discuss in detail. But in his writings, he refers to himself as a saboteur, a role he believes a teacher must play to be effective in public schools.

At least one former colleague at School 44, a retired math teacher and old poker buddy named Danny Kotok, does not agree. Speaking from his home in Florida, Kotok, who taught for 31 years, said he had great respect for Gatto and his teaching abilities. "If I were principal, I would have had him at the top of the staff, as my premier English teacher," he added. But he didn't share Gatto's hostility toward the public school system.

"John would operate outside of the lines, and if he didn't like something the administrators had done, he would let them know," Kotok said. "But I had the attitude that if I did my job as well as I could, I could work through my frustrations with all the nonsense. I wasn't going to get all worked up about it, because you had about as much of a chance of succeeding as getting the Arabs and Jews to love each other."

Kotok also questioned the freedom Gatto gave his students. "John let the kids do pretty much what they wanted, and they soon realized that it was pretty much a matter of what they could get away with," he said. "I'm pretty sure he allowed the kids to do some things they shouldn't have done. He was the shepherd letting the flock go wherever it pleases."

As my interview with Gatto winds down, I suggest that public education couldn't be hopeless if he was able to positively influence so many students. He says, however, that he was one of only a few iconoclasts working inside a system that would never tolerate more than a handful of such teachers. It's a system that has been devoted, since its inception, to managing, not educating, and it's therefore incapable of change, he adds.

So, does Gatto have alternatives to offer? Eliminate forced schooling and a thousand flowers will bloom is the gist of his argument. There could then be schools in homes, businesses, churches—almost anything would be possible. And the poor, whose condition has, in part, been perpetuated by compulsory attendance in terrible schools, would finally be free to pursue alternatives of their own making. Gatto says: "Poor people are mostly poor, particularly poor in spirit, because the policy classes"—his trope for ruling classes—"and the cops and schoolteachers who do its bidding keep them poor. The system that pays for our schools could not survive without the poor, the desperate."

Diane Ravitch, who served as assistant secretary of education during the George H.W. Bush administration, agrees that American education, to some degree, practices social engineering—indeed, her recent book, *Left Back*:

A Century of Failed School Reforms, argues this point. “But 80 percent of American children will always be in public schools,” she told me. “It makes no more sense to do away with them than police departments; there are plenty of people who do not want to make their own arrangements for public safety and schools. I foresee a K-12 system that is a lot like the higher-ed landscape—an attractive mixture of private and public options.”

One of the few public school educators Gatto holds in high esteem is Deborah Meier, founder of the Central Park East School in Harlem and currently director of the Mission Hill Charter School in Boston. Gatto taught one of her children in the late ‘60s, and being an activist parent at the time, she served on a number of school-related committees with him. I asked Meier what she thought of Gatto’s idea to break up the public school system. Before answering, she praised him as a “gifted teacher, unpredictable and exciting.” She also said many of his criticisms of public schools were incisive. But she believes that eliminating the system would have dire consequences that Gatto perhaps hasn’t considered.

“John imagines this world in which people will, through voluntary associations, create their own schools,” she said. “And he’s right in some ways. The closer institutions are to the people, the more ‘mom and pop’ they are, the better. But I think these institutions should primarily be public, not private. I disagree with John in that I believe, in the absence of public schools, privately managed institutions will take over that are primarily interested in profit and even less accountable than public schools. Whereas John sees powerful community-based schools, I see a chain of Walmart-like schools.”

Gatto disagrees. After his speech before the John Holt Associates, when he was talking to some of the homeschooling teenagers, one said he respected Gatto but wanted to take issue with his call for an end to compulsory schooling. If every kid were allowed to drop out of school, he said, most would spend their time just hanging out, playing computer games.

“No!” Gatto bellowed. “Kids wouldn’t do that. The kids you’re talking about are like those who built America, and they will reinvent themselves if given the chance. Yes, there would be a period of chaos, during which people would be searching for alternatives, but in the end, it would all work out.”

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.²

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

2. For instance, 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.

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. For the next three volumes, you are about to spend twenty-five to thirty hours with the mind of a school-teacher, 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

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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.

THE WAY IT USED TO BE

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.

— Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (1934-61)

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)

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. (*Arnold Toynbee quote on chapter title page.*¹)

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 Jane as a vehicle for vengeance. In a transport of passion she:

1. Gives Jane's car a ticket before the meter runs out.
2. Throws away Jane's passport application after Jane leaves the office.

1. George Orwell, in his striking tale of an intellectual socialism's world fully realized (1984) paraphrased Toynbee this way: "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past."

3. 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.

4. 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?

Arnold Toynbee quote on chapter title page.

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.

A Nation From The Bottom Up

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

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 ain'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.

2. This incident was memorialized by Beveridge's pupil, Alexander Graydon.

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

3. *Actually more than that if carefully mixed with air in proper proportions and suitably contained.*

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 every-

⁴ Any connection between this conjecture of mine and the Social Darwinism of Carnegie and Rockefeller is illusory. Those who fail to survive in the motoring sweepstakes are likely to be prosperous, beautiful, and noteworthy beyond the average, not the reverse.

thing, 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

OFFENSE and LASHES

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 Liar 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 acad-

emies, 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 leader-

ship—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 meta-

5. The eye-topped pyramid. This notion is taken specifically from religious and philosophical prescriptions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism which occupied a prominent position in English thought during the last half of the eighteenth century, perhaps because major fortunes were being built through contact with the East. The mentality of oriental rulers fascinated the thrones of Europe. For instance, a Chinese court minister had propounded a strategy known as "The Policy of Keeping People Dumb." Such thinking inspired similar notions in the West.

phorical 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, flimflam 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) apportioned 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.

1. Brahmins—Priests and those trained for law, medicine, teaching, and other professional occupations.
2. The warrior and administrative caste.
3. The industrial caste, which would include land cultivators and mercantile groups.

The lower 95 percent was divided into:

1. The menial caste.
2. 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 under class 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 school-master 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 school-teacher of the day made. When the Civil War broke out, the newspaper became a gold mine. 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 candle maker, 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 candle-maker’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 Shermy’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, thou-

sands 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 fol-

lowing 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

"No public school in the United States is set up to allow another 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."

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,

6. 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.

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.

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

7. Horace Mann and the entire inner coterie 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.

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.

AN ANGRY LOOK AT **MODERN SCHOOLING**

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 *overproduc-*

tion 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

1. This 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."

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.

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 sud-

denly 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?

2. A 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, family-less, 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.

"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 served a concealed command economy and a deliberately re-stratified social order."

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 Associa-

tion, 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.

3. The 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."

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 limita-

tion: 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.

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

EYELESS IN GAZA

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 mem-

bers 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 hu-

miliates 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.

1. The 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.

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 best-seller, *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 brashest 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

2. A 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 Hogenon 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, socioeconomic 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.

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?"

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?³

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.

3. *The 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.*

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.⁴

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.

4. In 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.

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 Siljestrom, 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."

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 fright-

fully 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:

1. 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.
2. Fifty million can recognize printed words on a fourth- and fifth-grade level. They cannot write simple messages or letters.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.⁵

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

5. 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.

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 mastered 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:⁶

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.

6. Mitford 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 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 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 be-

fore 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 shy 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 non-competitiveness 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 pro-

cesses, 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,⁷ 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

7. 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 \$1 million.

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 chalks 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....

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.

"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."

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 jump-

ing 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, 176.⁸

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

8. 1955 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.

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.

I QUIT, I THINK

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 grown-up 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 best-seller 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 OOOOOHHHHH! OOOOOOOOOHHHHH! 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 non-verbal 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-swarming 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 gate-crashing 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

1. Not his real name

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:

1. First Class was called "Gifted and Talented Honors."
2. Second Class was called "Gifted and Talented."
3. Third Class was called "Special Progress."
4. Fourth Class was called "Mainstream."
5. 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 high-tailed 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?

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 gold mine of ideas, that you're fun to be around. You'll have to mas-

ter 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 shake-up 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.

"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 education as one, too."

My own school fell victim to a politically correct black gym teacher imported from New England to be its principal. Two school-wide 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 rear-guard 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 non-abstract child.

