



Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Summer 2002

on education

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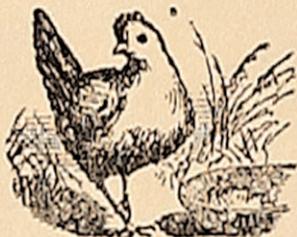
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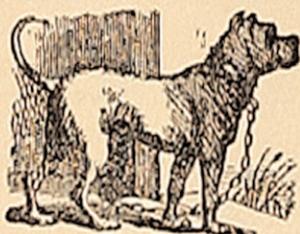
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LESSON III.*



A sly hen.
Can she fly?



A bad dog.
It bit a man



A big ox.
Let him go.

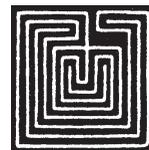


A fat pig.
Can it run?



A red cow.
Has she hay?

* Spell each word in the line; then read, as in Lesson I.



*Inside front cover: From McGuffey's New First Eclectic Reader: For Young Learners, by Wm. H. McGuffey, LL.D., published in 1885 by the American Book Company. First published in 1836, McGuffey's Readers revolutionized the teaching of English in the United States by grading material according to its difficulty, and by giving teachers suggestions for prereading activities, comprehension questions, etc. Total sales of the McGuffey Readers are estimated at 120 million. On today's textbook industry, see Diane Ravitch, *Education after the culture wars*, pages 5 – 21. Courtesy of the Penniman Memorial Library of Education of Yale University. Photography by John T. Hill and Sven Marten.*

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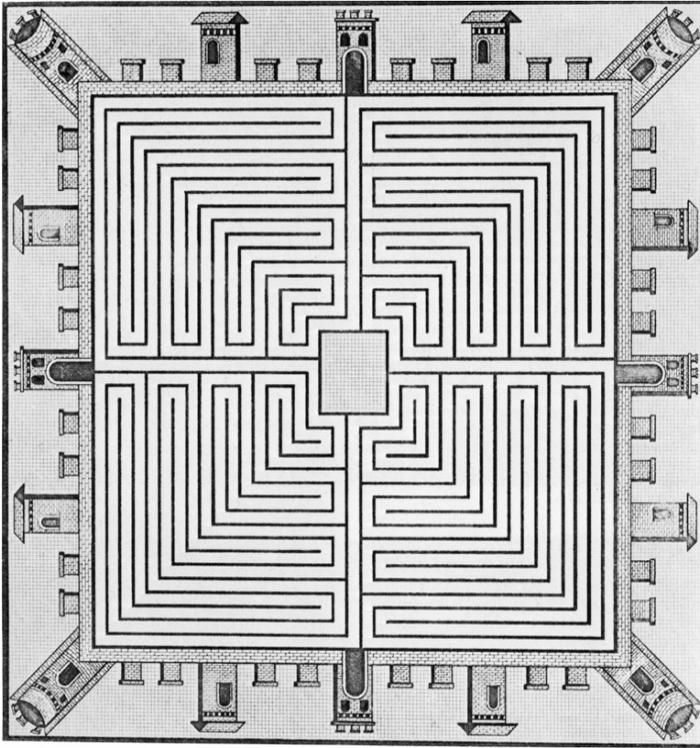
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Dædalus is designed by Alvin Eisenman

Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences



Nineteenth-century depiction of a Roman mosaic labyrinth, now lost, found in Villa di Diomede, Pompeii

Dædalus was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. The journal's namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. Its emblem, a maze seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to "lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness."

The American Academy of Arts & Sciences, like its journal, brings together distinguished individuals from every field of human endeavor. It was chartered in 1780 as a forum "to cultivate every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honour, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people." Now in its third century, the Academy, with its more than four thousand elected members, continues to provide intellectual leadership to meet the critical challenges facing our world.

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Education for all: an unfinished revolution

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Death of Magellan

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Petrified forest

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Diane Ravitch

Education after the culture wars

Suppose most of our nation's schools, through some unknown mechanism, decided to stop teaching history and literature. Suppose our educators went along with this practice because it was so widely accepted, and so far advanced, that no one person could stop it. Individual teachers might still be allowed to make their idiosyncratic decisions about what to teach. Social studies teachers with a keen interest in history could still teach it, and language arts teachers would be left undisturbed if they decided to teach *The Scarlet Letter*, *Moby Dick*, *Gilgamesh*, or whatever literary remnants of a bygone culture they personally val-

ued. Such teachers could be safely ignored, because everyone else would understand that such people were renegades who in time would retire and disappear.

We are not at that point of cultural amnesia yet. But our schools are moving perceptibly in that direction – and no one seems to know how to reverse the trend.

Certainly there is broad public support for educational reform, or so the pollsters tell us. The public knows vaguely that something is amiss and is concerned about the quality of the schools. In the spring of 2001, Congress endorsed a plan drafted by President George W. Bush that calls for annual national tests of reading and mathematics in grades three through eight. Four years earlier, President Bill Clinton had proposed federal funding for similar national tests of reading in the fourth grade and mathematics in the eighth grade.

Yet there is reason to wonder whether the proposed reforms will be able to remedy the underlying problems within education that not only drag down student achievement, but also undermine the teaching of history and literature.

A few years ago, I had a rare opportunity to see firsthand the strange political dynamic that has robbed our education-

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al system of much of its coherence. In 1997, I was appointed by the Secretary of Education to serve on the board of a small federal agency called the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), which has administered federal tests known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress to samples of American students for the past thirty years. That same year, shortly after President Clinton recommended national testing, the U.S. Department of Education awarded a \$50 million contract to a consortium of test publishers to develop such tests. A few months later, when the responsibility for the new tests was handed over to the NAGB, I was able to observe the extraordinary self-censorship practiced by the educational publishing industry in this country and to ponder its likely consequences for our society.

As a historian of education, I have been an interested onlooker and occasional participant in the culture wars, the highly publicized battles of the past generation over whose history and whose literature should be taught in our schools. My own research has persuaded me that some of this skirmishing was just another episode in the long history of anti-intellectualism in American education.

In order to reveal and (perhaps) counteract the tendency to downgrade intellectual content, I had helped in the late 1980s to develop a national test of history and literature; administered only once, it demonstrated how woefully little high-school seniors knew about what was supposedly our common cultural heritage. In the early 1990s, as an assistant secretary of education in the first Bush administration, I actively promoted federal support for national academic standards.

It was, I believe, because of this back-

ground as a longtime supporter of standards that the Clinton administration invited me to join the NAGB as it assumed responsibility for the president's testing initiative. Although I am a registered independent, I had served in a Republican administration, and so my appointment by the Clinton administration was, it seemed, a signal of bipartisan support for higher standards in American education – just as President Clinton's initiative implied that one chapter in the culture wars was drawing to a close.

In my work as a member of the NAGB, I was primarily involved in the effort to establish clear standards for the curriculum in America's grade schools. But what I learned in this setting suggests that the problems within American education run deep, and that these problems have grave implications, not just for America's primary schools, but also for its colleges and universities – and, indeed, for the future of our common culture.

For how, in a society as varied and rapidly changing as our own, can a common culture survive without a clear commitment to broadly shared standards for the teaching of literature and history? And absent any such shared culture, how can we communicate across lines of race, religion, ethnicity, and social class in order to forge common purposes?

As a member of the NAGB, I reviewed one- and two-page passages that had been prepared by the testing consortium for President Clinton's "voluntary national test" of reading in the fourth grade. Most of these passages had been previously published in children's magazines or in recent anthologies.

After I had read about a dozen such passages, a combination of fiction and nonfiction, I realized that the readings

themselves had a cumulative subtext: the hero was never a white boy. Instead, the leading character – the one who was most competent, successful, and sympathetic – was invariably either a girl (of any race) or a nonwhite boy. Almost without exception, white boys were portrayed as weak and dependent. In one story, a white boy in a difficult situation weeps and says plaintively, “If only my big sister were here, I would know what to do.”

The passages, I discovered, had been edited to eliminate anything that might be perceived by anyone as a source of bias. In an essay on a giant sequoia tree, for example, the editors deleted a phrase that compared the sequoia’s shape to that of a Christmas tree because the analogy was considered religious and might be offensive to non-Christians. Another phrase in the same essay was dropped as sexist because it described a branch of the sequoia tree as so wide that a seven-foot man could stretch across it without being able to extend either his fingers or his toes over the edge.

A passage from a well-known fable was also edited to remove the moral of the story. The original had ended with the conclusion that “God helps those who help themselves.” To avoid any reference to a deity, the editors had replaced this phrase with the advice that “People should try to work things out for themselves whenever possible.”

I did not know whether these editorial revisions were the work of an unusually sensitive group of editors, or whether there was some predetermined policy at work. My puzzlement ended in mid-1998 when our committee met with representatives of Riverside Publishing, the company that was selecting the passages for the voluntary national test, editing them, and writing test questions.

When I asked why so few reading passages were drawn from classic children’s literature, the publisher explained that it was a well-accepted principle in educational publishing that everything written before 1970 was rife with racism and sexism. Only stories written after that date, he said, were likely to have acceptable language and appropriate multicultural sensitivity.

To clarify what was acceptable and what was unacceptable, the publisher gave our committee a copy of the company’s guidelines, called *Bias and Sensitivity Concerns in Testing*. These guidelines describe what sort of content and what sort of language can (and cannot) be included in educational tests.

Riverside’s guidelines are in no way unusual. Almost every major education publisher in the United States has issued similar guidelines. They express the explicit consensus that now governs the educational publishing industry and that shapes the language and content not only of tests, but also of mass-market textbooks.

The passages we were reading, I discovered, had been screened to assure that they did not include any “language, symbols, gestures, words, phrases, or examples that are generally regarded as sexist, racist, otherwise offensive, inappropriate, or negative toward any group.”

That seemed reasonable. But the guidelines also require that tests must be “free of subject matter that many would consider controversial or emotionally charged,” for fear that upsetting material might distract test takers and prevent them from showing their true ability. Anything that could conceivably cause a student discomfort is considered a form of bias, requiring heavy editing or the omission of the objectionable passage.

According to the Riverside guidelines,

the tests had to be carefully screened for:

- representational fairness;
- language usage;
- stereotyping; and
- controversial subject matter.

Applying the principle of “representational fairness” requires a test reviewer to determine whether a particular subgroup is overrepresented or underrepresented; whether the subjects portrayed are sufficiently diverse in terms of “ethnicity, age, socioeconomic background, community setting, and physical disabilities”; and whether test materials are “relevant to the life experiences of the test taker.” According to the criterion of relevance, it would be unfair, for example, to ask students who live in Florida to answer questions about “snow and freezing winters,” just as it would be unfair to ask students in Wyoming about oceans, or students in Indiana about mountains.

The language used in the tests was also carefully scrutinized for signs of bias. Almost any use of the word “man,” whether by itself, in a suffix (as in “salesman” or “workman”), or in a colloquial phrase (“the man in the street” or “mankind”), is treated as an unacceptable form of gender bias.

Not only tests but textbooks are to be purged of certain ways of referring to people with disabilities or social disadvantages. The writers are directed not to speak of “the blind,” but only of “a person who is blind.” Similarly, it is unacceptable to write “Terrence was a victim of polio”; this has to be replaced by “Terrence had polio as a child.” Or consider this sample sentence: “Even though she was a poor, Hispanic woman, Maria was able to start a successful company.” Such a sentence is outlawed by the guidelines as elitist and patronizing, and it would have to be revised: “Through hard work

and determination, Maria Sanchez started a successful company.”

Even more striking is the long list of forbidden stereotypes in the Riverside guidelines: men shown as “strong, brave, and silent,” women shown as “weepy, fearful, and emotional”; boys playing sports, or girls playing with dolls; Irish policemen; Asian Americans working in a laundry or a produce market; African Americans working as maids; men working as lawyers, doctors, or plumbers; women working as nurses or secretaries; older people or people with disabilities shown as dependent on others; elderly people suffering from physical deterioration; men playing sports or working with tools; women cooking and caring for children; older people fishing and baking cookies; Asian Americans portrayed as academics; African Americans portrayed as athletes; Caucasians portrayed as businesspeople; men portrayed as breadwinners; women portrayed as homemakers; and children portrayed as “bundles of energy.”

The claim that a story reflects the world as it really exists – or, alternatively, that a story is a work of imagination – cannot counter the charge of stereotyping. Indeed, Riverside invites its writers to *fight* stereotypes by reversing the role of key characters. For example, an older person might be depicted as a participant in an athletic event. A mother might be shown fixing a roof, while a father tends to a sick child.

The guidelines dictate that emotionally charged topics be avoided on tests, for fear that mention of them might upset sensitive children. The forbidden topics (in alphabetical order) include:

- abortion;
- creatures that are considered scary or dirty (e.g., scorpions, rats, and roaches);

- death, disease, violence, weapons, and natural catastrophes, such as fires and earthquakes;
- disrespectful or criminal behavior;
- evolution (there can be no discussion of the origins of the universe, nor any mention of fossils and dinosaurs since they imply evolution);
- high-priced consumer goods or vacations, because the families of some children can afford neither expensive items nor vacations;
- magic, witchcraft, and the supernatural;
- personal appearance (e.g., any specific description of height and weight);
- politics;
- religion (even casual references to religious holidays are prohibited);
- social problems (e.g., poverty, alcoholism, child abuse, animal abuse, divorce, or addiction);
- unemployment;
- unsafe situations, unhealthy habits, junk food, and references to even common drugs such as aspirin.

In addition, the guidelines ban references to so-called negative or sensitive material. As the authors of the Riverside guidelines explain with characteristic thoroughness, negative material includes, but is not limited to, parents quarreling and children mistreating each other, disobeying their parents, or generally showing disrespect for authority. Sensitive material includes references to Satanism, paganism, parapsychology, magic, extraterrestrials, Halloween, ghosts, witches, and the like, even in a fantasy context. Pumpkins and masks have become tainted by their association with Halloween and should be avoided. References to gambling are not acceptable. Avoid topics dealing with nudity or implied nudity, pregnancy, and birth, whether to animals or people. Avoid top-

ics related to controversial styles of music such as rap or rock and roll.

If the Riverside guidelines seem incredible, bear in mind that these rules typify the guidelines used today by most major American publishers of educational materials. Some, like the Macmillan-McGraw Hill multicultural guidelines, *Respecting Diversity* (1993), are even *more* restrictive in specifying what constitutes bias and stereotyping.

And it is not just writers who must toe the line. Illustrators must not use pink for baby girls or blue for baby boys. Out is the old-fashioned idea that females care more about their appearance than males do: today's illustrator must portray both sexes "preening in front of a mirror," with Dad using a blow-dryer.