I'm Outta Here!

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

TRUE BELIEVERS AND 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 policy makers 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

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

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.

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.² 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, bureaucrati-

2. For 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.”

cally, 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.

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 be-

come 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 school-teachers, 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:³

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?
2. 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,

3. 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.

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.

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.⁴

Where the parent form of American Calvinism had preached the rigorous

4. 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.

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."

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 process⁵ 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.⁶

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 be-

5. 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.

6. 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.

lievers 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."

"Common sense should tell you it isn't 'difficult' to teach children who don't want to learn. It's impossible."

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):

1. *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...*
2. *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.
3. *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.

4. 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.

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

6. 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.

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;⁷ 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 coexist 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

7. 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.

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.

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 grass-roots 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 de-

velopments 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.

THE LURE OF UTOPIA

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 *Encyclopedie* 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.

1. 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.

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.

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.² 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.³

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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

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.

"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."

Barnes 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 col-

lapse 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)

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.⁴ 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

4. The 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 at least a portion of its purpose.

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.

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.”⁵ 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 chil-

5. 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.

dren...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.

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.⁶

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 stews 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

6. Economist 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.

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.

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 inter-meshing 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 coal mine "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.

ESSAYS by JOHN TAYLOR GATTO

AN OPEN LETTER FOR OLIVER STONE AND MICHAEL MOORE

An audience of tens of millions of once-tormented, humiliated, degraded former prisoners of forced confinement schooling has been waiting eagerly for a film that dared to tell the truth about the mass institutionalization of schooling with all of its seamy sides instead of the usual dishonest clichés about little red schoolhouse propaganda whitewash. The movie-going public will respond enthusiastically to such a film with word-of-mouth publicity.

Since our purpose in presenting this book is to change the raw deal we offer our children, such a film made from our text would aid the forces ready to affect changes in the way we seek to educate children, and to that end we ask you to consider turning our text into a full-length feature film, to be titled (possibly, subject to your final judgement), *The Secret History of American Education: The Real Truth About the Prussian Origins of Our Failing Schools*.

The story might begin in the military dictatorship of Prussian Germany in 1806, with the crushing defeat of Prussia's superb army at the Battle of Jena by the eccentric forces of Napoleon Bonaparte, followed by a tremendous social/economic crisis in Prussia whose entire economy was based on making war and renting mercenary soldiers to make war—made difficult by the defeat. The ruler of Prussia called an emergency meeting at his palace of the wisest men he could assemble to discuss the problem and ask their advice; a philosophy professor at the University of Berlin, named Johann Fichte said the defeat had been caused by disobedient soldiers disobeying the commands of superior officers and following their own judgment; he said the time had come to bring into reality an ancient idea of treating the young like a school of fish, of habituating them from childhood to render total fealty to superiors by "school" training that destroyed the ability to exercise free will, or even to imagine doing so, to transform young potential soldiers into machines incapable of disobedience by long compulsory school training and to correlate all future opportunity to how successfully each student accepted such schooling.

The idea was enthusiastically welcomed by the businessmen and bankers present as offering a customer base pre-sold on accepting advertising appeals.

Following this meeting, Herr (Lord) Fichte drafted a number of public letters to the King describing the plan in detail which were read all over Germany with general approval—"a machine to make unruly, willful children obedient? Splendid idea!" was the consensus. After a few years of trial all the advanced nations on earth sent observers to study the Prussian plan in operation, liked what they saw and spread institutional forced schooling as a tool of social engineering to every settled corner of the earth. America's school pioneer, the politician Horace Mann, lied to the government of Massachusetts that he had seen Prussian success in converting its society into a productive machine and, with the help of wealthy industrialists, caused Prussian schooling to be embedded into American life by 1852, from which it spread state by state until it existed coast to coast, causing riots in many places as parents saw it destroying family closeness and prerogatives.

This dramatic story line has many exciting scene possibilities that stemmed, in reality, from the psychological and social ramifications of schooling. For instance, the global narcotics trade spread such schooling into China so that Chinese families would stop resisting the conversion of Chinese society into a vast market for opium. Because of concern on the part of elites that school not develop intellect in underclasses, school academics were dumbed down from the first, and school spokesmen, like John Dewey, were set to publicly scoff at the value of skills-training, like reading, short-circuiting a formidable literacy that made the American population the best educated in the world, according to the French aristocrat, Alexis de Tocqueville. The dumbing down was progressively enlarged and continued through the 19th and 20th centuries.

We chose you two to make our initial appeal to because apart from your cinematographic genius, you both seem unusually, honest, forthright, and socially conscious. We are prepared to offer you a deal to convert our book into a feature film that will open American eyes to the reality of forced schooling, so this pernicious German import can be put behind us finally and we can replace it with something more truly beneficial. The mass killings in schools in recent years have served notice that our sons and daughters have tired of being imprisoned away from real-world experience, adventures and explorations of the sort that educated Washington and the rest of our founding fathers. Should you wish to explore an option, please contact our editor-publisher at Oxford Scholars Press, Mr. David J. Rodriguez, at info@OxfordScholars.com.

BACKSTORY OF BEATLES' CENTRAL PARK MEMORIAL "STRAWBERRY FIELDS"

An audience of tens of millions of once-tormented, humiliated, degraded former prisoners of forced confinement schooling has been wait

Pedagogical Situation—In my 8th grade program at Intermediate School 44, Manhattan, known as the lab school, circa 1980-1991, each of my students was required to spend one full day a week in an independent study project of their own choosing, year-long.

The Kono, Killeen, Laski Project—The famous pop musician John Lennon, had been murdered near our school in, I think, 1980 at about Central Park West at 72nd Street, where he lived across the street from Central Park in a famous building called the Dakota. His widow, Yoko Ono, wanted the city to build a memorial to the Beatles in Central Park, which she offered to pay for, that environmentalists objected strenuously. For all her wealth and influence, Mrs. Lennon became despondent and issued public appeals for help with the project, which could only happen in a negative decision, by 7-0 vote by the Community Planning Board and could be set aside or overruled by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, though either option was unlikely because powerful political interests on the west side were dead set against it. But into that situation stepped three 8th grade students asked me for permission to take the cause of a Beatle's memorial as an independent study project, and for 3 months out of class attendance in which to mount a pro-memorial campaign. I agreed if the girls: Miyo Kono, a transfer student from Japan, in America to study violin at the New York Philharmonic, and Vanessa Killeen, vivacious British-American girl, with a winning personality, and Dara Laski, an intellectually-oriented westside Jewish girl, would be able to raise 5,000 signatures on a pro-memorial petition and direct a letter-writing campaign against each of the 12 Landmarks Commissioners as representatives of an official advocacy group, "The Committee of 5000" speaking for 5000 New York teenagers. They agreed and had formal letterhead stationary printed up and decided to raise 200-plus signatures from each of the 22 schools in District 3, a total of over the 5000 agreed to. This took 3 full months out of class to do.

For a period of several months the 3 girls split the work of mounting a case to have the Community Planning Board reverse its decision to turn down

Mrs. Lennon's offer to pay for a memorial to the Beatles built in Central Park directly across the street from John Lennon's apartment building on Central Park West at 72nd Street.

Their strategy had several prongs: legally, the Community Planning Board, was outranked in decision making by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, a 12 member body, which could reverse the negative decision; the girls decided to individually research each separate commission member to profile their personal preferences, then direct a mass mailing to each (and all turned out to be politically extremely liberal and "progressive"-minded) appealing to their personal values—so the girls' argument was backed up by 5000 and more signatures on a petition drawn from the 22 schools in the District (at 200-plus signatures from each) complaining that the voice of the young had been ignored in the negative decision.

To meet the demands of propriety, Miyo Kono had first given the Planning Board the same argument, asking them to reverse their original decision. When they rejected the argument, the way was clear to appeal to Landmarks Preservation which ruled in the girls' favor and to Yoko Ono's delight a green light was given to using 2 and a half acres of the park for a Beatles memorial, a new city landmark completed in 1985, I think, which has brought thousands of visitors from all over the world, and millions of dollars of tourist revenues to hotels, restaurants, etc.

The memorial's existence was made possible by the tireless work and fertile imaginations of three 13-year old girls who used a few months of school confinement time to achieve a feat of prodigious productivity, which has benefited a legion of New York citizens for the past 30 years in tangible ways that test-taking and blackboard note-taking could not have done.

World-famous Yoko Ono honored the girls at her apartment saying, "I am speechless with joy. The situation was grim, indeed, until the girls took charge." In Edward Eggleston's brilliant book, *The Transit of Civilization*, Eggleston makes the case that the successful transition of European civilization to America was largely due to the work, courage, and imagination of young people, not their elders, in taming a wilderness continent. The book is available to read on Ron Paul's website: www.bit.ly/TransitOfCivilization or can be purchased from an out-of-print book service (it was published in 1900).

The great lesson of Kono, Killeen, and Laski to me—and the lesson of those thousands of colonial children—is that we recklessly waste a great national resource in locking 50 million children in square brown classrooms every year, that the policy councils of America would be improved immensely by the addition of young advisors—and that our schools must no longer be allowed to squander such a unique resource. The next time you visit, or hear of, Strawberry Fields in Central Park, connect your spirit to those of Miyo Kono, from Japan, Vanessa Killeen from Dublin, and Dara Laski from New York City, who taught the rest of us what advantages a free society can confer on its citizenry by honoring the principles upon which it was founded. It was a lucky break that fate paired these precocious teens with me as school teacher who understood the power locked in our founding documents and who accorded full citizenship to three 13 year-old girls. "The situation was grim UNTIL THE GIRLS TOOK CHARGE(!)"

Imprisonment schooling has no justification in science, common sense, or history. Get your children out of such schools if you want them to be educated. School means living up to the expectations of total strangers; education involves meeting your own expectations—GOALS SCHOOLS ARE UTTERLY INDIFFERENT TO. The strangers who set school goals work for the rich and famous, not for you, wake up! The original point of institutional schooling was CLASS WARFARE—it remains that. Evidence that it is so is overwhelming.

The damage schools have done to middle class family life is intentional. Read Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Plato's *Republic and Laws*, and Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* along with Torrey Harris' *Philosophy of Education*. As I told you, the evidence is overwhelming—CLASS WARFARE is the game, protecting the interests of the wealthy and influential.

Don't think of it as conspiracy. It is simply "looking out for number one," advantaging those who pay the politician's bills. In their position you might do the same; it was only the Christian morality of our national founders that protected us so recently from the forces of class warfare that dominate Britain and Germany, our predecessor and feeder nations. Our Constitution and Bill of Rights make not a single word of mention about school or education, because our founders knew what the dark side of romantic blather about education really would be—a tool of class warfare. Instead of schools, common Americans were given access to guns, which they could use in the

ALGORITHMS OF SUCCESS

The secret formulae of successful behaviors are handed down to us from past generations as wise sayings and proverbs, a legacy that future generations may use to guide their choices. Some of these repeat themselves so frequently and aggressively among leadership groups in every culture that avoidance of their recipes by official training institutions, especially our schools, must be looked upon suspiciously as a strategy to weaken children from assuming inconvenient powers that might easily be within their reach.

Two of the algorithmic recipes most notably ignored by schools, avoided in readings and discussions, are these: "Divide to rule" or "divide and conquer," and its obverse, "in union there is strength."

It doesn't require extreme intelligence or watchfulness to notice that as early as first grade, school sets out to lead children to mistrust and even dislike themselves. To fully comprehend such alienation requires familiarity with the Prussian intellectual mentors of William Torrey Harris: Hegel, Fichte and Kant. Their recommendations for an ideal society include *alienation* from one's family, friends, neighbors, nature, beauty, traditions, religion, and nearby community concerns. Their aim was that your total loyalty and affection can be concentrated in obeisance to central government authority. The corsage of alienations are today realized in a structural way. Examples include: keeping formal schooling in passive isolation from the real world; avoiding readings and discussions which challenge these arrangements as correct and proper; and, punishing all disobedience to these prohibitions. Pupils are held back from any attempts to self-correct those denials of experience, adventure, and exploration which afford easy, inexpensive, and natural ways to maximize learning and happiness. Through schooling, the young are divided from all allies who would otherwise help them to reach competent maturity. In other every age and corner of the world, the young were brought into adult life as competent citizens using different procedures from those used in schools, that were tested over centuries to provide successful learning.

The easiest way to confirm this is by comparing the way children of important people are taught with the ways children from ordinary families are taught. Once the phenomenon is confirmed, the question should inevitably be asked, quite fairly, "Why?" The usual response is that it is done to reduce costs, but this is nonsense. Everything in the education of elites, nationally or

worldwide, could be modified—without additional costs—to fit any of the lower classes of society. If costs are dismissed as the main reason for reductions in quality training for ordinary children, then what alternative motivation for aberrant schooling of underclasses emerges? The scientific habit of analysis known as Occam's Razor is insightful, as it directs problem-solving to fixate on simple explanations. The simple and disturbing answer as to why schools are this way is that leaders want them that way, because advances their own relative superiority over the masses. It meets the requirements of competitive advantage that exist in any competitive society—any class-driven society—like our own inevitably has.

The second categorical algorithm which institutional schooling radically ignores, both in actuality and in theoretical discussion, is the power that comes from alliances. The mere act of not being alone to solve problems confers substantial advantages in the constant competitions fostered by Prussian-derived classrooms. The constant, unceasing competitions establish lifelong habits of regarding others as rivals and not as potential aides. But elite schooling and social experience teaches exactly the opposite! That in union there is strength. School defines effective cooperation to be a form of cheating. Yet all potent secret societies across planet earth, from Skull and Bones at Yale, to Scottish Rite Freemasonry, to Rhodes scholars, to Bilderbergers, and even to their humble equivalents in clubs like Rotary or Kiwanis and so on. Each is a place that teaches solidarity with one's associates and loyalty to them, regardless of merit, pays substantial dividends in gaining opportunity in the races of life. Tight "connections" in "club" associations are family-like, and require fellow members to be preferred over others for promotions and prizes, even if doing so violates standards of fairness. This is an important strategy that successful folk employ to get ahead. Why do schools resolutely turn away from even mentioning such timeless truths, forcing students instead to pay fealty to a philosophical vision that privileges the upper classes of hierarchical societies? Those classes urge, in rhetoric alone, "equal opportunities for all and a level playing field," as the sayings go.

What I am trying to get you to see here is what you probably already have, a personal way to refer to "inside information" or "real" learning, what members of the secret societies at Yale call "the unprinted curriculum." That vital data about the truth of things, social and economic, separates those "in the know" from the "unwashed." It divides the boulevardiers from the bumpkins, locking underclass children into the lowly roles they already occupy.

This “stabilizes” the social and economic orders, from one generation to the next. It was proposed by many philosophers throughout history as a way to make management easier for the leadership class. It sure does. But American society idealizes the idea of fluid social and economic placement, where everyone has a fighting chance to become top dog. In such a society, keeping insider information for a favored class is rigging the game to guarantee outcomes before the game is played, a form of cheating. Let’s explore these mysterious distinctions between public and private school dynamics.

In public schooling, what comes after school is “work,” and this means “a job” that somebody “gives” you, and requires your obedience to their wishes. The private school idea of “work” is different, as it follows another set of processes or algorithms rather than obedience. It expects that “work” flows from assigning yourself tasks which fulfill existing needs of others, or in the modern variant, that fulfill new needs in others—which you will fulfill, for a fee, by “inventing” something. It may be something grandiose like an iPhone that never before existed, or something newly designed that others will pay you for like a clothing-fashion, song, or specialized service. In antiquity it could have been providing some goods from far away, like pepper or special oils, and working locally to create needs for it through advertising and “promotion.” In institutional schools, the training delivered fails to teach or train habits in such algorithms necessary for success. Those fortunate enough to have families knowledgeable in an appropriate curriculum leading to self-employment have a substantial head start over those dependent upon school lessons aimed to supply “jobs” to existing businesses; an advantage contradicting American ideals, one difficult to see unless it is pointed out to you. If you stress cooperating with others in teams to achieve maximum quality and efficiency in project outcomes—even in academic projects—instead of stressing competition, as schools do, you will put your students’ feet closer to the right path, and be sure they remain connected, not divided, from allies in family, church, tradition, and so on. In this way you can counteract a great deal of the invisible damage school does in violating natural algorithms of real education.