A strong tone of cultural resentment pervades the Macmillan-McGraw Hill bias guidelines; they suggest that white European American males have received too much credit in the past and that the textbook writers must compensate by highlighting the accomplishments of women and members of minority groups in every subject field, including science and mathematics. Although the guidelines insist on the extensive diversity among Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans, "European Americans" are treated as if they were members of a single undifferentiated group, rather than people who originated in a continent of many different nationalities, languages, ethnicities, and religions (just like "Asian Americans," "Hispanic Americans," "Native Americans," and "African Americans"). In reality, all of these groups are purely social constructions, made in the USA; no such group identities exist outside the United States.

The *Multicultural Guidelines* published by Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley

(1996) further complicate the already near-impossible task of the textbook writer. According to these guidelines, the aim of a textbook is not simply to help students master a specific field of knowledge; the goal is rather to create nothing less than “a Multicultural Person.”

According to these *Multicultural Guidelines*, every group has its own “historically-honed worldview” and its own “values, norms, expectations, and beliefs.” The guidelines emphasize the overriding importance of “groupness,” ignoring the evidence of group intermingling caused by economic mobility, increased education, and rising rates of intermarriage in the United States in recent years. Students are expected to learn how membership in a group shapes the way a person “thinks, acts, and believes,” as well as the way a person is perceived by others. At the same time, students will be reminded of the danger of deploying stereotypes. The properly trained Multicultural Person will never allow “useful, flexible group generalizations to harden into inflexible distortions of group stereotyping.”

A reader is left to wonder: when is a generalization about a particular set of people a good application of “groupness” – and when is it just an old-fashioned stereotype?

The worst aspect of all of these guidelines is that strict application of them entails the exclusion of classic literature from reading textbooks. Neither the Riverside nor the Macmillan-McGraw Hill nor the Scott Foresman-Addison Wesley guidelines require that a certain proportion of textbooks be set aside for classic literature. None requires that stories and poems by significant nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers be included, even if they do not meet the letter of the bias rules.

After all, few, if any, classic children’s authors can meet the requirements of the textbook guidelines. Most of them were unaware of the need for balanced demographic representation. Most of them also assumed that children could imagine worlds that were very different from those they had personally experienced.

That helps to explain why so many American children now arrive in college without ever having read anything by writers such as Herman Melville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ralph Ellison, Joseph Conrad, Willa Cather, W. E. B. Du Bois, Jack London, Edith Wharton, John Steinbeck, Richard Wright, George Orwell, or Charles Dickens. Insofar as such writers flunk the tests laid out by textbook publishers, they risk slipping quietly out of circulation.

Given the concentration of ownership in the textbook industry, in which a small number of publishers dominate sales across the nation, the new censors wield enormous power. A few publishing officials determine what words and subjects are suitable for consumption in a great many of the nation’s classrooms. If they hope to work for the educational publishing industry, writers and illustrators must follow the guidelines with care.

Following the guidelines with care can lead to horrible results. In June of 2000, a vigilant parent compared literary passages used on the New York State Regents examinations in English to their original versions. She found that most of them had been expurgated to remove anything that was remotely controversial, in some cases making the author’s intention unrecognizable. Isaac Bashevis Singer’s memoir was bowdlerized to remove any references to religion, which destroyed the sense of it. References to

race, ethnicity, religion, sex, mild profanity, and alcohol were deleted. In one passage, the adjective “skinny” was changed to “thin,” and “fat” was changed to “heavy,” presumably to protect the feelings of children who were skinny or fat. Although New York’s “sensitivity” guidelines are minimal compared to those used by many publishers, its sensitivity reviewers removed whatever they thought might give offense to anyone, without the knowledge or permission of living authors. The public revelation of the damage wrought by the absurdity of the sensitivity review was so embarrassing to the State Education Department that the State Commissioner of Education promptly agreed to stop cutting literary classics used on the exams.

Although the fracas in New York brought attention to the common practice of bowdlerization, there is a danger that it will encourage test publishers to avoid literary passages in the future. Many already believe that all literature written before 1970 is hopelessly riddled with racism and sexism. It is so much easier for them to use only reading passages that they commission, written by anonymous freelance authors who keep the bias guidelines in front of them and who do not own their words. The contract writers know in advance which words, which images, which stereotypes, and which insensitive language to avoid.

As the sensitivity rules have become more onerous, some writers and illustrators have simply given up. Some years ago, the *New York Times* described the case of an artist who had stopped accepting assignments to illustrate children’s textbooks after receiving a ten-page, single-spaced document specifying the guidelines for a single story. “The hero was a Hispanic boy,” the artist

explained to the *Times*; “there were black twins, one boy, one girl; an overweight Oriental boy, and an American Indian girl. That leaves the Caucasian. Since we mustn’t forget the physically handicapped, she was born with a congenital malformation and only had three fingers on one hand. . . . They also had a senior citizen, and I had to show her jogging.”

Current textbook guidelines have an insidious effect not just on writers and artists, but on the integrity of the texts themselves. Today’s textbooks in science and mathematics abound in references to the race, ethnicity, and gender of scientists and mathematicians and to events that occurred in other cultures, even when the references and events bear no relation to the lessons. Dr. William Bennetta, who edits *The Textbook Letter*,¹ has identified numerous instances in which textbooks have sacrificed accuracy of content for multicultural consciousness-raising.

In a popular high-school biology text, for example, there is a two-page feature titled “A Day in the Life of a Physically Challenged Person,” accompanied by an assignment to write about whether one’s own classroom is accessible to a person in a wheelchair; neither the story nor the assignment has any relation to biology. A textbook on driver education includes a sidebar about a movie-stunt woman who is completely deaf. A mathematics textbook contains blurbs about tennis star Venus Williams, author Alex Haley, and other multicultural items that have no connection to the subject of the text. Similar irrelevant features are scattered throughout textbooks in every subject.

Standardized tests of all kinds have also been affected by multicultural con-

¹ His publication appears on the web at <<http://www.textbookleague.org>>.

cerns. Tests are routinely screened for content or topics or language that might unfairly affect the performance of specific racial, ethnic, and gender groups – psychometricians call this “differential item function” (DIF). What began as a sensible effort to weed out subtle as well as overt forms of racial and gender bias has evolved into a strenuous program to banish any test questions that *may* be associated with group differences in performance, even though the questions themselves are not in any way biased, as that word is commonly understood.

The Educational Testing Service currently recommends avoiding certain topics that allegedly lower the test scores of female, African American, and Hispanic American students. Topics to be avoided include the military and sports. Also to be avoided are questions that use a specialized vocabulary to test a student’s knowledge of farming, finance, law, politics, science, technology, tools, and transportation. Ironically, researchers have consistently failed to demonstrate that students who are female, African American, and Hispanic will get higher scores if these topics are eliminated.²

Debates over the content of America’s textbooks and educational tests have, of course, been raging for many years now. But what is not at all well understood, even by the educated public, is the extent of the censorship imposed by the bias and sensitivity standards that cur-

rently prevail. Even worse, the range of forbidden knowledge seems to just keep growing – as I discovered during my tenure on the NAGB.

After our board approved various reading passages, based on their quality and suitability, for use on the “voluntary national tests” proposed by President Clinton, they were forwarded to a bias and sensitivity review panel. This panel recommended the deletion of several passages we had approved. (The Clinton administration’s voluntary national tests, by the way, were developed but never deployed due to bipartisan opposition in Congress.)

Two of the passages selected for deletion were about peanuts. One focused on the history of the peanut (with particular attention to the scientific contributions of George Washington Carver) and the other on the peanut’s nutritional value. The bias panel objected to the first passage because it included a statement that peanuts were exported from Brazil after Portuguese explorers defeated many tribes. (The bias reviewers believed that this wording would offend someone, but I wasn’t sure whom: maybe people who don’t like the word “tribe”? People who object to the historical role of Portuguese explorers?) The second passage on peanuts bothered the bias panel because it neglected to mention that some people are allergic to peanuts.

The bias panel also proposed to drop a passage about a heroic blind mountain climber because it implied that people who are blind are worse off than sighted people and have a more difficult time facing dangers like mountain climbing.

The bias panel wanted to kill an informative story about the life of African American educator Mary McLeod Bethune because it did not approve of the

2 For a comprehensive review of research on how different topics affect children from different racial, ethnic, and gender groups, see Paul W. Holland and Howard Wainer, eds., *Differential Item Functioning* (Mahway, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993). See especially chapter sixteen by Elizabeth and Nancy Burton, “The Effect of Item Screening on Test Scores and Test Characteristics,” 321 – 335; they conclude that “screening for DIF does not change mean scores of women or minorities.”

name of the school she founded in Daytona, Florida, in 1904: the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls. The reviewers thought African American children might be offended by the school's name. A fable by Aesop in which the clever Fox persuaded the vain Crow to drop her cheese was rejected as gender biased.

The panel also proposed deletion of a charming story in which a rotting stump in the forest, which served as home to successive groups of insects, birds, snakes, and small animals, was compared to an apartment house. The bias panel found the analogy demeaning and claimed that it might reinforce stereotypes about apartment dwellers, or even trigger a negative emotional response among children living in housing projects.

This sort of censorship has no end.

Only the blandest, least controversial, and ultimately least interesting passages can pass through such a fine filter. The only authors likely to pass muster consistently are those who have been commissioned to write, to order, for the tests and textbooks.

This is an awfully weak foundation upon which to build a curriculum. How can we transmit our culture to the younger generation if we teach only what was written in the past dozen or so years? Is the culture created prior to 1970 so corrupt that it should be locked away and forgotten? Should we allow our cultural heritage to be hijacked by a handful of self-righteous pedagogical censors?

It would not be too big a stretch to assert that the McGuffey readers of the nineteenth century contained not only better literature than our own bowdlerized texts, but also more honest writing about the realities of contemporary society – poverty, crime, unemployment, class differences, and social injustice.

By ensuring that students never read anything that might possibly offend them, current textbook guidelines reinforce a sugarcoated and narcissistic view of culture, as if books and poems and historical narratives were ephemeral commodities – meant mainly to make us all feel better about ourselves.

Perhaps my indictment seems too strong. After all, periodic surveys by the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature at the State University of New York at Albany have reported that the “most popular titles” in high school are *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Julius Caesar*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The Great Gatsby*. However, this list of titles has been compiled by asking English department chairs in a sample of high schools to list “for each grade in your school the book-length works of literature which all students in *any* English class study.” The department chairs, notice, are not asked to list the works of literature that *all* students in each grade will study, or even the works that students in *every* English class will study. As a result, department chairs are free to regard a work of literature as among “the most popular” even if only the students enrolled in an advanced placement course actually read the work.

Even when great works of literature are taught, they are often taught carelessly in an effort to purge the reading experience of potentially disturbing difficulties. Writing in a recent issue of *The American Educator*, a college professor acidly described a class of incoming freshmen. Most of them assume that “all theories and opinions are of equal value, as are all readings of works of fiction – regardless of the facts of the case.” Students often told him, “My high-school teacher told me that a poem can mean anything I want it to mean.” Unable to

imagine the concerns of other people living in other times, these students have been taught instead to express invariably their *own* concerns when confronted with any given cultural artifact: “whether the text is the Bible, Shakespeare, or Toni Morrison, students read only themselves over and over, with the predictable results that the greater their ignorance the higher their self-esteem.”

With exceptions, mainly accounted for by idiosyncratic teachers and elite schools, a disturbing pattern has emerged from the reforms of recent decades: a curriculum without content – and a new consensus that only this kind of curriculum can properly meet the needs of modern American society.

The emergent consensus over the contentless curriculum is the result of a variety of social and political factors, some of them of long standing. Certain strains of educational progressivism, as I showed in my book *Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform*, regarded the traditional curriculum as elitist and sought to replace academic subjects with utilitarian activities connected to everyday life. Since the early years of the last century, the academic curriculum has been forced to compete with demands for vocational education, industrial education, and life-adjustment education. The child-centered strain of progressivism, as represented by William Heard Kilpatrick in the 1920s and 1930s and later in the 1960s by A. S. Neill, asserted that children learn best in the absence of *any* set curriculum: it is the students, not the teachers, who should be directing the course of study.

Educational psychologists launched a different sort of attack against the content of the curriculum by changing the way students were tested. In the early decades of the twentieth century, psy-

chologists brashly claimed that they could measure not only what children had learned, but what they were capable of learning. Cloaked with the authority of science, they belittled teacher-made tests and essays as too subjective and unscientific. One of their casualties was the College Board examinations, which relied heavily on elaborate and detailed student answers; these exams were replaced in 1941 by the multiple-choice Scholastic Aptitude Test. Psychometricians liked the SAT because it was objective, reliable, and could be scored by a machine. The old College Boards had tested mastery of a prescribed curriculum and included an annual list of what literary classics students were expected to know; the SAT claimed to be content-free. The changeover from the old College Boards to the SAT removed one of the vital supports of the traditional academic curriculum.

For much of the past century, the leaders of the nation’s education schools – an eclectic mix of progressive pedagogical experts and psychometric experts – have seen themselves (sometimes heroically) as the vanquishers of the academic tradition. In every subject field, progressive educators have assailed the established order, whether it be the teaching of literary classics in English, the study of events in chronological order in history, or the mastery of computational skills in mathematics.

Thus, when the culture wars began in the late 1960s, the antagonists of a traditional curriculum were pushing against an open door. When critics on the Left complained that English classes paid too much attention to the writings of dead white men and that the characters and stories represented women and minority group members in demeaning ways, the status quo had few defenders. When the critics said that these omissions and rep-

representations damaged the self-esteem of students from these groups, many education leaders agreed: the system was guilty as charged. When critics said that too much attention was being paid in social studies classes to the actions of white males, educational publishers rushed to revise their textbooks, even hiring some of the critics to serve as in-house consultants on the issues that troubled them.

But the pressure for change did not come only from the Left. By the 1970s, members of the religious Right had joined the crusade against the traditional curriculum, lobbying publishers to purge anything that might give offense to the faithful. In his book *Battleground: One Mother's Crusade, the Religious Right, and the Struggle for Control of Our Classrooms*, Stephen Bates recounts a legal challenge to the popular Holt reading series by fundamentalist Christian parents in rural Tennessee. The parents accused the Holt series of teaching secular humanism and violating their religious beliefs. As part of the litigation, Holt, Rinehart & Winston released over two thousand pages of internal files, which detailed the inner workings of the textbook publishing process and revealed (in Bates's words) the company's "almost pathological fear of controversy."

The memoranda circulated among writers and editors showed their desperate efforts to placate any protests about gender, race, and ethnicity by revising their guidelines and content. By 1977, at least half of all characters in stories and illustrations had to be female, and representations of minority groups were closely scrutinized to avoid stereotyped behavior. As the publisher's guidelines evolved, the rules for representation grew more elaborate (Jews must not be shown as "diamond cutters, doctors, dentists, lawyers, classical musicians,

tailors, shopkeepers, etc.," and the elderly must not be depicted "in rocking chairs, knitting, napping, and watching television"); authors, stories, and photos were chosen not for their literary quality or their contribution to teaching reading, but on the basis of "the latest U.S. population figures."