Real education is learning to form connections among ideas, and developing ease with relationships. It is not being isolated in a square brown room away from family, friends, the working world, and your own self. It is not being disconnected from everything for the convenience of institutional procedures and employments. The formal system of schooling that leaders have

allowed to develop is one that deeply disrespects and contradicts the guiding algorithms of the wealthy and powerful: In union there is strength; division from natural allies is not in your best interests. Once you accept this advice, given at all great private schools like Groton and St. Paul’s, the next natural step is to inventory the resources that constitute your natural allies. In school those are your fellow students, much more than the teachers. You must build working relationships with those students, exchanging assistance, loyalty, and affection. Then, scrutinize the wider community you live in, targeting the natural targets of assistance for reciprocal exchanges likely to end in alliances. You want to learn to fly? Find a pilot with a dog he wants walked, read the same books he does, go to the same meetings, declare your love for his passions, work as a volunteer for the same charity.

To construct the best teaching relationships for you, it’s absolutely essential to know in detail just who you really are. Only with self-knowledge can you sharpen your judgment in the quest for the best matches for your own chemistry. To know yourself and your weaknesses as well as your strengths, what counts for more than any book or lecture is raw experience with the world around you, your immediate environment. To learn your weaknesses, fears, and strengths you need adventures which put complacency at risk. The most important are the explorations of the streets, alleys, fields, buildings, and boulevards of your city and town. Such familiarity with your place bestows a reassuring feeling of being at home, that your place is really yours, a miraculous sense of connection which for many extends over a lifetime. For myself, while I physically live in New York City, my heart, soul, and spirit lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Each of the hills, the brick streets, and the rivers I learned intimately as a boy and I return to them several times each day, whenever I feel lonely. Such a gift I would give every boy and girl on earth. As a schoolteacher in New York City, I made certain that my classes walked over a hundred city blocks every week to invest their bodies and minds in the city that fate had dictated to be their home for the foreseeable future.

As romantic as it may sound, let me repeat this mantra that 30 years of school teaching taught me: We all need experience, adventure, and explorations more than we need algebra. Take any boy or girl who seems bad at algebra and give them a worthwhile and interesting life to lead and the algebra will automatically improve. I came fervently to believe that the dull, meaningless, parasitic existences we force upon children are the principal reasons for their indifferent scholarship. Try to reverse the pattern by stress-

ing different goals to aim for. I believe you will be pleasantly surprised. For schools themselves, accelerating threats about the future means no improvement will ever occur. High-stakes testing is worse than useless, but help your kid create real work for themselves, that pays in cash or in other real benefits, and watch their grades soar.

THE COMMON CORE MONSTER

I am increasingly horrified at the invisible agendas at work in American public schools; especially those aimed at ending America's unique sovereignty and its Christian code of morality. America's position as a world leader promotes this code indirectly against more intolerant codes, like the Sharia Law of the Islamic world, which prescribes beheading, burning, and death by stoning for the disobedient or those in opposition.

It is a little-known fact, but quite true, that since America's founding its philosophy has been both an attractive beacon of liberty and possibility to the common peoples of the earth, and at the same time, a deadly danger to the elites of other nations who prefer arbitrary and tyrannical rule, and dislike the American example that shows common people that another possibility exists. When military might exerted against America by Britain, Germany, Japan, Russia, and other nations failed to bring America to heel, other strategies were devised to dominate American policy and make it compliant with the will of those elites.

Cecil Rhodes was the wealthiest individual of the 19th century, owner of the diamond mines and gold reef in South Africa. His last will established a secret society that intended to end opposition against elite plans to dominate the world by a novel scheme of forcing the ordinary to surrender the ability to think clearly and independently: Compelling their children to be imperfectly trained and hence "dumbed down," so that as adults they could be easily manipulated without realizing what was happening. Details of this scheme are clearly set down in an operational manual still available bearing the title, "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," which lays out the engineering used to force consensus upon the thinking of the underclasses. This document may originally have been a cynical attempt to pin culpability upon a much-despised Jewish minority, to throw pursuers of truth off the trail of the real ideological culprits, but the net result is to offer a highly credible blueprint of mind-control to any special interest disposed to assert absolute control over the minds of others.

Virtually all varieties of socialistic thinking in the developed nations, from the Soviet Union to less ambitious varieties, have a vested interest in seeing American capitalism and its entrepreneurial model put to death and seen as a bad example by their own citizenry. State-determined participation in

Common Core and its standardized testing mandates is an attempt to placate these foreign influences, but at the cost of weakening American loyalty among its schoolchildren as it indoctrinates students with a negative, politically leftist view of America's past, minimizing American uniqueness. George Washington's life is reduced to a single sentence, and Abe Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is completely omitted. The famous scholar Stanley Kurtz concluded that the goal of the radicals who created this and administer it is to "end American history as we have known it," by substituting a narrative that doesn't make other nations seem inferior by comparison. Discussion of our unique founding generation is almost gone. The Declaration of Independence and its principles occupies exactly one sentence.

The University of California math department had this to say about Common Core math in the August 6, 2014 *Wall Street Journal*: "Common Core fails any comparison with the standards of high-achieving countries." Common Core will move the U.S. even closer to the bottom in international ranking, U.C. mathematicians said. No reference whatsoever is made to the heavy religious influence in America's founding, and of Christian codes of morality continuing to shape our national character and laws—as Islamic codes shape the core of modern terrorism.

Under Common Core, the simple concepts are artificially made difficult in order to maintain a pretense that the training is high-level, while it is actually low-grade. The College Board and its radically leftist president David Coleman, believed to be a secret society member following an agenda to end American exceptionalism, have pulled a revolutionary coup on American families. Such a coup would have been called treason in past decades. *I blow this whistle* on this so you will be warned and wary in the face of government propaganda. Although I stay away from commenting on partisan politics as a matter of principle, and although I twice voted for the man, I truly believe that President Obama has inflicted more harm on American principles than all the foreign spy rings in operation. A Christian he is certainly not, an American... just barely.

A national movement is underway to repudiate Common Core. Find its office in your area and wreck this abomination. George Washington, one sentence. No Gettysburg Address! How stupid these internationalists must think you are... But King George III thought the same of the colonials, once. The Common Core ideologues are King George's direct spiritual de-

scendants, targeting your children to be citizens of a global government without freedom of speech and association, without rights to trials by a jury of your peers, and certainly without a right to own weapons! Common Core is bad news, an evil scheme concocted by people who dislike America and intend to change it by brainwashing your kids.

A NEW THEORY OF CURRICULUM

When you attempt to acquire an education, or improve upon the one you have, you need to avoid the mistakes existing institutions make. Not only those institutions in the United States, but everywhere systematic schooling has established a track record. As famous inventor Thomas Edison used to say about his failures in discovering a light bulb filament, "Every failed attempt teaches me something! When they don't work, I know what *not* to do in solving my problem."

Students should be taught this principle about failure as part of developing newer, better, ideas. The most dramatic evidence that the old theory of curriculum is dysfunctional is found by looking at Islamic countries, which were once world-leaders in many academic specialties, especially sciences, but are now extremely retarded in development after following for the past 6 centuries the same model of curriculum that our schools adopted. This old theory of curriculum overvalues mere *knowledge*, the accumulation of thousands of tiny bits of fact. In practice, that cannot be shown to correlate with any breakthroughs in understanding. But it does interfere with critical habits of thought, independent initiative, and inventiveness. The old theory over-values isolation, following monastic traditions of scholarship, and detachment from the outside world. Islamic pedagogical practice, and our own, requires utter obedience to those alleged experts called "teachers." Feedback from subjects so taught, in the form of critical commentary, is actively discouraged as it threatens command structures. Losing such a valuable source of learning turns classrooms into caverns of silence and inactivity in chairs.