Even though the fundamentalists' critique of the Holt reading series ultimately failed in the courts, educational publishers took their complaints to heart and added evolution, religion, divorce, disobedient children, Satanism, magic, and fantasy to the list of forbidden topics in children's textbooks and standardized tests of reading comprehension.

Consequently, the content of today's textbooks and tests reflects a remarkable convergence of the interests of feminists and multiculturalists on one side and the religious Right on the other. No words or illustrations may be used that might offend the former groups, and no topics can be introduced that might offend those on the other side of the ideological divide. The Left gets censorship of language usage and pictures, and the Right gets censorship of topics.

The new consensus that undergirds the contentless curriculum is built on certain assumptions: that America lacks any common, shared culture worth speaking of, much less preserving; that there are no particular literary works that should be read by all students; that historical studies are problematic insofar as they require students to memorize and recall certain facts (this is derided as "rote learning"). The traditional curriculum could have been expanded to make it more inclusive of women and minority groups, but instead critics attacked its very nature. They derided it for emphasizing a "canon" and for expecting students to master a "body of knowledge"

(the notion of “mastery” was itself suspect). Once the very idea of mastering a specific set of facts and texts was discredited, there was nothing left to teach but various methods, such as “basic skills,” “discovery learning,” “critical thinking,” and “problem solving.”

The failure of the publishers to defend the integrity of their textbooks was not entirely their fault. When critics assailed them, the publishers could expect no support from state education departments, which were equally averse to controversy, nor could they turn to the schools of education, which hastened to express their solidarity with the critics, nor could they seek aid from professional associations. The American Historical Association had long before accepted the submergence of school history into the amorphous field of social studies; primary- and secondary-school history teachers didn't even have a professional organization to represent them. Nor was the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) concerned about the steady whittling away of recognized literature in the school readers. That organization became politicized in the 1970s and was more concerned about social issues than about teaching classic literature or standard English. The “national standards” produced by the NCTE and the International Reading Association in 1994 failed to mention even a single piece of literature that all American students should read. Besides, the leaders of the major academic organizations in both history and English were themselves too devoted to issues of race and gender to challenge those who pushed beneficent self-censorship onto the educational publishing industry.

Because the new consensus permeates the educational establishment, it has affected the course of the current struggle

to raise educational standards – and not just at the federal level.

Over the past decade, every state but Iowa has written new academic standards, which describe what students are expected to learn at different grade levels in every subject area. These standards are supposed to be a guide for students, teachers, parents, textbook publishers, and test developers. The standards are particularly important as a guide to assessment: a state cannot ask questions on standardized tests about topics that were not specifically included in the state standards; if it did, some students would be at an unfair disadvantage, since they would be tested on material they had not necessarily been taught.

The most common failings of state standards in social studies is that they either omit history altogether, or they set expectations for learning it that are absurdly grandiose.

For example, an early draft of the Illinois social studies standards asked high-school seniors to “assess the long-term consequences of major decisions by leaders in various nations of the world, drawing information from a variety of traditional, electronic and on-line sources.” The same document directed seniors to “compare and contrast varying interpretations of major events in selected periods of time.” After loud complaints, the standards were slightly revised. One of the new standards for seniors became: “Analyze how the United States's political history has been influenced by the nation's economic, social and environmental history.”

In Ohio, seniors are expected to “explain how past events in the world and the United States have impacted events/issues today,” and “explain how different choices in the past could have led to different results today.”

In New Jersey, seniors are supposed to “synthesize historical facts and interpretations to reach personal conclusions about significant historical events” and to “compare and contrast divergent interpretations of historical turning points, using available evidence.”

It is noteworthy that these standards do not refer to any particular events or issues or time periods. They sound impressively comprehensive. But they are so vague that they cannot be tested and should not be considered a “standard.”

The English standards in most states are similarly blank about what students should read. At present, no state identifies any specific work of literature that students should have read at any grade level. Only a few states append a list of recommended readings.

Such lists are invariably controversial. When Massachusetts issued as an appendix to its state standards “A Suggested List of Authors, Illustrators, or Works Reflecting Our Common Literary and Cultural Heritage,” one principal complained about “a return to pell-mell coverage – opening up kids’ heads and pouring stuff in. I thought we were getting away from that.” Another principal declared that distributing a list of literary “greats” was a step backward: “All it does is codify a rigid bias about learning and culture.” Others condemned the list as too white, too male, and too Eurocentric, even though it did include writers who were neither male nor white.

The moral of this story about state standards is all too clear. Any effort to prescribe content will provoke controversy. And remaining silent about “content” has one obvious advantage: no one can complain about “what” is taught if there is no “what” to argue about.

Politically, the path of least resistance has been to issue “standards” that of-

fend no one. Controversy is far more likely to erupt in response to sins of commission than to sins of omission. So omission is the order of the day – a goal achieved by concentrating on skills while ignoring content.

Since most state standards do not include any specific content, the state tests of English cannot ask questions that assume any specific prior knowledge. When taking a test, students are given a poem or short story and asked to answer questions about it, either in multiple-choice, short-answer, or extended-essay form. They are tested on their ability to analyze an unfamiliar passage, not to reflect on a text they have previously studied.

Most state history exams similarly assume no prior knowledge. Tests typically include “document-based” questions, in which students are asked to analyze a document (for example, a cartoon, a short passage, or an excerpt from an article) that pertains to some historical issue; the correct answer can be found by reading the “documents” carefully, without knowing anything about the historical context. Also common is a type of question in which the student is given a quotation from some historical figure and then asked to pick a multiple-choice answer that captures the meaning of the quotation. The 1999 New York Regents exam in global history included a map question about “the Mongol Empires, 1200 – 1350,” which could be answered correctly without knowing anything about the Mongol Empires. Then there is the “historical” graph, which contains information about an issue like wages or unemployment or gross domestic product in certain decades; students are asked to read the chart to answer questions, which they can do without any knowledge of the historical period.

This approach to testing – similar to

that found on the SAT – is different from the one used for the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate examinations. Both of these elite programs publish a syllabus, which describes the material that will be examined; teachers and pupils prepare for the examination by studying the syllabus. The exams are based on specific, clear content standards. Students are expected to study specific events in history and specific works of literature in order to prepare for the exams.

To prepare for the new state tests, by contrast, a student need only be able to read and express an opinion. In effect, testing agencies and state education officials have figured out a way to administer “standards” that do not require any specific knowledge of literature or history.

And so it has come to pass. Despite the admirable efforts of well-intentioned reformers over the past decade, our nation’s schools need not teach a common set of facts about history – and they no longer feel it necessary to teach a common set of literary texts.

There are exceptions, of course, especially in private schools and elite suburban public schools. There are most certainly talented and dedicated teachers of English in every state who still teach classic literature, just as there are dedicated history teachers who still equip young people with a clear, chronological scaffolding of events, issues, and people.

Their efforts, however, receive scant support from the new state standards. These teachers teach what they teach out of personal conviction. And whether a student has such a teacher is – in most schools – almost entirely a matter of luck and demography.

Getting the chance to study great literature and learn about the historical

events that shaped our world should not be a matter of luck. It should be the consequence of well-considered educational policies that govern curriculum, classroom materials, teacher preparation, professional development, and testing.

Can we sustain a healthy civic culture when so few students (or adults) understand the evolution of our political democracy? Can we preserve a common culture when many high-school and even college graduates know little or nothing about our nation’s history and its literary heritage? Can we, even as we recognize increasing numbers of women and people of color among the ranks of great authors, simply abandon those earlier writers whose works inspired them?

Some would surely answer all of these questions in the affirmative. Some will disagree with me on every point.

But they will have to consider that the vacuum created by our failure is being filled not by cutting-edge critical theorists, but by the commercial entertainment industry. If we do not teach our children history, Walt Disney and Oliver Stone will do it for us. If we do not teach literature, the rising generation will be denied access to one of the smartest and most effective methods of forming critical and independent minds.

In a recent essay in *The New Republic*, Mario Vargas Llosa argues that new technologies cannot replace the book. Science and technology promote specialization, he remarks, but literature provides a common denominator for understanding human experience: it allows human beings to recognize each other across time and space. Through reading great literature, argues Vargas Llosa, we learn

what remains common in all of us under the broad range of differences that separate us. Nothing better protects a human

being against the stupidity of prejudice, racism, religious or political sectarianism, and exclusivist nationalism than this truth that invariably appears in great literature: that men and women of all nations and places are essentially equal, and that only injustice sows among them discrimination, fear, and exploitation.

Those hardest hit by the conditions I have described are the sons and daughters of parents who lack the means to send their children to outstanding suburban schools or to private schools. For these children, what is taught in school is all too often dreary stuff that cannot compete for their attention with the powerful stimuli they find on television, in the movies, in video games, and on the Internet.

For them, school is the Empire of Boredom. Little do they know or care that an entire industry of bias reviewers has insulated them from any contact in their textbooks with anything that might disturb them, like violence, death, divorce, or bad language.

No matter. When the school day is done, they will turn to the videos and music that feed them eroticized violence and surround them with language that knows no constraints. This is as wacky a combination as anyone might imagine: schools in which life has been homogenized, with all conflicts flattened out, within the context of an adolescent culture in which anything goes.

Schools cannot beat the entertainment industry at its own game. What they have to offer students is the chance for intellectual freedom, the power to think for themselves rather than the incentive to gorge themselves on the media's steady diet of junk food.

But under the present regime of censorship, the schools themselves are not intellectually free. Worse, they cannot awaken children's minds with great lit-

erature if they are restricted to only what was created in the past twenty or thirty years, and then to only the predigested pap that passes the industry's elaborate bias and sensitivity codes.

It is unrealistic, obviously, to expect the government to lead the way in establishing high standards for history and literature. As my own experience in the standards movement confirms, the government, like the educational publishing industry, abhors controversy – and establishing standards with real content is nothing if not controversial.

What, then, is to be done?

Parents must inform themselves. And even when they seem to be standing alone, they must insist upon something better than the current fare.

For their part, teachers must free themselves from the expectation that whatever they teach must boost children's self-esteem, and that whatever students read should mean whatever they think it means in light of their own personal experience.

There are also lessons to be learned from the surreptitious bowdlerization of test questions on the New York State Regents exams. The work of bias and sensitivity reviewers must be reviewed by nonexperts, by regular members of the public (like school-board members); their decisions to delete passages must be defensible and sensible. I also believe that there should be public access to and review of test passages that have been eliminated for bias reasons; let's all see what bias looks like and whether the experts' views pass muster in the light of day. In New York, the State Commissioner promptly realized that he could not justify what had happened once the state's actions were subject to public scrutiny. As a rule of thumb, the state should not do anything that makes it look ridiculous. If excerpts need to be

cut for reasons of length, it is easy enough to insert ellipses; high-school seniors should know what ellipses are.

Great literature in any event does not comfort us. It does not make us feel better about ourselves. It is not written to enhance our self-esteem or to make us feel that we are “included” in the story. It takes us into its own world and creates its own reality. It shakes us up; it makes us think. Sometimes it makes us cry.

The same is true for the study of history. It is possible to spend one’s time learning only about one’s own family or ethnic group. But there are worlds of adventure, worlds of tragedy awaiting us if we are willing to let go of our solipsism, our narcissism, our need to study only ourselves.

One of my favorite American educators is William Torrey Harris, who was U.S. commissioner of education at the beginning of the twentieth century and a prominent Hegelian. Harris was a great proponent of liberal education, and he believed that what young people needed was “self-alienation.” They needed, he said, to enter into worlds remote from their own, immerse themselves in the life of another civilization, and then return to their own, with a critical perspective honed by their experience in a different world. Harris suggested that teachers should challenge students, upend their settled ideas, and expose them to worlds far beyond their own experiences. Properly taught, literature and history can cultivate the sympathetic imagination, the capacity to leave one’s own world and empathically experience lives in other times and cultures.

There is a price to be paid for the flight from content and from knowledge during the past generation. As they advance in school, children recognize that what they see on television is more realistic than the sanitized world of their text-

books. The numbing nihilism of the contentless curriculum produced by the puritans on the Left and Right merely feeds a popular appetite for the exciting nihilism of an uncensored and sensationalized popular culture, skillfully produced by amoral entrepreneurs who are expert at targeting the tastes of bored teenagers.

Even worse, the situation I have described leads to a growing gap between the educated haves and the poorly schooled have-nots – two nations, separate and unequal. In my view, the great goal of education is not to cultivate an elite – it is to abolish class distinctions. The path down which we now are heading will make education not the great leveler, but a great divider.

We do not know how these trends may yet affect the quality of our politics, our civic life, and our ability to communicate with each other. The consequences can’t be good. As the technologies of the entertainment industry become more sophisticated, so too will its appeals to emotion, to feelings, to our basest instincts.

When we as a nation set out to provide universal access to education, our hope was that intelligence and reason would one day prevail and make a better world, that issues would be resolved by thoughtful deliberation. Intelligence and reason, however, cannot be achieved merely by skill-building and immersion in new technologies. Intelligence and reason cannot be developed absent the judgment that is formed by prolonged and thoughtful study of history, literature, and culture, not only that of our own nation, but that of other civilizations.

That we have turned away from such studies, that we have limited them to advanced classes in secondary schools, and that they have become electives in

higher education are not encouraging. As our common culture becomes constricted, so too does the possibility for informed citizens to debate the shape of their shared future. What we risk losing is part of the common fund of knowledge needed to sustain a truly democratic society.

I do not wish to sound like a Cassandra (a word that may appear biased because it suggests a fearful female), so I will not despair. Nor do I intend to be a Pollyanna (another word that may appear gender-biased).

But I do not believe that we should accept mediocrity as our fate. As scholars, as teachers, as parents, as citizens, we must reclaim our common culture – or risk seeing it disappear.

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Howard Gardner

Contemporary consciousness & the study of the humanities

Since people began to reflect about such matters, the nature and quality of education has been of concern; probably every generation in every land feels that its educational problems and prospects are special. That said, there is little question that educational matters are at the top of national and international agendas these days, and for good reason. In a world that is changing so rapidly in so many consequential ways, it is imperative to revisit the assumptions on which our current educational system is based and to consider what revisions may be in order.

Though many Americans write about education, few do so with the authority

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of Diane Ravitch. Over the years I have read much of what she has written and have agreed with a good deal of what I've read. At the same time, I must add that I can't help noticing *which* Diane Ravitch I am reading: the provocative but careful scholar of American education (from whom I learn), or the highly polemical commentator (with whom I am often out of sympathy).