Late in life, George Washington was asked, of all the factors in his early life, which did he consider had added most significantly to his many lifelong successes? His answer requires hard reflection to understand and to appreciate. "Two things," he replied. "Ballroom dancing and horseback riding" (!) Both gave him the bearing, presence, posture and attitude of a leader rather than the dispirited appearance of a peasant-follower. After the Revolution, a British sniper testified he once had Washington squarely in his rifle sights, but found himself unable to shoot because Washington had such magnificent command of his horse, Blueskin.

This is a testimony to the importance of recognizing and mastering the non-verbal languages which all of us read and base vital judgements upon. Those

are not learned from lectures or books, but from active engagement in the non-school society; conceiving, designing, initiating and executing projects which one sees through to a conclusion, and then reflects upon. Any new theory of curriculum requires the instructor to try to answer to awaken curiosity and interest: *To motivate learners to self-teach.*

Consider that elementary school students and kindergartners know nothing about the world they are new to, but that they eat, drink, wear clothing, live inside shelters and seek amusement and diversions... Why not show them where and how, locally, these things come from? Involving them in matters that are, by nature, vital to their contentment? In my experience, this is never done. Elementary students are never deliberately shown the stages of life they will inevitably enter in the arc of the future.

Once I undertook a curricular experiment, to allow the young to see what their futures would look like, and, as I expected, they were utterly fascinated and highly motivated, and for weeks afterwards showed more interest and seriousness about school studies. In earlier American society, when children were incorporated actively in the daily business of society, exposure to the arc of future life occurred quite naturally. But now we systematically exclude the young from associating with people of other ages, as part of our faulty theory of learning. Such an introduction is often provided synthetically. Usually it is by threatening students with a verbal abstraction called "the future," that has little meaning beyond a mere **sound**, to people lacking experience.

In the new theory of curriculum, genuine involvement is vital to contentment and to learning. It starts by accepting as a **necessity** the involvement of students in their own curriculum planning: conception, initiation, organization, completion, evaluation, remediation, and so on. To get to that point demands instructors who are prepared and willing to identify with students in the exact situations they find themselves at the moment of instruction, to address the questions and answers raised by the real problems that the students are realistically expected to have at that very moment. Classroom attention and energies scatter and fade when directed by some illusory future imagined by schoolteachers. When this imperative is followed, students' interest, cooperation and motivation to self-teach combine in ways that please every stakeholder in the school equation (students, parents, teachers, and the local community at large).

Before launching on a new theory of teaching and learning, one should take pains to comprehend and accept the core proposition of the new theory, and also to understand the parts of the old theory that are to be discarded. The magnetic pull of the familiar is a dynamic always at work in human affairs, and it can be better resisted in its attempts to make the future resemble the past. Once you train yourself to a new theory of curriculum, your imagination and experience will bubble over with good and strong lessons that your students will enjoy and learn from. In a short time, they will recognize a positive difference has occurred between the schooling that turned them off, and something better.

As a schoolteacher I was frequently asked by other teachers why my kids behaved better and accomplished more than theirs. Trying to be helpful, I replied, "The difference as I see it is that your students work for *you*, while mine work for *themselves* as often as not. I don't need to motivate mine, they motivate themselves." It is a distinction worth pondering.

THE ORIGINAL AMERICAN CURRICULUM

The native peoples of North America devised curriculum for their children around developing 12 or so character traits, instead of memorizing abstract data. In its most substantive manifestation it can be regarded as enthroning a meritocracy of practical knowledge with immediate utilitarian uses. For instance, on the burning deserts of the Southwest, knowledge of how to construct shoes, called moccasins, for protection from stones, cacti, and heat had to be learned by every warrior to survive. Each needed to keep a sewing kit at hand; having a needle and thread, or thread substitute, within reach constantly for repair needs. And since refrigeration wasn't available and wild meat was the principle food, knowledge of drying meat into pemmican for transport over distances as a life and death matter.

Education of young Apaches was constructed around exercises to develop the following personality characteristics—without doing so subjected the student to ostracism and even expulsion from the tribe.

1. **Discipline:** reliability was highly prized.
2. **Fortitude:** complaining was unacceptable.
3. **Independence:** depending on others was bad form.
4. **Audacity:** reckless courage in battle was expected.
5. **Passion:** emotional commitment to the task at hand was the community standard.
6. **Perseverance:** one must never surrender or quit a task before completed.
7. **Filial Piety:** taking care of one's parents was customary.
8. **Honor:** absolute honesty was required. Lying was unforgivable—as it is under our perjury laws in courtrooms—and considered a serious crime.
9. **Resolve:** pledges and promises are sacred.
10. **Adaptability:** be flexible in widely varying circumstances, weathers, hunger, pain, natural disasters, without complaint; stoicism was insisted upon.
11. **Resistance to Oppression:** Indians were loath to follow orders; even chiefs had little authority to command; compliance was

voluntary except in combat

12. Loyalty to Tribe: allegiance to one's community, as a whole, was absolute.

Inadequacy in any of these vital areas was cause for shunning by others, and was used as an excuse to be denied a right to be accepted as warrior by the tribal council. Every male child, by the age of 7 or so should be able to make a bow and arrows from materials at hand and should know how to remove arrows, spears, and bullets from flesh, and to manage broken bones and animal injuries. All were proficient in building wickiups and teepees, which women would then decorate.

This Apache character-development curriculum resembled that of the classical European civilizations of Athens and Sparta in Greece, or at many of the elite, private academies in Britain and Germany during the Victorian Age. Even today, there are Christian home schools which put character development at the center of school affairs.

Once upon a time, American public schools treated morality and character as important school subjects, reported on official documents, but the progressive era—so called—called an end to that along with school prayer. Opinions are still strongly divided about the wisdom of that change. A highly successful football coach, Mike Leach, has written a fascinating book about the principles of Apache education that shines an interesting light on our own school procedures—it's called, *Geronimo: Leadership Strategies of an American Warrior*. Read it if you find time; it will give you ideas, I promise.

THE CURRICULUM OF PLAY

What is the subject of Play? We don't often think much about play, even though the British once boasted that the lessons used to defeat Napoleon at Waterloo were learned on the "playing field." When machinery seems to play we call it "broken." Play in public schooling "bad" behavior. Yet men and women, dogs and cats, birds and fish, play all the time; what are its functions?

Before trying to answer, a definition must be clarified. Organized play, the only kind permissible on school playgrounds misses much of the value play has to confer: it has no danger, is tightly regulated by rules, has no unpredictable component—or not much—that might require players to adapt quickly on the spot to changed circumstances. Organized play is more like work than the free, joyful activity we yearn for in play. The adaptability component, which qualifies it, teaches that utterly essential component of good educations, adaptation, the skill Charles Darwin established as the very gateway to species survival, moving it into the realm of leadership policy considerations. In elite private education worldwide, as in the U.S., play is a major part of curriculum on lower as well as higher levels of schooling, but, for whatever complex reasons, it is marginalized in training systems mandated for lower and middle class children, perhaps (as I think) as part of a package of strategies intended to keep them in subordinate positions, to make leadership commands more efficient and the social pyramid more stable, reasons, you will notice predicated upon rational considerations, not predicated upon prejudice.

Play is the key to discovering a personal style in expressing yourself, that "star quality" so highly prized in movie stars and other entertainers, and increasingly to corporate workplaces. On January, 10, 2010, *The New York Times* published an essay in its Business section by the CEO of an Amazon division announcing that it preferred to hire people with string personal styles because they "energize the workplace, serving as assets to the business just by expressing their personal styles, while those who remain "faces in the crowd" are net liabilities." In hiring top executives, the key determinant is that applicants show themselves in interviews to be individuals "we would choose to have dinner or drinks with."

The most reliable training to develop such skills occurs through play, because

only in play can you try out different versions of yourself. Real play involves the player in meanings that transcend the immediate needs of existence reminding us that rational calculations fall short of meeting the needs of spirits to develop fully; in play we try out different personalities and use feedback from companions to determine which to keep.

Freedom is the essential characteristic of real play, which is why team sports fall short—too many rules, but rules have a role, too. In play, self-imposed rules give free play its meaning, putting boundaries around what the player is allowed to do; think of scientific experimentation as a kind of magical play. Play has a goal and all its movements lead to that goal—whose nature is often known only to the player. In team sports the goal is clear to all spectators and players alike, but in team sports individual players strive to be parts of a human machine, a collective entity, whose many rules rob the imagination of most of its power to improvise.