Unfortunately, the first part of Ravitch's essay emanates from the pen of Ravitch the rhetorician. Justifiably concerned with the foolish guidelines put forth by Riverside Press and (apparently) other textbook companies as well, Ravitch goes on at excessive length to lampoon these practices and to suggest that American youth will henceforth be educated by texts that lack any substance or character. My blood pressure rose, as it was meant to, but I did not feel edified by the overkill, nor was I helped to discern an alternative perspective.

I don't like these guidelines or texts either, but I can't share Ravitch's alarm. To begin with, students learn from many books other than textbooks, and often (as I have learned from my own four children) they do not read the texts at all. Second, excesses breed reactions, and I am confident that bland textbooks will generate ones that stand out for

their voice, conviction, and substance. For example, Joyce Hakim has produced a marvelous set of texts in American history that exemplify the properties that Ravitch and I admire, and, as one who has surveyed the educational literature on evolution, I have seen several biology texts that deal in a forthright way with many sensitive topics. Third and most important, whatever sanitized versions may appear in these politically correct texts are more than compensated for by the sharply chiseled picture of the United States – past and present – that appears throughout the media. While Ravitch rightly suspects history *à la* Oliver Stone, she neglects a more likely outcome: from the mosaic of Oliver Stone/Disney messages, the bland textbooks, more substantive auxiliary reading, lectures by teachers, and conversations among youths and their families, a reasonably balanced and textured view of America might well emerge. Moreover, this state of affairs may be preferable; I suspect that the day of the authoritative textbook has forever passed.

In the second part of the essay, I was relieved to encounter a more reasonable and substantive Diane Ravitch. Ravitch properly worries about how youngsters are to master history, literature, and other humanities in the United States and, as appropriate, in other parts of the world. I worry about this as well.

I note that Ravitch herself falls short of recommending specific books or topics, and thus can be accused of the same timorousness that she ascribes to the text writers. This unexpected silence comes, I think, from the fact that it *has* become risky to recommend any specific canon, even in so canonical a venue as the pages of the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

My own take on these matters comes in two parts. First off, I believe it is not

necessary for young Americans (or indeed young persons elsewhere in the world) to have read certain key texts in the humanities. Nor, except for the most obvious examples (e.g., the founding fathers, the rise of Napoleon, the abolition of slavery), do I feel that it is essential that certain topics be covered. In my view, the essential knowledge that students should acquire by the end of secondary school is an appreciation of what it means to think in a disciplined way.

Cognizant of the pun in the word “discipline,” my focus falls on what it means to think historically, scientifically, mathematically, artistically. Individuals become able to think historically when they can appreciate that history is an attempt to construct, from necessarily incomplete and sometimes contradictory materials, a coherent narrative of what happened in the past. They must understand that such narratives are necessarily imperfect and subject to change but that their creators strive to “get the story right.” Moreover, history involves real human beings with their vexed intentions, motives, and personalities, and so it differs qualitatively from both literary art, which deals with imaginary figures, and natural science, which attempts to construct models of the inorganic and organic worlds. Indeed, scientific thinking involves the creation of theories, the development of hypotheses, the collection – via observation and experimentation – of relevant data, and the reformulation of theories in light of such newly secured empirical evidence.

My purpose here is not to recapitulate the opening pages of a history or science text (Riverside or not); rather, I want to argue that such understanding is the most important achievement of a precollegiate education. Moreover, and of more consequence, I believe that such understandings can be secured from a

wide range of curricula. Recently, my home state of Massachusetts dropped world history from the state assessments in favor of U.S. history; one member of the state board of education commented that it was more important to understand Thomas Jefferson than the Ming dynasty. Perhaps so on certain criteria, but such a comparison misses the point: one can learn to think historically from either topic, but more often than not, history consists of lists of names and dates rather than the more challenging but more generative capacity to “do history” and to “think historically.”

It is important to stress that one can only learn to think historically – or scientifically or artistically – by delving deeply into specific topics. I differ from Diane Ravitch, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., and doubtless many contributors to this volume in my belief that the particular topics or courses do not matter nearly so much as the ways of thinking that are (or are not) taught in those courses. Once equipped with these ways of thinking, students can go on to master whatever content they wish; bereft of disciplined minds, they can only continue to accrue what Alfred North Whitehead called “inert knowledge.” My critique of the “standards movement” does not reflect discomfort with standards, but rather unhappiness about the excessive “content” thrust of most standards.

In writing about course content and the disciplines, I remain rather close to Diane Ravitch’s formulation of the problem, even though she would likely take issue with my proposed solution. Recently, however, I have become convinced that we need to think differently about what it means to be an educated person and how we might best tackle this challenge in the United States and perhaps elsewhere.

It’s become cliché to note, as I have, that our times are marked by incredible

changes, ones matched only by such rare events as the onset of printing (cf. the Internet) and the rise of the industrial revolution (cf. the information society). And yet our curricula still reflect the priorities of the 1893 Committee of Ten, if not the shadows of the medieval trivium and quadrivium. One major reason for our current educational problems, I submit, is the increasing disjunction between the concerns of most inhabitants of the planet and the themes and topics that those of us in the liberal arts continue to hold sacred.

About twenty years ago, with deliberate reference to C. P. Snow’s famous essay on the “two cultures,” John Brockman introduced the notion of the “third culture.” Brockman argued that the dynamism in intellectual circles has come increasingly from those individuals at the forefront of science – like Carl Sagan, Stephen Jay Gould, and E. O. Wilson – who are able to communicate the substance of their work directly to the reading public, thus bridging Snow’s two cultures.

Building on Brockman’s insight, I contend that there is a nexus of issues that today occupy the consciousness of alert individuals around the world. Many of these issues that pervade or even constitute contemporary consciousness come from the sciences – particularly biology, computer science, cognitive science, neuroscience, cosmology, and theoretical physics. Others come from the realms of business, communications and the media, and the environment – each of which has taken on a new complexion in a global society. Still others have more to do with the personal realm – questions of consciousness, meaning making, spirituality, the identity of particular persons, and of the human species, in a diverse and increasingly interdependent planet. As the September of 2001 attack on America cruelly reminded us, none of

these issues replace the older themes of society – e.g., religion and politics – or the classic themes of literature and the arts. And yet unless these contemporary issues are taken into account in the formulation of the agenda of school, formal education is likely to seem increasingly anachronistic to the most thoughtful and forward-looking members of a society.

And here, I think, lies the deep problem in Ravitch's essay. Many readers – including this one on some days – have a nostalgia for the history, literature, and arts that we encountered in school, particularly before the cataclysmic 1960s. (And some of our resentments may arise because we don't like all of the consequences of the 1960s.) Understandably, we would like our own offspring to encounter the very canonical ideas and texts that formed us as well as our own predecessors. This ideal can only be approached, however, if we engage much more fully in an examination of the issues that have, for better or worse, risen to the center of consciousness at the beginning of the twenty-first century. If the humanities deserve inclusion in the curriculum of today – as I believe that they do – proponents must demonstrate their significant, indeed indispensable, contribution to discussion and understanding of these and other current concerns.

Just how we might achieve this transformation remains a challenging ques-

tion. Certainly it would be possible to organize courses in the humanities in such a way that they are responsive to the concerns that already pervade public discourse and the mass media. I suspect, however, that a more thoroughgoing transformation is in order. In particular, I believe that courses that are determinedly interdisciplinary, that focus on problems or themes rather than on subject matter, are more likely to offer a natural place for humanistic study. (The culminating "theory of knowledge" course in the International Baccalaureate curriculum might be one harbinger of this trend; the well-known "Facing History and Ourselves," which began as a course on the Holocaust but now covers a range of social, political, cultural, and psychological themes, could be another.) As one himself committed to the mastery of specific disciplines on their own terms, I have my share of ambivalence about such interdisciplinary undertakings; they run the risk of superficiality or incoherence. And yet I know that the best interdisciplinary thinkers and courses really do provide important "value added." And if this route turns out to be the best way to achieve some of what Diane Ravitch calls for, it may be one that we will have to perfect in the decades ahead.

Theodore R. Sizer

A better way

While it was unlikely to have been her intention, Diane Ravitch's lively essay provides us with a powerful argument against centralized state and national control of the schools' curriculum.

A neat, "rigorous," and uniform American curriculum, with its accompanying assessments, is, perhaps, attractive to Ravitch and to me in the abstract – but in the particular *only* if my friends and I design and administer it. If other folks get their hands on it... well, I am not so sure, especially given the picture Ravitch paints. Under those circumstances, we had better not have detailed "national standards" from which all else would flow. We must find some other way to get American schooling up to snuff.

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Ravitch accurately portrays our children confronted by a "curriculum without content," this purveyed in a school that is an "Empire of Boredom." It all reminds me of what Charles Silberman in his warmly reviewed book *Crisis in the Classroom* had to say in 1970: "... what is mostly wrong with the public schools is due ... to mindlessness." In the summary of his massive 1970s research project on American schooling, John I. Goodlad came to comparable conclusions. "Boredom," he wrote, "is a disease of epidemic proportions." The authors of the 1985 study *The Shopping Mall High School* zeroed in: "... Americans want high school to be genuinely accessible to virtually everyone ... [but] Americans have profoundly different notions of what a proper high school education should be ... [I]n these circumstances the shopping mall is more than an apt metaphor ... " That is, an education can be pap if the people want pap, or it can be powerful if that's what they want – and the definitions of "pap" and "powerful" are subject to debate by reasonable people.

David Tyack and Larry Cuban have recently made an important, related argument: "[S]chool reform is ... a prime area for debating the shape of the future of the society." That is, the cur-

riculum, particularly if it is not pap and thereby has sharp cultural edges, is not likely to be found by the few and thereafter delivered without controversy unto the many. The curriculum as a statement of American priorities is something inevitably controversial. Ravitch's primal scream about the mess we are in is a familiar one.

Of course textbooks are a mishmash. Publishers must not only meet their budgets but also make money for their investors. Development costs for textbooks are high and profit margins are narrow, making the scale of sales crucial. In this situation, the publishers do what they can. No section of the country can be slighted or offended. Every possible matter must be explored. Comprehensiveness in point of view as well as material covered is a virtue. Compendious, mushy texts result.

Groups assigned to produce "curriculum frameworks" for a large district, a state, or the nation have the same problem. Most such committees are large and carefully chosen, with every major interest group included. The members struggle mightily and fight often: witness the battles over history and literature standards that Ravitch mentions. *Of course* they struggle, and we should be thankful that they do. The ideas that are to envelop America's children are important. Ravitch accurately sums up: "Any effort to prescribe content will provoke controversy." If that is the case, which of us has the right in this sturdy democracy to say "this will be the curriculum and the rest of you must go along with it"?

Neither textbook publishers nor those developing "curriculum frameworks" are subject to the discipline that every teacher faces in a classroom, "discipline" in the sense of doing what is necessary for *this* group of students to meet

this standard in a manner that displays not only these particular kids' grasp of the "facts" but their ability to apply them in both familiar and unfamiliar situations. Sweeping requirements are easy to list, and making the usually necessary choices among them is painful. Most committees stress the former and do whatever is necessary to avoid the latter. They do not have to live with their decisions.

Further, no two classrooms are ever quite alike. The largely Caucasian kids in my exurban public school are neither "better" nor "worse" scholars than the dozens of new Cambodian Americans in a nearby city. Should the history and literature offering and the method and pace of its presentation be precisely the same for all? I think not. However, how to respond to the differences is, again, a controversial matter. Abstract direction is easy. Dealing with the reality is something far more difficult. People who have never lived for a typical school year as an on-the-line teacher in a typical American high school are likely to oversimplify the work that must be done. Promulgated directives from afar are therefore highly likely to be simplistic and off the mark.

Finally, in reality it all comes down to the teachers. However brilliant the "curriculum frameworks" and however scholarly the textbooks, what the teachers do with them is most of the game. Ravitch surely would agree.

What, then, does it take to attract and hold the kinds of able people from whom we want our children to learn? Respect. A fair wage. Appropriate conditions of work. Authority.

The latter is crucial, as strong people do not take jobs that fail to entrust them with important things. The more that detailed decisions about my work as a teacher (or principal) are made by folk

far from my situation, the less attractive that situation is to me. Treat me like a mere distributor of what you think my kids need and in the standardized manner that you deem necessary, and I will avoid your profession. I know my teaching task is far more sophisticated and necessarily more nuanced than that. You cheapen my profession by oversimplifying it. In other words, unrestrained top-down direction, however necessary it appears in the short run, is a recipe for mediocrity or worse in the long run.

Ravitch suggests – again perhaps without intending to – a remedy for these problems in her mention of the success of private schools and of the Advanced Placement program of the College Board. Those schools and that program are matters of choice – in practice, primarily parental choice. If the schools fail, they lose customers. If an AP program is sloppy, schools do not recommend it and students are not subjected to it. A “market” is introduced. Decisions are kept at an immediate level, in an arena that is of human scale.

However, what about “standards”? Indeed. But reasonable people disagree over standards; these matters, as Ravitch wisely reminds us, are controversial. It is more than likely that there can be all sorts of respectable representations of “rigorous standards” in most areas beyond the obvious rudiments. There is no One Best Way.

If there is no One Best Way, how can we compare schools? We can’t, at least not precisely. Students’ ultimate habits of mind and grasp of serious subject matter do not lend themselves to precise assessment and authentic ranking. There is no magic metric of serious learning. Scholarship, happily, is more complicated than that. That complication should not make us shy away from judgments. It should, however, push us to make those judgments with caution and restraint.

And so, are we thus left with the mindless policy of letting all those flowers – and weeds – bloom?

No, absolutely not. If we do shy away from making any judgments, then many schools and school districts, especially those whose parent constituencies are not organized enough to insist on rigorous work, will cease to have reasonable “standards,” save the visible routines of school attendance. The children will effectively be warehoused, not energetically taught. The historical record is sadly clear on that point.

So, what then? Again, the remedy is visible in what Ravitch suggests with private schools and Advanced Placement programs. Private schools are actually the least of it. Choice is the most of it, and wealthier citizens exercise that choice by selecting residence in communities that have reputations for “strong schools.” Are those reputations always deserved? No, largely because their evaluation is heavily the result of gossip. However, regular state inspection (such as that crafted in Massachusetts for that state’s Charter schools and for all public schools in Rhode Island under its School Accountability for Learning and Teaching program) does provide a fair balance between local authority and state-level accountability. Are “choice with inspection” programs without flaws? No. They just have fewer flaws than top-down detailed direction and standardized testing of that which has been directed.

What about that “boredom” of which Ravitch writes? It is unlikely to be primarily, much less exclusively, a “curriculum” problem, especially one that can be remedied at a level of government far from classrooms. Rather, it is a problem with teaching; its antithesis is also teaching’s joy. The teacher’s wonderfully demanding trick is to catch each student’s attention with something of powerful intellectual or artistic merit, and to

hold it. The problem in most high schools (revealingly, less likely in private schools and the Advanced Placement courses of public schools) is that each teacher is assigned too many students to allow him or her to “catch” each youngster in a caring and thoughtful way.

Serious reform will have to start with each school itself. A first priority must be to ensure the conditions necessary to attract and hold the best and the brightest teachers. Everything else pales in importance. A legion of good teachers would not stand for the hollowness that Ravitch describes. While fiddling with texts and scripted curricula cannot necessarily hurt, such reform will not solve the problem Ravitch illuminates – and may indeed make matters worse.

Citations from sources other than the preceding essay by Diane Ravitch: Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education* (New York: Random House, 1970); John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School: Prospects Toward the Future* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School: Winners and Losers in the Educational Marketplace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985); and David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

Not to worry?

All strength – all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form –
Jehovah – with his thunder, and the choir
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal
 thrones –
I pass them unalarmed.

– Wordsworth

Equipped with an unparalleled knowledge of American public education, Diane Ravitch offers telling illustrations of the ways in which American schools are perpetuating cultural fragmentation and a skills gap between rich and poor.

One can plausibly disagree with some of her conclusions. Theodore Sizer rea-

sonably questions whether textbook publishers should be assigned so much blame for the appalling mediocrity of textbooks, given the exactingly complex rules for state textbook adoption. He and Howard Gardner are legitimately skeptical about what I take to be an implication of Ravitch's essay – that schools across the nation should require students to read a common core of specific literary works. It would be nice if everybody knew *Hamlet* and *Huckleberry Finn*, but in practice it's much harder to gain principled agreement on an arbitrary list of literary works than on specific knowledge in history, science, math, and civics.

These are quibbles compared to the importance of the problems Ravitch has identified. A basic goal of public education in a democracy is to integrate future citizens into a national community of discourse based on common reference points and a common language, and, in a general sense, common loyalties and values. Another basic aim of democratic schooling is to form an autonomous citizenry capable of ruling itself. And most democracies, including our own, attempt to narrow the education gap between rich and poor, so that a person's life chances will be determined more by character and talent than by who one's parents happen to be. Diane Ravitch is

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alarmed that our public education is very far from meeting these basic democratic goals, partly because it cannot make up its mind about the specifics of a curriculum. I think she is right to be alarmed.

TheodoreSizer seems less alarmed. He appears to be just as concerned about Ravitch's proposed solution – instituting some degree of commonality in the school curriculum – as he is with the current shortcomings of American schooling. Yet his proposed solution to those shortcomings – attracting better teachers and letting them and their schools determine curriculum – is not a very concrete proposal, and appears to have its own practical and logical difficulties. Of course Sizer is right that having better teachers will improve teaching and learning. That sounds suspiciously like a tautology. Unfortunately, an incoherent school system such as the one we have, and such as the one Sizer continues to advocate, grinds down good teachers by its very incoherence. If there is little commonality in what students learn at a grade level, then the teacher of each successive grade faces the ever-mounting and finally impossible task of accommodating students with different levels of preparation for the new lessons to be learned.

This characteristic American difficulty, caused by curricular incoherence, is exacerbated by the swarm of students who move from school to school even within the year. In our major cities, the within-year mobility rate of students (usually the neediest students) is around 30 percent. Over time, the percentage of students who have moved more than once in grade school increases to more than 50 percent. Unless we ignore the resulting educational incoherence for this group, caused by lack of commonality in the curriculum, we must not take

the individual, local school as the unit for making educational policy, as Sizer wishes to do. Since most mobility occurs within a district, what Sizer says about the local school should be expanded at least to the local district, in which case, in order to achieve a minimum of commonality across the district, he would need to make some specific curricular decisions.

Everyone agrees that results count, yet Sizer does not want to apply a common measure for school results. He advocates “regular state inspection,” but is silent about how inspectors could reliably or fairly evaluate schools without standards of judgment based on common criteria that would not vary wildly from inspector to inspector. And I don't grasp how there could be common standards for inspectors without basing them on common standards for student outcomes. Commonality is not uniformity. Ravitch would hardly disagree with Sizer that there are many acceptable ways for schools and students to meet academic standards, once we know with some definiteness what they are.

The need for a degree of curricular commonality is so elemental and logical as to be self-evident. It has been recognized by most of the liberal democracies, including now even Great Britain. Yet this elemental logic is resisted by American experts like Sizer and Gardner, despite the current shortcomings of our public education, and despite the evident fact that their proposals would perpetuate this lack of curricular commonality without compensating for its mind-wasting unfairness. Given the popularity of their views in the education world, more than mere logic is needed to persuade parents and schools to move toward greater commonality.

Recently I have felt that what is needed to moderate the anticcommonality at-

titude is an understanding of the very American emotion behind it. It is a quasireligious emotion that values diversity above commonality (“one law for lion and ox is oppression” said Blake the romantic) and that has faith in the self-adjusting power of natural processes, including educational processes, when they are left alone. Thus, when Ravitch is alarmed by the poor quality of textbooks, Gardner says that “he can’t share Ravitch’s alarm.” Why not? Because, he says, “excesses breed reactions, and I am confident that bland textbooks will generate ones that stand out.”

Blake said it memorably: “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.” But why was Blake (and now Gardner) so confident that excess would lead to a beneficent result rather than merely more excess? M. H. Abrams, the expert on romanticism, had a phrase for this quasireligious faith in the beneficence of processes when left alone: he called it “natural supernaturalism.” In essence, it is a secular version of the belief in a providential divinity. First it was “God will provide.” Then it was “Nature will

provide,” and now it’s “A free society will provide.” That pattern of thought is everywhere in our culture, in free-market romanticism, in free-culture romanticism, and, emphatically, in educational romanticism. The hallmark of such thinking is an Olympian unwillingness to interfere with the untrammelled process, because to do so would artificially interfere with that which, if left alone, would lead to the palace of wisdom.

This romanticism underlying so much American educational thought would be merely a curiosity of American intellectual history were it not for the practical fact that these ideas are not just empirically wrong but also pernicious in their social and economic effects. The only way in which a complacent educational romanticism could be justified would be if it viewed antiromantic activists like Diane Ravitch as part of the benign, self-correcting process in which it places such unwarranted faith. After all, an intellectually consistent romantic would not write in opposition to Diane Ravitch but would allow the providential process to unfold by getting out of her way.

Joyce Appleby

An intractable debate

Education invariably provokes controversy. The philosophical implications of education, together with its complex impact on society, prevent any easy agreement about how we should appraise current practices. Just consider that each baby is a bundle of potentials, which education will nurture or inhibit. Or that every society depends upon education to carry its cultural traditions over the chasm between generations. The effort to answer fundamental questions about education easily becomes a substitute for debating fundamental assumptions about human nature and our collective goals.

Diane Ravitch's arresting critique of education after the culture wars and the thoughtful replies from Howard Gard-

ner and TheodoreSizer amply confirm this conundrum. All three authors infuse their observations and anecdotes with personal values and convictions.

Some of Ravitch's recommendations seem so sound, one yearns to get all the disputants in the same room to hear the arguments against them. The political correctness that she remarks upon operates differently – actually at cross purposes – depending on the subject. In history instruction, the old political narrative has been enriched by including research on women, laborers, immigrants, and slaves. If students now deal with this sobering factual material in history classes, what is the basis for banning literary works that even more powerfully evoke the prejudices influencing past events?

And then there are the controversies that swirl around methods of inquiry. In most discussions on curriculum, fostering critical thinking will always trump teaching content, but we can only think critically about actual subjects. And the more we know, the more likely it is that we will be able to think critically about a topic. Separating knowledge and analysis is like splitting the front and back of a piece of paper.

Ravitch's essay oscillates around several debatable – in the best sense of the

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word – contentions: that the diminishing importance of history and literature in our schools represents a new round of American anti-intellectualism; that political correctness operating through bold censors and timid textbook publishers has eviscerated the literary material taught in the schools; and, finally, that without a culture based on shared literature and history, it will be difficult to forge common purposes across lines of race, religion, ethnicity, and social class.

All of these are interesting hypotheses, but they surely are no more than that. To speak of the diminished importance of history and literature, the evisceration of literary material, and the disintegration of a national culture presumes a benchmark from which this decline has taken place. Yet “the world we have lost” – the one where young people’s study of significant historical events and famous literary works formed a core culture – exists more as an ideal than a verifiable reality.

Ravitch begs the question when she asserts that the abandonment of literature because of its offensive references robs students of the common reading needed to nurture shared national purposes. Do history and literature in fact function as a peculiarly effective cultural tie? Will civil society be weaker in the future because schoolchildren learn different things in the classroom? This contention has a rhetorical punch, but it seems dubious as a factual proposition.

Popular culture furnishes a vibrant set of common images and narratives for Americans of all ages. Is it really important – speaking strictly of national cohesion – that our collective memories cluster around *Alice in Wonderland* rather than *Law and Order*? From art films to televised sports, the much-abused mass media furnish ample material for creat-

ing enough social norms and political understandings to bind us.

If it is the sharing that is critical, experiencing events together constantly produces food for civic thought. First there is the commentary in newspapers, radio, and television, and then events kick up issues that in turn trigger endless discussions in the interpretive communities we all belong to. Indignation and shock, surprise and delight pull out the passions to animate thoughtful discussions across the land.

The problem with sorting out proposed educational reforms is that the nostrums, strictures, and recommendations too often reflect personal dispositions more than disinterested analysis.

Conservatives are impressed by the waywardness of human beings. For them, people learn in the school of hard knocks. They like tests because failing tests is an instructive hard knock for schools and students. Liberals tend to have a rosier view of human nature. In the nurturing hands of an inspired teacher, they see students opening up like a rose under a spring sun. In the best of all schoolroom settings, according to the liberal view, curiosity overcomes resistance to the hard work of mastering a subject. And, of course, both groups are partially correct.

Since in talk of education anecdote is king, I’ll draw on my experience reviewing American history texts to support my objections to tests and the standardization they serve. I read *ad seriatum* manuscripts designed for fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades for one of the nation’s major textbook publishers. Through this review, I discovered – to my alarmed astonishment – that they all followed the same narrative. Only the vocabulary changed as the intended audience of ten-year-olds, thirteen-year-olds, or six-

teen-year-olds traipsed through the Pennsylvania woods with General Braddock headed for defeat at the Monongahela or followed the congressional horse-trading that led to the Missouri Compromise. When I asked about this dreadful redundancy, I was told that this was what state boards of education demanded.

How much more rewarding it would be to engage fifth-graders with historical biographies that gave them some hint of the fascinatingly different lives lived in the past. Eighth-graders might take on local history projects, learning research techniques and simultaneously investing their familiar surroundings with the mystery of the past. Then eleventh-graders, on the brink of their own citizenship, could learn the national narrative when it might be particularly meaningful. The political clout behind teaching schoolchildren the national history of their country would prevent adoption of such a program.

Of course, I've just added to the plethora of recommendations for reform. I've also provided a good example of what

political scientists call expressive politics. In expressive politics, people prefer to give vent to their opinions instead of rolling up their sleeves to work for change.

Education has become a fertile matrix for expressive politics because there's no consensus on what either is being, or should be, done. Even if there were consensus, no political will exists to raise the money that real reform would take. Physical plants are deteriorating, salaries turn the choice of a teaching career into a humanitarian gesture, and state educational codes wrap the classroom in red tape. Who's going to take on all this?

So we are left to treat education like the weather, something we can't do much about but love to discuss. With or without "education presidents," it's doubtful that much will be done to address the real needs of our school systems. In the meantime, there will be enough experiments and breakthroughs to keep hope alive. We should not, as Diane Ravitch insists, "accept mediocrity as our fate." That should go for our debates about education as well.

Catharine R. Stimpson

The culture wars continue

The culture wars that began in the 1960s in the United States have been fought over four great, linked issues: the nature of the United States and its role in the world; race and racial discrimination; gender and gender discrimination; and sexual norms. Although the intensity each issue provokes has fluctuated over four decades, none has been resolved. The United States is no more beyond the culture wars than it is beyond tornadoes and hurricanes. Unable to put such phenomena behind us, we instead march and stagger in changing ranks from storm system to storm system. An obvious example: the struggle over the nature of the United States and its role in the world is still passionate, but it is now less over Vietnam than over the memory of Vietnam and its historical narratives,

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“globalization,” and, after September 11, the complex relations of the United States to terrorism.

The diversity of American higher education – nearly four thousand institutions, each with its own history, “mission,” sources of revenue, and systems of accountability – makes many generalizations about it suspect. One is safe: higher education has been prominent in the culture wars, at once a source of dissent and experimentation, a strategic target, and a provider of warriors for the Right, Left, and center. Higher education has mattered because it maintains and produces masses of intellectual capital and because it recruits and trains human capital, including a national and international elite.

Haunting the culture wars has been the question of the next elite generation. Who will belong to it and what will be their political and cultural leanings? How will they think and behave? How will they define American values? And, some ask, will they be able to define values at all if they carry the virus of anti-foundationalism, antiessentialism, or, more colloquially, relativism?

Diane Ravitch's work usually pays much more attention to primary and secondary education than to higher education. So does her *Dædalus* essay. However, passages poke and prod at colleges,

universities, and their ancillary institutions.

Like nearly all of her work, this essay has a sharp eye for human failure and folly, especially when we fail to make the necessary effort to combine political democracy with a rigorous liberal learning for all students. Because of her sturdy intellectual independence and integrity, Ravitch exempts no sect, ideology, or school from failure and folly. Here she lumps together “feminists,” “multiculturalists,” and “the religious Right” as censors of educational publishing. As a feminist and a multiculturalist, I was unhappy to be stereotyped – but briefly consoled myself with the implausible fantasy of talking to Phyllis Schlafly about forging a collaboration to get intellectual repression on a roll again.

Far more seriously, and for a much longer period of time, I have applauded Ravitch’s lucidity, her courage, and the consistency of her deeply felt advocacy of democracy and liberal learning.

Ravitch’s current explicit and implicit charge against higher education is that it has aided the decay of the noble American search for common purposes into a narcissistic search for the lowest common denominator. Refusing to redeem the failures of primary and secondary education, higher education does not carefully teach American history and literature. The Scholastic Aptitude Tests on which higher education depends as a gatekeeping system are equally indifferent to requiring knowledge of these subjects. To add to the slack mess, the professional organizations to which higher education faculty belong have permitted educational publishers to market “predigested pap” and pabulum. Embedded in these reproaches is the assumption that teaching history and great literature will create national cohesion, democratic order, and some ability to understand The Other.

Ardently patriotic, Ravitch longs for the viability of these values in America. Given her concern for America, Ravitch cannot seem to imagine in her essay what some faculty are seeking to build: a curriculum for students whose complex sense of citizenship may simultaneously include loyalty to a place of origin, the American nation-state, a faith, and a global society that connects its citizens economically and electronically.