Carl Jung, the influential Swiss psychological philosopher found play to be the core of all creative arts and all fantasy; for Jung, the painter incapable of play is a mere illustrator, and the play-less inventor a mere doodler.

But on the negative side, from a leadership point of view, the ordinary citizen with a developed imagination for play is a great danger to the social order, which explains why so many advisors to rulers, like Napoleon or an Attila, through history advised that some form of organized schooling be imposed—to arrest the play impulse as one of its main intentions, before that impulse could produce social mischief.

What confuses the public in thinking about education is that it has been conditioned to believe that those activities known to enhance imagination: art, music, dance, sculpture, design, and the like, are peripheral to developed intellects when that is far from true; the public has been deliberately convinced to regard serious study as only the seat-bound teaching of abstractions we call “subjects,” when the truth is that such containers for knowledge interfere with the best uses of mind which are found by thinking in wholes, not rigid compartments; thinking about all knowledge as intimately interconnected, not as isolated bits – packages of facts disconnected from one another by school bell, room changes, and tests. School implies, through its practices, that mass commercial entertainment can fill the voids created by ignoring play and the arts, that by consuming the playful imaginations of commercial

employees that our own developmental requirements for this form of mental nutrition will be satisfied. IT IS NOT SO!

CHILDREN DON'T BELONG TO POLITICIANS—COURT DECISION

Looking back upon the dismal record of American schooling since its high point of accomplishment in colonial times, brilliantly conceived one and two-room schoolhouses under local control, it is difficult to locate any notably wise policy coming from the higher realms of government that honors our founders' legacy to ordinary people that we be "a nation conceived in liberty." One outstanding exception to that intention came to disturb our judiciary branch in 1925 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled:

"THE CHILD IS NOT THE MERE CREATURE OF THE STATE."

Not, not, not! Not ever.

The occasion for that emphatic assertion was a ruling by the state of Oregon that private alternatives to state schooling were illegal. This Hegelian preemption by state politicians of parental rights came following a surge of passion in America to follow Germany's lead in sacrificing all private rights to interests of building a strong centralized government, an idea rejected by the Supreme court in the case, *PIERCE v. SOCIETY OF SISTERS* (1925). The court added these words to its decision:

"Those parents who honor him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations."

The principle that "the child is not the mere creature of the state" should be engraved in our hearts as we face school life in 2016 under our new state-mandated Common Core Curriculum conceived by a radical bureaucrat, who holds membership in several secret societies, one at least, David Coleman of the College Board, is a member of the Rhodes Society, which is dedicated to ending our national sovereignty in favor of ushering in global government. Common Core is a step toward making our sons and daughters mere creatures of the state as the big three names of German fascism: Hegel, Fichte, and Kant wished them to be, a wish in which Horace Mann and John Dewey (along with the Rockefellers and Rothschilds) concurred.

The tactic of making incremental progress, settling for an inch when your intention is to take a mile, is advice recommended by the famous American radical, Saul Alinsky in his manual for political take-over actions, *Rules for*

Radicals. It's a tactic commended also in a manual for "change agents" published by the federal Department of Education in Washington some years ago, written by employees of the RAND Corporation. *The Change Agents Manual* (as it was called) created the famous Delphi Technique for silencing critics by shaming and humiliating them in front of their friends, as a way to discredit their arguments, hardly an ethical tactic, but one commonly encountered. At a national school convention in Salt Lake City years ago I was Delphied by the organizer when I refused to accept the consensus the presumably democratic meeting had been ordered in advance to reach, but fortunately I was aware of the social engineering at work and so could defend myself by turning the table on derogator by revealing to the audience what he was trying to accomplish—and at whose behest.

The ambitious agendas at work through forced institutional schooling go far beyond local schemes to profit and privilege private parties, although such political uses of school are quite common. But larger, stranger agendas from fantasy and science fiction involving schemes of planetary control associated with mad people, or evil ones, as tradition regarded them, are also at work. The two master agendas of this type under way at present, both partially or wholly financed, it seems, by Bill Gates and his foundation are:

1. Radically reducing the global population (watch his TED talk, "Innovating to Zero").
2. Ending national sovereignty forever—consolidating nations into a global government.

The driving force behind this is coming from multiple sources including interests at the United Nations, banking groups, and committed utopian ideologues. This seems to involve the schools in order to prevent the young from becoming aware and providing resistance. Students' educations are sacrificed in order to create a leadership utopia of a perfectly obedient citizenry—a long-term German philosophical dream. No discussion of these dynamics is allowed to appear in mainstream American media, so rallying opposition to this ghastly threat to our national existence is made virtually impossible. Only a few decades ago, a banker named Warburg, a representative of Rothschild interests, addressed the U.S. senate demanding cooperation in moving to a global government, announcing that "We" would have global government whether the Senate wanted it or not, "either by cooperation or by conquest." Conquest?

You never heard this, because the big-time press and television networks decided to keep it from you, as they also decide about much other news, being part of the sinister agenda schemes themselves. Read Anthony Sutton's book, *America's Secret Establishment*, to learn all the painful details.

Schools render your children ignorant of the political realities of modern life, deny them the power to think independently, render them subservient—they are not to be trusted. We must find the strength to train them ourselves to the furthest extent possible, as past generations did—so it's possible to do, we know from experience. We must preserve their right to be citizens, not subjects, at gunpoint, if necessary, as our ancestors did under similar circumstances.

A wealthy African politician, and founder of the Rhodes Society, expressed his plan to recruit promising young adults (like Bill Clinton, who was an honoree of Rhodes as well) into an invisible cabal for the purpose of globalizing government on earth. Coleman was also, I am told, (but have no way personally to verify) a member of the notorious Skull and Bones secret society at Yale, a group of rich boys who boast of being grave-robbers—not the best qualities for someone appointed to be overseer of your kids' future, I hope you agree.

Both Bush presidents were members of the same secret society, which boasts an agenda too secret for public awareness, and a substantial chunk of the C.I.A. are also members of the same secret society, as was the founder of TIME magazine and many higher ups in all forms of mass media. This allegiance to secret agendas is widespread on every level of American government, unbeknownst to the population at large, but increasingly suspected and resented as a betrayal of common decency. These secret society members—like the Bushes and Coleman (and Clinton) directly manipulate school policy towards ends the public is kept in the dark about. Just another reason why, if you want an education, you must prepare to do it yourself because one common characteristic of all the secret agendas like Coleman's Common Core Curriculum and Bush's No Child Left Behind is that they are covertly committed to keeping you ignorant in spite of rhetoric to the contrary. So, engrave it into your heart, "the child is not the mere creature of the state." Not ever!

NEW YORK STATE TEACHER UNION (NYSUT) ASSESSMENT

Over the past ten decades of withering criticism of public schooling, prodigious effort has been expended by critics of both the Right and the Left in finding the prime villains of low school quality among the associations which, contractually, represent schoolteachers—the unions. As I sit here on March 17, 2015 writing, a copy of the state union news magazine, "NYSUT UNITED" is beside me, indicting state politicians as the real culprits, but acknowledging the sorry state of official schooling.

It struck me as a good idea to let you hear the union voice on school affairs—in its own words for a change—to *help you decide* if continuing your own children in the institution, as insiders describe it their publication, is a good idea or not. I begin with the front cover which shows a fierce-looking New York governor baring his teeth behind the headline: "He Has No Respect For You...Or Your Profession. Fight Back!" You might wonder what it means that the union endorsed such a man for office when other choices were available, unless all candidates disrespected teachers and the teaching profession even more than the incumbent. If so, that would be an ominous reality for students, wouldn't you agree?

On page five, in a letter to members from union president, Karen Magee, titled "Beating the Billionaire's Agenda." Ms. Magee announces: "We are in a war," claiming that the governor cared more for the concerns of billionaire campaign contributors than the wishes of parents and the needs of students by increasing the number of charter schools while removing their "accountability," and while tying the fate of public schools to high-stakes testing using irrelevant criteria of judgment.