Perhaps because higher education is not Ravitch’s principal concern, her charge is not explored. Yet it may enable more conservative cultural warriors to pop her piece as an intellectual vitamin supplement. To be sure, the meaning of being “conservative” or “progressive” in the culture wars in higher education has blurred over time. Perhaps most obviously, the importance of institutional and intellectual diversity, which progressives have championed, is a far more common value than it was. As Ravitch writes, “the ranks of great authors . . . [have grown] to include women and people of color. . . .”

The growth of more inclusive policies and practices has not extinguished the flashpoints of the cultural wars. The most ignitable institutional issue is the use of affirmative action to increase diversity in higher and professional education and consequently among the professional classes. Future Supreme Court rulings may bring different legal parameters to the use of affirmative action, but no Supreme Court ruling can wholly erase the tensions about race and gender that made affirmative action necessary in the first place. The curricular flashpoints are, if possible, even more volatile. They concern both what should be taught and how it should be taught, the epistemological and pedagogical principles that govern, no matter how sloppily or unconsciously, one’s research and classroom activity.

Let me return to the Ravitch sentence I partially quoted above and give it fully. “Can we, even as the ranks of great authors grow to include women and people of color, simply abandon those earlier writers whose works inspired them?”

Why might this sentence represent a flashpoint? I would argue as fiercely as any that some authors and narratives *are* greater than others. Compelling both within and across cultures, they open themselves to multiple rereadings and reinterpretations. Far more problematically for some groups in the culture wars, the sentence establishes two different categories: women and people of color. Doing this linguistically eliminates the possibility that women might be people of color and that people of color might be women. Doing *that* keeps us from thinking about identities, be they personal or cultural, as complex, multiple, hybrid, often internally conflictual. Recently, Amartya Sen has used such a construction of identity to argue against an influential theory, born in the academy, of the contemporary world as a clash of cultures, a struggle of civilizations. As problematically, Ravitch’s sentence ignores the human contests – such as the culture wars themselves – that define greatness. Here “ranks of great authors grow” as if they had an organic, autonomous life of their own.

Two recent pieces show that flashpoints are still combustible. One is a succinct defense of the conservative position by Donald Kagan, a professor of classics and history at Yale, entitled “What is a Liberal Education?” At points overlapping with Ravitch’s essay, it diagnoses contemporary liberal education as incapable of the search for “general, universal knowledge and for the philosophical principles on which it may be based.” As a result, the curriculum is “individualized, unfocused, scattered, and ill-defined.” Most egregiously, high-

er education has placed both culture and politics in danger because it has failed “to enhance the students’ understanding of their status as free citizens of a free society and the responsibilities it entails.”

Unlike Ravitch, Kagan refuses to praise the fact that since the 1960s higher education has admitted many more citizens and made their lives part of the curriculum. However, like Ravitch, Kagan believes that this putative cultural vacuum will leave students hostage to “the informal but potent education of . . . the communications media.”

Unfortunately, not only does this jeremiad underestimate students’ savvy about the media, but conceptually it denies both the historic links between popular culture and high culture and the differences within the modern media. Big Bird is not Britney Spears in feathers. Nor is every website porno.

Like Ravitch, Kagan has a solution, a common program of studies in the arts, mathematics, and sciences that would “provide our children with an education shaped by the purpose of creating citizens of a free society who will love liberty, but who will understand the discipline and sacrifice needed to preserve it, and who will be eager to do so.” These well-shaped children, I might add, resemble many of the students at NYU, my very contemporary urban university, as they digested the events of September 11, 2001.

Another recent piece is a more balanced analysis of post – World War II higher education by Louis Menand, a Distinguished Professor at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, entitled “College: The End of the Golden Age.” I largely agree with Menand’s tracing of what institutional and intellectual shifts have happened and why they have been controversial, although his essay underestimates how

politicized some professional organizations and academic programs have become. He describes a system that first grew wildly, stimulated in part by government spending on science and foreign languages, and then diversified widely. As it diversified, the academic disciplines transformed themselves. They became more interested in, inter alia, multiculturalism and “a Deweyite conception of teaching as a collaborative process of learning and inquiry.” Intellectually, talk of “disinterestedness” pervasively (although not exclusively) gave way to “talk about ‘interpretations’ . . . ‘perspective’ . . . and ‘understanding’ An emphasis on universalism and ‘greatness’ has been replaced by an emphasis on diversity and difference . . . ‘context’ and ‘contingency’” And, as Menand knows, literary studies have become cultural studies in many places. Tellingly, the January 2002 issue of *PMLA*, the publication of the Modern Language Association, over which I once presided, is devoted to a special topic, “Mobile Citizens, Media States.”

The flashpoints of the culture wars are now a familiar part of the landscape of higher education. Intrinsicly, this is not a problem. The familiar – a carton of milk, the keys to an old car, a lover’s smile – can be fundamental to our survival. The danger is that we will be at once so comfortable with the familiar and yet so blinded by the explosive light of the flashpoints that we will be unable to weigh the gravity of other issues that haunt higher education.

For example, we still need to work to reclaim historically complex, difficult, and inevitably controversial philosophical and political questions from the polemics of the culture wars. The nature of reality, the patterns of history, the construction of the conscious subject, the requirements of loyalty and patriotism – these are the kinds of topics that

the culture wars have often oversimplified and consequently debased.

Perhaps more serious is the uneven quality of the support for intellectually powerful, socially valuable, dignified systems of mass higher education. One reason why the treatment of the City University of New York is significant is that it is a measuring stick of the depth of the commitment to mass higher education. As Menand and others show, since 1945 the United States has alternately raced and limped toward providing higher education for any reasonably promising student who might want it. If a higher education degree was not an immediate passport into the elite, it was at least a passport to greater economic opportunity and social status. Higher education, however, like most social goods including primary and secondary education, costs money if it is to be done well. Unfortunately, in some institutions, doing well has meant the construction not only of labs and libraries and technological support but of cushy recreational and leisure facilities.

Government grants, industry monies, philanthropy, and tuition may fall short of paying for necessities. One of the strange features of being an administrator in higher education today is that one wakes up nearly every morning to budgetary challenges. How much will the start-up costs be for that promising young chemistry professor? Or for the labs for the general education science requirement? Simultaneously, from the Left and left-of-center come accusations that the university is selling out, becoming a corporation, and getting fat, rich, happy, and indifferent to faculty rights. It is dangerously possible that the promise of good, mass higher education – well appointed for some but more or less accessible for all – will crumble.

Its successor may be a four-tiered system: handsome, residential higher edu-

cation for the elite, with programs of financial aid for less affluent students who are selected to be brought into the elite; mass-produced, on-site higher education for many, often in proprietary institutions; e-education for students who are taught electronically, whose student center will be a chatroom; and finally, a hybrid of mass-produced on-site and electronic classes.

Because such a four-tiered system is still in the future, I can only prophesy its appearance. What is here is the drastic marginalization of the humanities and of the liberal arts within higher education.

The culture wars have been over a battlefield that has been shrinking for reasons that have little to do with the ways of teaching American history or literature since the 1960s and a lot to do with the perceived utility of a college education. The number of degrees in the liberal arts has been declining for a century. The biggest undergraduate major is business, which awards 20 percent of all bachelor's degree. Education gives out 10 percent. The only liberal arts that are growing are psychology and the biological sciences.

The humanities threaten to become a "skeuomorph," a term "anthropologists use for a device that once had a functional purpose but in a successor artifact loses its functionality and is retained as a design motif or decorative element." An example: an electric light in the shape of a candle.¹ As the study of Plato or Pater drifts toward the status of skeuomorphs, the humanists in the culture wars may prove Oscar Wilde's dictum that each man kills (or skews) the thing he loves.

The marginalization of the liberal arts is culturally self-destructive. On this the various combatants in the culture wars can agree. The great question is how to

demonstrate the cultural importance of a liberal education. One traditional way is to stress the importance of knowing foreign languages and cultures. September 11 taught and retaught us many things, among them the bad consequences of an education in foreign languages that does little more than to prepare patriotic Americans for being more competent tourists. The call for more and better language training has made many throats hoarse.

What is newer, but equally urgent to address, are ongoing changes in our understanding of what it means to "be human." The meaning of being human has been at the heart of the ethical inquiries of the liberal education. In the last forty years, combatants in the culture wars have frequently fought over the significance of race, gender, and nationality in our constructions of the meaning of being human. Today, religion ought to be joining race, gender, and nationality as a subject of inquiry. American institutions must become more aware of their neglect of religion in general and Islam in particular. Nor, I believe, have they become sufficiently conscious of the global renewal of a vicious anti-Semitism.

Another source of change is the irrevocable influence of contemporary science and technology on the meanings of being human – the evolving consequences of the discoveries of genetics and cognitive studies, the implications of the new reproductive technologies, the effects of mobility and electronic communities. The Cartesian formula, "I think, there I am," has long been questioned, but higher education must become a place in which students may ponder a different kind of formula: "My computer thinks, therefore I am."

Higher education must help to decide if this will be a flashpoint or a profound illumination.

1 N. Katherine Hayles, "The Complexities of Seriation," *PMLA* 117 (1) (January 2002): 119.

Deborah Meier

A view from the schoolhouse

Elementary education has become . . . a sort of vaudeville show. The child must be kept amused and learns what he pleases. Many teachers scorn the old-fashioned rudiments; and it seems to be regarded as a misfortune to read and spell.

– *New York Sun* editorial, October 5, 1902

During the past forty or fifty years those who are responsible for education have progressively removed from the curriculum . . . the western culture which produced the modern democratic state.

– Walter Lippmann, addressing the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1940.

These quotes appear in Richard Rothstein's Twentieth Century Fund report on student achievement in the United States, *The Way We Were?* Rothstein's book should be required reading before

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any of us take to print on the current shortcomings of our schools. Life is always more complicated than the school war critics on both sides (actually there are far more than two sides) make out. The closer one gets to the schools, the more complicated it is even to sort out the sides. Ravitch presents a picture of our school crisis that often misses the nuances and complexities of the real situation.

My disagreements with Ravitch's argument may result from our different perspectives. It may be that the closer that one gets to a classroom, the less credible some of her explanations and solutions to our troubles appear.

The stories she tells – about how our textbooks and our curriculum have been systematically dumbed down – may lead one to forget about what actually happens in classrooms, not to mention in children's minds. That's the central problem with her argument: What goes on in kid's minds is much less related to textbooks and official curriculums than policymakers suppose. Even when they are well served by the schools they attend, children get their education from sources far more influential than textbooks: television shows, video games, the Internet, peers, popular songs, movies (the list goes on). In fact, the story of America and our common culture are

only tangentially in the hands of school people.

The official curriculum is mostly just a series of institutional hurdles for kids. Getting better textbooks, designing tests to prove they have read these books, making sure that teachers have a greater store of inert knowledge, having a more tightly organized curriculum, paying teachers by test results, holding more kids over in grade: these are all familiar remedies. They've been in and out of favor over the years.

The current hope among reformers like Ravitch seems to be that the weight of the modern state, aided by modern technology, will accomplish what these "old-fashioned" methods have failed to accomplish in the past: to get all the ornery parts of the real world – from kindergarten to the workplace – to line up, or else. ("Alignment," in fact, is the current "in" word among educators.)

Ravitch and I agree that American educators, whether so-called progressive or traditionalists, have rarely taken intellectual life seriously. But what she misses is that they have taken "academics" all too seriously. Unfortunately, the 'academic' exercises favored in the schools have been largely unrelated to the life of the mind. It's no accident that the expression "It's academic" means boring or "beside the point." There's the shame.

It is not 'academics' we desperately need to devote more time to – it is rather engaging the attention of young people in matters of real importance. That's the missing link. That entails our paying closer attention to how children actually engage with the world – to what they see and do when we're not looking. Neither better textbooks nor a better curriculum suffice. We need a different kind of school in which adults are more, not less, powerful in the lives of kids.

Our problem is not the absence of a common culture, but our uneasiness with the common culture that exists. This popular culture has a tenacious grip on most kids, parents, and even us teachers. It happens to be a culture that I am often at odds with. But if I wish to moderate its influence on our children, I know I must first acknowledge it, then take it on critically, and finally offer compelling alternatives.

This doesn't mean aping Walt Disney, nor does it mean trying to compete with even the best of popular culture. On the contrary, it means taking seriously the one advantage offered by school settings: they are made up of real live people. Unlike the mass media, schools could be communities of adults who know their kids personally, with all their curious ideas. They could be places where kids might have intelligent interactions with adults whose ideas and life experiences they might wish to emulate.

Like Ravitch, I think we ought to introduce all kids to a culture that is currently quite *uncommon*. Doing this means changing the implicit culture of schools, the ways ideas are imparted (and largely devalued) in our classrooms. It means changing the way adults interact with kids, independently of textbooks and tests.

Ravitch hopes that if states list exactly which events, authors, titles, and historical dates students should "compare and contrast," the result will be improved intellectual competence. However, a prestigious regional education laboratory (MCREL) recently noted that if one took seriously the current specifics listed in state frameworks, students would need to spend an additional nine years in school just to cover the material listed – never mind remembering any of it, much less understanding it!

Getting to the bottom of things requires close and respectful relationships between novices and experts, as together they confront challenging subjects and ideas. Then, and only then, do texts matter, and real trade books are often a better vehicle than books written for captive student audiences.

Current textbooks are indeed bland, but not more so than a century ago, when no one worried about the absence in these texts of strong females, or people of color, or non-Christians. In the past, it's well to remember, very few children learned very much, few made it through grade school, and fewer still through high school. In the process, vast numbers of students were made to feel stupid – and resented it. (Perhaps anti-intellectualism was in part their form of revenge.)

The old ethnocentric curriculum was not one whit more serious or thoughtful than the multicultural curriculum often favored today – and ever so much more insulting to millions of Americans, thanks to its casual sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism.

It's not multiculturalism that has hurt our schools, but business as usual: both the relentless dumbing-down of all meaty and controversial ideas, and the absence of strong adult communities that respond to kids personally. Increased centralization of decision-making about what goes on inside schools is not likely to lead to livelier classrooms or more powerful adult communities.

Some people apparently imagine they can remake the next generation only by removing the bad influence of the current crop of adults – both parents and teachers. Such ideas flourish both on the Right and Left. Both the Right and the Left imagine solutions that bypass the dumb teachers, through “smart” lessons plans designed by right-minded experts,

with close monitoring and penalties for deviation. The weapon of choice: high-stakes testing.

The trouble is that intellectual life depends, as Ravitch well knows, on persuasion, not mandated truth – on conveying a range of ideas, not one putatively best idea.

Knowledge and skill are passed on, in the end, by the communities of people that matter to us as learners, not by the textbooks whose pages we turn in order to prepare for tests. Building such communities, ones that “matter” to kids, is the tough work.

There is no shortcut. The fastest route involves supporting, nudging, provoking, persuading – in short, educating – the adults who must remain in control of our school systems. It means doing whatever it takes to increase the odds in favor of strong, interesting schools where adult ideas are taken seriously, and where pop commercialism can be challenged while a deeper appreciation of the world is fostered.

If we want to produce a culture that isn't dominated by commercialism, as Ravitch and I both do, we need schools that enlist the energies of both adults and kids in a common effort to make sense of things. We need to start with school communities where adults, in the presence of their students, defend their views and develop their ideas. They need to accept responsibility for doing what they believe is in the best interests of the youngsters they know well, not cede their authority in the name of standards imposed by centralized authorities.

We need to provide school people, and families with the time – ah, time – to tackle tough questions. Young people have to believe we're serious about the value of knowledge, human reasoning, good arguments, weighing evidence, and negotiating compromises. They have to

believe that we, rather than some distant authority, adhere to high standards – and practice what we preach.

The kids need to be in the presence of thoughtful, informed teachers – not functionaries reading scripts designed in central offices in order to produce results on mindless tests scored by machines.

Our far-from-perfect democracy has never depended, for better or worse, on our citizenry's knowledge or appreciation of great literature or history. The United States has nevertheless had a rare run at democratic government and culture. This suggests we have time on our side – which democratic solutions always require: the time needed to gradually rebuild schools on a human-scale, schools that respect our historic genius for diversity, skepticism, openness, and hands-on ingenuity, staffed by teachers

who look upon sweeping predictions of civilizational crises with just a wee bit of humor.

If the gaps in resources between the rich and the poor continue to grow ever wider, it's hard to see how schools alone can close the achievement gap. In fact, it is amazing how well we have done in getting so many poor kids through high schools at a time when, as a country, we are irrationally focused on celebrating fame and fortune for the few. Still, more can be done, provided we focus our energy on what really matters.

If Ravitch wants to make a quick difference, she should try perhaps to influence the script writers for Walt Disney, not the bureaucrats who write the lesson plans for Chicago's Board of Education. The latter is a waste of precious time.

Patricia Albjerg Graham

Class notes

In the spring of 1958, my high school principal, Rufus Tonelson, assigned me, a twenty-two-year-old teacher with a master's degree and one year of prior teaching experience, five sophomore English classes: the top one, three middle ones, and the bottom one. The school where I was teaching, Maury High, was an all-white downtown city school in the then racially segregated Norfolk, Virginia, that believed in grouping its students by their perceived ability. The powers-that-were had assigned all sophomores to twenty-one different English classes. The idea was that it would be easier to teach children of similar ability or achievement – and if the kids were easier to teach, then perhaps they would learn more.

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Fairness dictated that the teacher who got the most able class would also get the least able class, plus three in the middle. Little concern was given to whether the best teacher for the best students would also be the best teacher for the worst students; meanwhile, the majority of the students in the middle sections were expected to muddle through on their own, if need be.

Not surprisingly, the best students were a joy to teach. They were lively youngsters, representing some of Norfolk's most prestigious old families, some Navy families, and others. The hour with them went swiftly, consumed with active participation in the discussion of works read in common, as well as those read separately. Monday through Thursday, I had everyone start the class by writing a paragraph. On Friday, I asked students to revise their best paragraph, and to turn it in, along with the other paragraphs written during the week. On the whole the revised paragraphs were interesting, intelligent, and grammatical. The highlight of the term was a classroom discussion of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, a discussion that included sophisticated literary observations and also historical references, both to the French Revolution and to an English author's perspective on it.

Although I was fond of these smart students, what I remember most vividly is my experience with the least able students. The class mainly consisted of sons of postwar immigrant parents with little formal education. Most of them could not read. Most were a year or two older than the other sophomores. Some were even past the legal age – sixteen – when a young person could leave school, if he chose. The most remarkable thing was how many of these older boys had chosen to remain in school, though satisfactory completion of academic work that required reading was obviously difficult for them. They knew that they were in the bottom section, and many began the term by avoiding all academic endeavors, preferring to disrupt the class, an activity at which they had great skill.

What to do with this challenging class? Since Maury High had what today would be called a “standards” curriculum, even the least able students were expected to master *A Tale of Two Cities*. Inexperienced and young though I was, I could not imagine asking these boys to read Dickens. My efforts to have them write paragraphs were also unsuccessful.

Seeking some alternative, I discovered that the school possessed a supplementary reading curriculum developed by Science Research Associates (SRA) in Chicago. The SRA curriculum consisted of short texts, rated for difficulty, and then color-coded, so that older students could progress by working their way through the colors, until finally reaching purple. Although the short texts were pretty boring, they did help teenagers who were beginning readers to develop some skill in comprehending material that did not deal with the ducks and bunnies common in textbooks aimed at six-year-old beginning readers.

Though the SRA texts were a start, I was still desperate to find some better way to inspire these students. In search

of texts they might actually *want* to read, I finally found what I was looking for one weekend in a seedy newsstand in downtown Norfolk. There, behind the car magazines and girly calendars, I discovered a rack filled with ‘Classic Comics’ – a brand that took familiar literary classics and turned them into comic books. After skimming the Classic Comics version of *A Tale of Two Cities*, I decided to try a ploy: After buying the newsstand’s entire stock of Classic Comics and then tearing out the last four pages in each issue, I went to the school library, checked out copies of the various classics the comic books were based on, brought them to my classroom, and stacked them on the window sill.

When class started the next Monday, I astonished my students by passing out comic books. I told them that we were going to spend some time in each period reading the comics, but that they would have to return the comics at the end of the period.

By mid-week, the fastest reader in the class had discovered my ploy. He had nearly finished his Classic Comic, only to find that the last few pages had been torn out.irate, he complained that he couldn’t find out what happened to Silas Marner and Eppie. We then went to the windowsill, where he found a copy of *Silas Marner*. Together we found the passage near the end of the novel where the Classic Comic had stopped. He took the book and, with some help, finished it. Other students followed his lead.

By the time school ended in June, most of my least-able students were reading, and some had even gone back to the SRA Reading Box to perfect their skills. A few even made it to the purple text.

That June, all the white public schools in Norfolk closed, in order to avoid having to admit black students. As a result of Virginia’s ‘Massive Resistance’ to school integration, many of my Classic

Comic readers left school. A number of my colleagues left teaching. And I moved to New York City, where in the fall I began teaching American history, European history, and civics in a Manhattan high school.

At the time, I was unaware that the kind of classics-based syllabus that I had tried to implement in Virginia (and was now trying to teach in New York) had long been under attack by progressive educators as being too tied to a “traditional curriculum.” These educational reformers, many of whom were based at Teachers College, Columbia University, half a mile from where I was then living, preferred language arts to English and social studies to history. They had criticized the “lockstep” of nineteenth-century approaches to schooling as irrelevant, dull, and inappropriate for many young people. Rather, they preferred a school environment that was ostensibly more “democratic,” more specifically attuned to each student’s aptitudes, interests – and likely adult life. (Diane Ravitch has chronicled the history of these views in her recent book, *Left Back*.)

Ironically, by the fall of 1958, one year after the Soviet launch of Sputnik had jolted Americans into a preoccupation with schooling, the progressive education movement was officially dead: its organizational embodiment, the Progressive Education Association, disappeared in 1955, and its journal had folded the same month that Sputnik was launched. As my own experience confirms, the theories of the progressives were by the mid-1950s less ubiquitous than subsequent historians, including myself, have sometimes implied. The most persistent and pernicious legacy of progressive education in the last half century has been that the content of the curriculum did not matter.

As it happens, my own views on progressive education evolved over the

years: I have come to realize that the progressives in America were very much like the fabled little girl with a curl, about whom we have learned, “When she was good, she was very, very good, but when she was bad, she was horrid.”

Progressive education, when offered to eager, enthusiastic students by gifted, dedicated teachers in settings that were rich in resources – settings like my class of gifted students at Maury High – was absolutely the best education that these children, their families, or the nation could ever hope for. Adjusting the curriculum to the aptitudes and interests of such students meant upholding very high standards and expectations. In mid-century America there were many progressive schools, both public and private, where children received marvelous educations.

On the other hand, progressive education, when it was offered to disinterested and poorly schooled students by poorly trained teachers in settings that lacked critical resources – settings not unlike my class of least-able students at Maury High – was arguably the worst possible education for these children and their families. Adjusting the curriculum to the aptitudes and interests of such students meant lowering standards and expectations, virtually consigning those who graduated to an adult life of menial work.

These reflections are triggered by reading Diane Ravitch’s provocative essay. She rightly reminds us that one enduring legacy of progressive education has been the rise of curriculums without content: since progressives assumed that students in theory could learn from any experience, mastering the classics did not matter. Quite properly in my view, Ravitch is also critical of much of what we now give our students to read – though what she calls “censorship,” I would call “commercialism” on the part

of textbook publishers.

Science Research Associates no longer exists as an educational publisher – it failed to make enough money in mass-market texts, a fate common to many high-quality niche educational publishers. Since state adoptions, particularly in Texas and California, are crucial to educational publishers, the state boards of education in those states exercise exaggerated power. Publishers wishing to sell books fear attacks from interest groups who object to something in their texts that provokes controversy of any kind. These market forces do not reward literary excellence.

Certainly there was much in the old materials that we would find inappropriate today. But the most troubling issue to me is not the “cleansing” of the old, nor the “representativeness” of the new: it is the sheer boredom these textbooks are bound to inspire.

What child will ever get turned on to reading, if the required reading is relentlessly dull? In order to be captured by a text, one must be engaged, excited, stimulated. Good fiction does this, as do compelling biographies or works of history or science. The teacher’s task is to help a student develop the skills that ultimately will lead to being captivated by a piece of writing. Enchanted by a book, a child can learn vicariously, develop imagination, effortlessly acquire new information. Of course, there are other ways to achieve those goals – but a love of reading remains one of the most efficient ways to do so.

Diane Ravitch, again rightly in my view, laments the “growing gap between the educated haves and the poorly schooled have-nots.” I believe that the role of schooling is not to reinforce the advantages that children bring from their homes and communities; rather, it is to maximize the talents that they have. Yet too often today, our schools are in

the business of reinforcing advantage, rather than maximizing talent.

This is America’s basic educational dilemma. Most of our affluent youngsters are doing fine in school, as international test comparisons reveal. But many children of low-income and middle-income families are doing poorly, particularly when they become adolescents. America has the widest test score gap in the industrial world between high- and low-scoring students.

For children who through no fault of their own are born into families and communities without strong educational traditions, this disparity is devastating. Schooling is more important for them than it is for those with other advantages. Yet the schools these children encounter are precisely the ones that are least likely to have experienced, well-prepared, and gifted teachers. Even worse, such schools often adopt a curriculum that is geared to the perceived weaknesses of both pupils and teachers. This means that reading materials are often neither captivating nor intellectually stimulating.

As Anthony Bryk and his colleagues at the University of Chicago have shown in their analysis of school reform in Chicago, intellectually rich curricula combined with high expectations for mastering it are a powerful stimulus to academic achievement of low-income students in urban schools. Teachers with high expectations for their students’ academic achievement, working with a demanding curriculum that they are skilled and empowered to teach, remain the best hope for schooling *all* of America’s children.

Alas, such teachers and schools are still too rare. And too many Americans are not receiving the kind of education, at school or in their communities, that they need and deserve.

Jeffrey Mirel

The decline of civic education

Many years ago, Lawrence Cremin noted that often, when dealing with controversial issues, educators followed the principle of “when in doubt, leave it out.”¹

Diane Ravitch’s account of current textbook publishers, testing companies, and educators pitching controversial curricular materials overboard to try and quiet politically stormy seas demonstrates how that principle is being taken to a logical but deeply disturbing conclusion. If her predictions about the future are accurate, the recent applications of that principle will do greater damage than ever before to the ability of public schools to perform what I believe to be their principal mission: to educate the citizens of a democracy.

As a historian, I know all too well that the trends Ravitch describes have deep roots. Since the Common School era of

the nineteenth century, educators have been trying to shield public schools from controversy. Similarly, since at least the time of the Scopes trial, publishing companies have been sanitizing textbooks in response to pressure groups.

In behaving in this way, educators and publishers have tried to balance three legitimate but competing goals: to ensure the survival of public schools by shielding them from political controversy; to promote national unity through a civic education that teaches students a shared language, shared democratic ideals, and a shared understanding of American culture and history; and to acknowledge the demands of ever more diverse groups of American citizens with new ideas about how best to organize the policies, practices, and curricula of the public schools.

At times, educators and publishers have skillfully balanced these potentially contradictory goals. But at other times, that balance has been impossible to maintain, and educators and publishers have sacrificed either the goal of promoting unity or that of acknowledging diversity in order to protect their institutional power.

1 Lawrence Cremin, ed., *The Republic and the School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1957), 15. Many quotes that follow come from this book.

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Almost from their inception in the mid-nineteenth century, public schools steered away from controversy. “It is obvious . . . that if the tempest of political strife were to be let loose upon our Common Schools,” warned Horace Mann in 1848, “they would be overwhelmed with sudden ruin.” To keep controversy at bay, Mann and other leaders of the Common School Movement advocated two important principles: nonpartisanship, which meant that schools would shun advocacy of any specific political party’s platform; and nonsectarianism, which affirmed the role of schools in teaching Bible-based morality, but prohibited them from promoting the doctrine of any specific Christian sect.

By adhering to both principles, Common School reformers believed they could identify and teach certain aspects of what they assumed was the common American culture, specifically what they defined as fundamental elements of republicanism and Christianity. Though they were avowedly “nonpartisan,” Mann’s Common Schools taught civic values by offering lessons on the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and, later in the nineteenth century, American history and culture. Though they were “nonsectarian,” the Common Schools of the nineteenth century stressed daily prayer, Bible reading, and, with the advent of McGuffy’s readers, parables that exemplified the Protestant ethic.

At the same time, Common School leaders treated controversial topics very gingerly. As Mann warned, if a teacher “in the course of his lessons or lectures . . . arrives at a controverted text, he is either to read it without comment or remark; or, at most, he is only to say that the passage is the subject of disputation, and that the schoolroom is neither the tribunal to adjudicate, nor the forum to discuss it.”

Yet despite these policies and practices – indeed, at times, *because* of them – public schools in the nineteenth century were often embroiled in political controversy. Supporters of such burning issues as abolition, for example, recoiled at the nonpartisan principle that kept teachers from promoting abolitionist ideals in northern classrooms.