The union president implies that the governor devotes large amounts of time to private meetings with "super rich" hedge fund managers, but is reluctant to attend public meetings where he would have to answer the questions of parents and teachers.

On page six, the governor is accused of "showing his true colors" in a variety of "petty extortion schemes" in which he seeks union support in depriving common children of art, music, foreign languages and guidance counselors, and forcing them into "classes of 30 or 35... with outdated textbooks." More than half of the state public schools receive less aid than they did 7 years ago

when costs were lower.

On page eight under a headline “Draconian Anti-Teacher Agenda” we hear the charge that the governor has sworn “revenge” on parent organizations for insufficient political support by assigning schooling evaluations to local ideological groups with vindictive anti-public school agendas. He offers a tax credit to donors to private schools.

On page nine, under the hashtag, “We Are Ready To Rumble” we hear the union is mounting a campaign “using print ads, television-ads, and social media to take school policy from the billionaires and return it to “people who know children by name.”

I have burdened you with the adversarial contents of the teacher union magazine to underline a realization that you need to accept to understand the school “mess” (as the union president characterizes it on page five). I want you to see how antagonism between schoolteachers and the reigning political authorities create an adversarial climate that cannot bode well for many school children in the long, or short run, and that the official voice of a half-million teachers in New York State has concluded *exactly* what I have been arguing in my writings and teachings for years: that official schooling is a vehicle of *class warfare* and a way to protect the privileged from any possibility that new generations might upset the social order by developing too effectively (becoming educated) beyond the station assigned to them. America was not the first nation to think this way.

The scheme was developed in Prussian Germany, a military dictatorship, in the early 19th century, not by army generals, but by college professors—world famous names—trying, it’s believed, to ingratiate themselves with wealthy aristocrats and industrialists who resonated with the class warfare theme (after the Prussian style) all over the world. Riding on the famous names which created it: Immanuel Kant, a legendary intellect, who preached passionately that *obedience to authority* was the decisive component of good education—an extremely un-American notion; after Kant in importance came Johann Fichte whose book, *Addresses to the German Nation*, said that training of the young should destroy their imaginations to such a degree that they would be unable to even *conceive* of independent courses of action in their lives apart from what authorities ordered. (Fichte’s writing is readily available in every college library—and in many community libraries—across

America. Fichte also vigorously pursued the idea that “national consciousness” was far more important than individual interests, itself an un-American concept (one which in Germany led to National Socialism (Nazi) consciousness.

The third of the mighty triumvirate of German philosophers who gave us the schooling we have was G.W.F. Hegel, *easily the most influential* thinker since Plato, who claimed to offer powerful governments *a way to actually control history* by keeping populations in fear and chaos (and hence out of the ruler’s hair), by staging a series of phony crises to terrify a gullible population—one uneducated to think for itself—to *support uncritically* whatever it was told to do, or tricked into believing necessary.

Kant, Fichte, and Hegel dominated policy thinking in Britain, America, Russia, Japan, and, of course, Germany/Prussia; in America, through vigorous efforts by William Torrey Harris, our nation’s leading Germanophile and first National Commissioner of Education; Harris actually wrote in 1906, *Philosophy of Education*, that *the purpose* of our schools was “self-alienation,” to cause students to mistrust themselves, to reject teachings of parents, churches, traditions, and that this alienation was best taught in “dark, airless corridors” than in beautiful surroundings, a good reason, as you can see, to deny ordinary children training in art (which might awaken aesthetic sensibility).

It is essential for you to realize that Horace Mann, who opened America’s doors to Prussian thinking caused our schools to devote themselves to social engineering, instead of to the things Jefferson, Washington, Franklin, Madison, et. al. would recognize as education. Under a regimen of social engineering, indoctrination is the ultimate goal, pre-school through college, and, without putting it so succinctly, the quotes I offered you from the teacher’s Union, should show you that many school teachers understand on a gut level the kind of mechanism they are trapped in. To an limited extent, many resist, sabotaging the worst of the orders they receive, and in doing so become targets of scorn from school policy makers, media, and a public uninstructed that bad schooling is exactly what the “system” is set up to deliver.

Until you know some history, you could hardly *imagine* the dystopian political minds who gave us dumbed-down schooling to protect the interests of the privileged. Once, however, you *can* imagine, and can appreciate that

from certain points of view there are good reasons for school being as it is, you have a foundation from which to build education instead of indoctrination. The first step is to give up wishful thinking that somebody else will do it for you. Agreed?

A TEENAGER CHANGES HISTORY

In the lectures I've given around the world over the past 20 years, the commonest request I receive from various audiences is to supply more cases of successful young people who find non-school ways to achieve worthwhile lives: names like Washington, Franklin, Farragut, Edison, Carnegie, Sarnoff, Richard Branson, Danica Patrick, et.al.

Now, if former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill is to be believed, I'm able to present you with the prize of the past millennium, a teenage girl, without kindergarten, elementary school, junior high, high school or college who Churchill calls "a being so uplifted from the ordinary run of mankind that she finds no equal in a thousand years," as he paid tribute to her in his book, *The Birth Of Britain*, from which I take details of her life, the life of France's most revered military hero, and most popular saint, Joan of Arc, the self-styled Virgin who drove the English armies from her nation and placed its legitimate king on the throne in place of a British pretender.

This was a peasant girl used to raw, practical experience: to tending sheep, cleaning house and washing dishes, an unlikely character to become a national Angel of Deliverance, a splendid heroine, one of history's least explicable phenomena. Born in a poor hamlet of Domremy, she watered guests' horses at a local inn, tended fields, and nursed a fantastic dream at age 15, that she would be the champion to free France from English military domination! How's that for girlish ambition?! Her father was outraged that she spoke of dressing in male clothing and leading rough soldiers into battle. Where would money come for armor, a warhorse, and weapons? How would she gain access to the King to gain his permission? And first, she would need permission from his attendants to be allowed to make the attempt to convince the monarch. Impossible! And yet, she did convince a local bigshot to help her get the project launched, after which she made a dangerous journey across France to gain an audience with the King, introducing herself this way (put yourself in the King's position): "I am Joan the Maid sent by God to aid you and the kingdom and by His order I announce that you will be crowned in the city of Rheims."

No historian tries to explain why he turned a sympathetic ear to her pitch, and accorded it creditability, but his court was fascinated by the girl, especially when she mounted a warhorse, couched a lance, and cried, "Forward,

fellow countrymen!" A committee of church people was called in to check her out to be certain she wasn't a pawn of Satan. Her first project in the year 1429 was to break the English blockade of Orleans where the enemy garrison outnumbered her force 4-1. After another battle, she was captured and condemned as a witch to be burned to death by church authorities. Her last living word recorded on the stake was "Jesus!" The executioner is recorded as saying, "We are lost, we have burned a saint." He was correct, the English were lost.

Winston Churchill's conclusion about Joan was: "All soldiers should read her story and ponder her words and deeds as a true warrior who, in one single year, though untaught in technical arts, reveals the key to success and victory." Joan perished on May 30, 1431, after which the tide of conflict flowed remorselessly against the English.

As a lifelong teacher of teenagers, the lesson I personally draw from Joan is that all of our art and science is inadequate to guide us in releasing more than a tiny fraction of the power students may potentially represent, and we might be better off to listen to what children have to say and should risk entrusting them with nobler tasks than copying notes off blackboards and taking paper/pencil tests if we wanted to reap the full benefit of their gifts for the general society. The system we have institutionalized acts to silence the young in the interests of managerial convenience, an unworthy goal if ever there was one.

The social media so vital to modern discourse would not exist without the imagination of the young and early American history is full of similar daring businesses we owe to youthful imagination and energy. So there is ample historical precedent to arrange society as if they were a valuable resource instead of a useless nuisance. The very idea of a French nation hardly existed until Joan's lily banner, showing Jesus Christ perched on the world, and her daring accomplishments brought it into being. Sophisticated France, a pinnacle of modern civilization, is more the creation of this visionary peasant girl's than of Voltaire's or any other notable name.

AFTERWORD by JOHN RICHARD GROVE

Originally published as a massive single-volume text, *The Underground History of American Education: An Intimate Investigation Into the Prison of Modern Schooling*, has been out of print for many years, and thus it was expensive to acquire when you could locate a copy. Those who persevered to acquire a copy, and read it, discovered it to be a literary treasure in its *entirety*. It's a map of how American schooling evolved into what it is today, a guide to our world and how to learn our way through it, written in poetic prose, and based on the facts and evidence of the matters at hand. I'm elated that it's being made more accessible, first by reprinting the book, and second because it's broken down into an easy-to-read 3 volume set.

I offer my congratulations to you for making it through Volume 1 which represents the first leg of this incredible journey. This adventure is about outgrowing the comfortable box constructed by public schooling.

This Afterword represents an intermission between Volumes 1 and 2. John asked me to provide you with some refreshment—a cognitive oasis—to inspire your interest and replenish your intellectual appetite, before you embark on reading the remaining 2/3 of this saga chronicling the downfall of the American school system- and what we can do about it, in Volumes 2 and 3.

Reading is an important skill in a free society, as it allows individuals to remain free and secure, because what we don't know *can* hurt us. In Latin, the word *Liber* was both a noun (meaning *book*) and a verb (meaning *to free*, as in *liberate*), it represented *liberty through reading*, and *freedom through living*. To become and remain free from the systems of control which have existed since prior to our birth into this world, reading is an essential tool for self-study, for it allows individuals to learn about the world which we're living through today—and how the institutions which assert control over others have evolved over time.

Literacy can also be a form of slavery, until a logical method of critical thinking is consistently applied by the reader. You can liberate your mind through literacy by learning to ask questions of substance and identifying non-contradictory answers. Asking questions is critical to learning, and John's prolific work in the public school system prepared his students for life by teaching

them how to ask substantial questions and reach beyond the school system for their education. If only we all had a teacher of such good nature and thorough wisdom. That's what John's books are for.

As Dr. Paul mentioned in his Foreword, "*The amazing fact of this book is this: it is an underground history written by an 'aboveground' educator*". This book reflects how John challenged the system from within his own classroom, by going against the grain of the prescribed curriculum and allowing each individual to design their own curriculum based on their interests. He created an "*underground railroad*", which set his students on the path to freedom—outside the imprisonment of public schooling.

After resigning, John set out to teach on a broader scale where he honed his skills and evolved into an exceptional author in underground historical research and its practical application—to end all forms of human slavery. John is a 21st century abolitionist, seeking to teach people how to liberate themselves from the illusions purveyed through the school system.

To me, the most astounding aspects of *The Underground History of American Education* reflect how American history goes far beyond what we're taught in school. John shines the brilliant head lamp of his inquiring mind into all the dark areas of American history which public schooling fails to illuminate. He discovered that the dark areas—which are left in the shadows of modern public schooling—are the same areas which individuals need to see clearly in order to remain creative, inventive, self-reliant, and as a function of that learning—Free and Independent.

John dug deep into the underground history in his years after leaving public schooling, and he has always remained a teacher; his classroom is now global, and his message resonates around the world. He struck an unmined vein of gold in the form of this *underground history*, he used his labor to mine it, and over decades he has shared it with all of us. His writings take us on a journey filled with clues which reveal the missing puzzle pieces of history with each page we turn.

Why has the history of individual freedom been kept from us? It lacked a story, a framework through which one could easily understand.

The Underground History of American Education traces the ominous continuity of an agenda which mirrors a recurring theme throughout history: *the*

suppression of useful knowledge as a method to control individuals and thereby harness populations. John's collection of published works reveal why groups have sought to subvert the American system of education, by degrading it into a process of public schooling. Instead of fostering independence and creativity, a coercively funded system was created. One that diminished individuality, propagated collectivism, and created obedient workers. The system breeds a dependent class that is in opposition to the revolutionary founding of this country.

As *The Underground History of American Education* continues to unfold it reveals a great many more secrets of American schooling, and illustrates the fabric of American society. The tapestry John weaves through his books reveals why schooling is so frayed and tattered, and offers solutions to revolutionize education and restore the creativity embodied by each individual.

I admire those who expose corrupt systems, and then dedicate their life to further their education, organizing the information, and then guiding others around the purposefully placed pitfalls.

In the next volume of *The Underground History of American Education*, we to move to the *who, what, where, when, how and why* of the 200-year process of subverting the American education system. John describes how self-reliant education was subjugated to the will of a non-elected ruling class, through public schooling. The process was simple: *subvert* the independent nature of the individual, *disrupt* their observation and critical thinking processes, and thereby *change* the attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors of Americans over several successive generations.

John points out the efforts of Utopian societies to implement forced schooling in the 1800's; from there he unveils the evolution of the Prussian Education system of control, and its exportation to America. He describes the influence of German professor Wilhelm Wundt, who helped to popularize the argument that human beings are just automatons without a soul, and thus could be programmed by a system of compulsory schooling.

As we continue down the trail of bread crumbs left by John, the result of layering strategies to control individual labor adds up to the industrial revolution—and to accommodate industry, the eventual systematic control of the individual was perfected through public schooling—designed to manufacture children into interchangeable cogs for the machines of government

and industry.

My favorite passages are contained in Chapter 9, *"The Cult of Scientific Management"*, wherein John introduces us to the scientific elite who usurped control of American education. At the helm of this movement in its early stages was Frederick Winslow Taylor, who authored *"The Principles of Scientific Management"*, a book which accelerated the trends of scientism being used to dehumanize individuals and de-individualize their thinking (i.e. treat them like automatons, a blank slate to be programmed by the state); in order to produce obedient workers for the ever growing number of government institutions and international corporations.

We are provided with a thorough study of the behaviorists like Pavlov, Watson, and Skinner who—in their attempts to 'save the world'—expedited the downfall of American education. John describes the concept of eugenics, both positive and negative, as the use of science to control and harness human beings, and how it flourished in an Anglo-American culture, before it was seeded into Germany and popularized by the actions of Adolph Hitler.

Later in that same chapter, John describes *"The Open Conspiracy"* to undermine individual liberty. It was based on a plan circulated by H.G. Wells and philosophically adopted by non-profit foundations in America, specifically the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations. This plan is targeted at the most vulnerable among us, our children.

John wrote in his original table of contents *"We trade the liberty of our kids, as we trade our free will, for a stable social order and prosperous economy. It's a devil's bargain in which most grown-ups agree to become as children, under the selfsame regimen of tutelage which freezes the young into place, in exchange for food, entertainment, safety, and political simplification. The contract fixes the goal of human life so low that students go mad trying to escape it."*

John illustrates how knowledge of the root-causes of the problems leads to understanding and generates the inspiration to grow beyond those bounds to discover the answers, and enact the solutions in reality. John's body of work is a seed, which when fertilized by inquiring minds, could yield a free, bountiful, and independent society.

John's solutions are elegant, time-tested, and well-founded... but they reach too few, too slowly.

This is where You come into the picture of Freedom, which is still developing and needs more exposure.

Will you take action? How will you take action? Those are questions you might consider at any point in this journey.

For my part, I spent almost 2 years tracking John down to conduct a filmed interview. During that time he was busy traveling the world, delivering his message to crowds of parents and students seeking the well-hidden truths of schooling.

When I caught up with him, we filmed a discussion which continued over 2 days on Independence Day weekend 2012. I titled it *"The Ultimate History Lesson: A Weekend with John Taylor Gatto"*, it's a 5-hour journey through the history of public schooling, and it contains over 200 footnotes and references.

After we filmed *The Ultimate History Lesson*, John suffered a stroke and he spent over a year in rehabilitation before he could return home. Though John is still partially paralyzed on his left side, and he currently requires health care assistance 7 days a week, his mind is strong, sharp, agile, creative, and in action. He's actively writing and researching, just as he always has. I visit with him every few months, and each time is a series of treasured moments, as he still has much wisdom left to impart upon those who are interested in learning.

Read on, and continue growing in the light direction!

Richard Grove,
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of Modern Schooling

JOHN TAYLOR GATTO

Former New York State & New York City Teacher of the Year

ORIGINAL COVER