There were even greater clashes over nonsectarianism. Common School leaders felt that the nonsectarian policy treated all religious groups equally and fairly, and, as importantly, they were confident that they had broad public support. But beginning in the 1840s, Catholic leaders denounced certain nonsectarian policies – for example, reading the Bible without reference to Church doctrine – as blatant attempts to convert children to Protestantism. Catholic outrage led to a series of “school wars” in cities across the country in which school practices, curricula, and funding policies came under attack.

Fearing that Catholic demands would undermine the unifying function of public education, Common School leaders flatly refused Catholic demands for making schools more accommodating to the religious sensibilities of Catholic students (although in some places school leaders did remove anti-Catholic passages from textbooks). As a consequence, many Catholics abandoned public schools altogether, opting to send their children to the newly developed system of Catholic schools.² This created still another battleground, as Catholics fought to gain a share of the Common School fund to support their schools, a battle that continues to this day in the debate about vouchers and tuition tax credits.

2 Lloyd P. Jorgenson, *The State and the Non-Public School, 1825 – 1925* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1987); Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 27 – 76.

In the early twentieth century, public school leaders in major cities faced a new influx of non-Protestant students as a huge flood of immigrants brought large numbers of Catholics, Eastern-rite Christians, and Jews into the schools. Yet surprisingly, the religiously based school wars of the nineteenth century did not recur.

This was due in part to the apparent decision by urban school leaders to avoid religious conflict by toning down the aggressive Protestantism that colored much of Common School education. They also recognized that the flood of immigrants would surely change the nature of urban educational politics and that new school wars sparked by religious conflict could well turn out differently from those in the past.

Consequently, school leaders gradually replaced the nonsectarian policies of the nineteenth century with a more secular approach to moral education. Throughout the Progressive era, the teaching of Bible-based morality in urban public schools faded away and nonsectarian civic education rapidly filled the void. School leaders in this era transformed the nonpartisan mission of public schools by expanding the scope of this principle to include the assimilation or, as they put it, the “Americanization” of immigrant children. Teaching the “old time religion” was supplanted by teaching students the American civil religion.

“Americanization” involved offering a mixture of English language courses, civics classes, Anglo-American literature classes, and American history courses that stressed the nation’s triumphs and ignored, in general, its failings. As Ellwood Cubberley, one of the leading educators of the era, explained, the goal of Americanization was “to assimilate and amalgamate these people as part of our American race, to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-

Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government, and to awaken in them a reverence for our democratic institutions and for those things in our national life which we as a people hold to be of abiding worth.”³

In many ways, ‘Americanization’ was a form of secularized Protestantism, particularly in terms of the values and attitudes that the schools tried to inculcate. But the explicitly nonreligious content of the curriculum provoked far less controversy than the religiously based attempts at assimilation in the nineteenth century. The most notable critics of Americanization were not leaders from the immigrant communities but intellectuals such as Randolph Bourne and Horace Kallen. Writing in 1916, Bourne dismissed Americanization as a process in which the “Anglo-Saxon element” of the population imposed “its own culture upon the minority peoples.”⁴

But many immigrant families welcomed Americanization, seeing it as a valuable acquisition, rather than an imposition. Writing in 1928, an Italian American journalist in Chicago declared, “Americanization does not mean to forget the best and noblest traditions of our motherland; it means, instead, to jealously retain the best and sanest of the Italian tradition, and at the same time to absorb the best of the life of our adopted motherland.”⁵

Immigrants voted with their feet, enrolling in public schools in record numbers. By 1920, it is likely that more Cath-

3 Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Changing Conceptualizations of Education* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), 15–16.

4 Randolph Bourne, “Trans-National America,” *Atlantic Monthly* 118 (July 1916): 88.

5 Mario Pei, “Italian Language in the High Schools,” *Mens Italica* (Monthly) (October 1928): 235–236, Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey, Reel 30, Harold Washington Library, Chicago.

olic children were attending public than parochial schools. While these children did not find public schools warmly accommodating or even sensitive to their ethnic or cultural backgrounds, they at least did not find them aggressively hostile to their religious convictions.

While increasing secularism helped keep the peace in the public schools of America's culturally and religiously diverse great cities in the North, the same trend generated fear and outrage throughout the South. With far fewer non-Protestant immigrants challenging the educational status quo, southern public schools remained firmly wedded to traditional policies and pieties. The assimilationist impulse that had encouraged northern school leaders to strive to integrate new groups into the broader American culture had virtually no resonance among white southerners whose educational, political, and social policies toward African Americans were specifically designed to exclude them from such integration.

Moreover, having stripped African Americans of their voting rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, white southerners were not about to adopt policies regarding civic education for black children akin to those that white northerners had adopted for immigrants. As far as most white and some black southern educational leaders were concerned, religiously based, Protestant moral education was and should remain among the most vital and enduring features of public schooling.⁶

One major challenge to southern schools was Darwin's theory of evolution. Throughout the 1920s, legislatures across the South tried to block the ad-

vance of scientific instruction by banning Darwin's theory from the classroom or, as the Tennessee law that set the stage for the Scopes trial put it, by outlawing "any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man descended from a lower order of animals."⁷

For many Americans, particularly those living in the great cosmopolitan cities, the 1925 Scopes trial marked the culmination of a long struggle between tradition and modernity – between religion and secularism – in American education. For them, Clarence Darrow's humiliating cross-examination of William Jennings Bryan in that trial symbolized the beginning of the inevitable disappearance of religiously oriented curricula in public education.

Yet as Edward J. Larson has convincingly demonstrated, following the Scopes trial southern educational, political, and religious groups waged a very effective counter-offensive on many fronts. They compelled such major textbook publishers as the American Book Company and Ginn and Company to reduce and often eliminate chapters referring to evolution in their biology texts. For example, the 1927 edition of *A Civic Biology*, "the most popular high school biology textbook and the one used by Scopes," made no mention of "evolution," referring only to "development."⁸

By 1929, Southern pressure groups had managed to restrict or ban the teaching of evolution throughout most states in

7 See Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 50, 230–231.

8 Edward Larson, *Trial and Error: The American Controversy over Creation and Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 84–85, 83–92.

6 James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

the old Confederacy. Such laws were not struck down as unconstitutional until 1968 in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Epperson v. Arkansas*.

Epperson was one of a series of Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s that completed the dismantling of what little was left of the ostensibly “nonsectarian” policy championed by Horace Mann a century before. In 1962, in *Engel v. Vitale* the court found state-mandated, teacher-led prayer in public schools unconstitutional. The following year, in *Abington v. Schempp*, the Court also declared that school-supported, daily Bible readings were unconstitutional.

Acknowledging the momentous implications of these decisions, the Court cautioned that public schools could not aver a “religion of secularism” or exhibit outright hostility to religion. Moreover, Justice Tom C. Clark, author of the majority opinion in *Abington*, declared, “one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. . . . Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a program of secular education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.”⁹

Despite these statements, school leaders in districts across the country scrambled to avoid further litigation by dusting off the “when in doubt, leave it out” policy and moving schools in a decidedly more secular direction. Over the next decade, they gradually removed even the most innocuous mentions of religion or the Bible from curricula and programs. True to form, textbook publishers followed suit, especially in history where

such important historical facts as Joan of Arc’s voices or the religious motivation of the Pilgrims disappeared from texts almost as quickly as evolution had disappeared several decades earlier.

Many religious Americans, but particularly evangelical Protestants, were outraged by the Court decisions and their policy consequences. They viewed these actions as evidence that Justice Clark’s admonitions counted for nothing and that public schools were indeed promoting a religion of secularism or, more pointedly, atheism.

In the early 1970s, they began campaigns to make schools more responsive to the sensibilities of students from religious families. These campaigns sought to restore prayer to public schools, introduce Creation Science as a counterweight to evolution, remove curricular materials that were offensive to religious students, and, most importantly, gain public funds to send children from religious families to schools more in line with their values (a position that ironically allied them with Catholics who originally had fled the public schools because of the staunch Protestant doctrines these groups proclaimed). These educational campaigns helped bring Protestant evangelicals and fundamentalists into the broader arena of American politics, one of the most significant and consequential political developments of the last part of the twentieth century.

In the 1960s, while the Supreme Court and educational policymakers were burying nonsectarianism, “nonpartisanship” as a concomitant of civic education, the other key principle of the Common School movement, seemed immune from criticism. Stressing the need to teach English, and to introduce students from diverse backgrounds to a

9 See Mark G. Yudof, David L. Kirp, Tyll van Geel, and Betsy Levin, *Educational Policy and the Law* (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1982), 129, 126–132, 137–142.

common culture of democratic ideals, the goal of a civic education survived well into the 1960s, even though the term ‘Americanization’ fell into disfavor. As immigration sharply declined in the middle of the twentieth century, schools simply shifted to what a Detroit superintendent once called, “the Americanization of the American,” acculturating each new generation by transmitting knowledge of the broader culture and inculcating the ideals, norms, and values necessary for life in a democratic society.¹⁰

Yet by the end of the decade, the traditional ideal of assimilation came under fresh attack, this time from groups such as Afrocentrists, supporters of bilingual/bicultural education, and other individuals and organizations that in an earlier work Ravitch has described as “particularistic multiculturalists.”¹¹ In phrases echoing those of Randolph Bourne, the new critics derided the very idea of a common civic culture: in their eyes, an “assimilationist” curriculum was a form of cultural imperialism. These critics also argued that imposing a putative common culture contributed to the poor educational performance of children from minority and immigrant backgrounds. As a leading advocate of multiculturalism put it, “*the pressure that schools place on students to assimilate is itself an example of educational inequality.*”¹²

By the end of the twentieth century, a panoply of other groups was attacking public school curricula as class-biased,

sexist, and homophobic. Joining the chorus of criticism were evangelicals and fundamentalists who were still eager to restore a modicum of religiosity to America’s public schools.¹³

Regardless of whether one opposed Eurocentrism or secular humanism, there appeared to be widespread agreement that the civic mission of public schools was a form of oppression. From that perspective, the old nonpartisan policy of preparing future citizens by educating them in the kinds of knowledge, skills, ideals, and values that had been traditionally taught in public schools had to be either radically redesigned or abandoned. As they had in the past, school leaders faced the problem of balancing the protection of the schools with competing pressures to promote unity or diversity.

Few aspects of American educational politics and policy have received as much attention as have these recent battles about the goals, values, and curricula of public schools. As Ravitch describes, most of these struggles have centered on English, social studies, and, to a lesser but no less passionate extent, science (due to the continuing battle over evolution). More often than not, school leaders have ducked controversy by abandoning the American public school’s historic mission to teach students a common culture that citizens may share.

These developments have unfortunately coincided with a downgrading of high school standards. Since the 1930s, many educational leaders and policy-makers have steered large numbers of

10 Frank Cody, “What One Representative American City is Doing in Teaching Americanism,” *Proceedings of the National Education Association* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1921), 760.

11 Diane Ravitch, “Multiculturalism: E Pluribus Plures,” *American Scholar* 59 (1990): 340.

12 Emphasis is in the original. Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learn-*

ing Communities (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 33–34.

13 On these developments see Jonathan Zimmerman, *Whose America: Culture Wars in Public Schools* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2002).

students away from rigorous, academic subjects and excised challenging materials from classes that many of these students do take. This combination of mediocrity and multiculturalism has, as Diane Ravitch suggests, all the makings for an educational meltdown, especially for the majority of high school students who are not enrolled in honors or AP classes.¹⁴

If unchecked, these combined trends would surely weaken further the ability of public schools to foster an educated citizenry. For as we have come to understand, America's democratic culture hinges on a paradox; it is precisely the *shared* experience of controversy over common values that enables it to flourish.

Democracy depends on the ability to manage conflict constructively. Learning how to deal with conflict in a civil manner is one of the great lessons that schools in a democracy must teach.

In identifying essential elements of high quality civic education, researchers such as Carole Hahn have consistently found that classes dealing directly and openly with controversial issues and materials are among the most effective in demonstrating democratic values and in developing behaviors in students that sustain those values.¹⁵ If schools do not deliberately teach students how to deal with challenging, troubling, and contentious material in a civil manner, what will? Surely not television, movies, or video games.

The trends that Ravitch illuminates in her essay all seem to point toward public

schools retreating from new approaches to civic education. The historical nature of these trends underscores how compelling her arguments are and makes her vision of the future of public schooling both believable and frightening.

Yet history also shows that things do not necessarily have to turn out that way. Even a brief overview of the controversies about a curriculum, such as the one that I have presented here, reveals the fiercely contested character inherent in these types of changes. In the battles between Catholics and Protestants, cultural pluralists and assimilationists, creationists and evolutionists, particularistic and pluralistic multiculturalists there have been no permanent victories, no utter defeats. Individual actors and actions matter in these struggles.

The effects of such actions can clearly be seen in one crucial area: the teaching of history. The leading scholars of history instruction in the country today – such as Robert Bain, Peter Seixias, and Samuel Wineburg – have completely rejected the “process-alone” approach to social studies that dominated the field for much of the twentieth century. In its place they have introduced content rich, contextually grounded approaches to studying the past, approaches to civic education that hold great promise for transforming history education in our schools.

Put simply, the battle to defend civic education is still raging. And though, as Ravitch shows, the current situation is difficult indeed, the outcome may not be as grim as she imagines.

14 On the historic decline of the quality of high school education see David Angus and Jeffrey Mirel, *The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890 – 1995* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).

15 Carole L. Hahn, “Citizenship Education: An Empirical Study of Policy, Practices and Outcomes,” *Oxford Review of Education* 25 (1&2)

(1999): 231 – 250; Hahn, *Becoming Political: Comparative Perspectives on Citizenship Education* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1998), 179 – 183.

Robert Boyers

Why a common curriculum?

At the close of her stirring paper, Diane Ravitch asserts that “we must reclaim our common culture . . . or risk seeing it disappear.” What precisely that common culture is, and what makes it seem to Ravitch so essential, she never precisely says. Neither does she say how or by what means the common culture she values actually produced – once upon a time – an American society she would like us to retrieve. Though Ravitch’s paper properly deplores many things, from “self-righteous pedagogical censors” to an undue educational reliance on “basic skills” learning, her reader can only wonder at her insistence that it is a “common fund of knowledge” we need “to sustain a truly democratic society.”

The term “common culture” will suggest many things – trivial and not so trivial – to many people. As a descriptive epithet it most plausibly refers to the world inhabited by people who live alongside one another, speak a common language,

ostensibly share certain values, and, for better or worse, are shaped in equivalent ways by the several forces dominant in their society. Americans today may be said to have a common culture because, for all of their diversity, they do have – most of them – a good deal in common with one another. They tend, most of them, to know more about television and movie characters than about characters in books. They describe themselves as religious although they devote little of their time to the practice of religious ritual and do not live what a disinterested observer would call religious lives. They are more interested in football and baseball than in soccer. They are, on the whole, more moderate in their political views than most other citizens of “advanced” countries, and they tend, most of them, to prefer status and security to risk and adventure, whatever their fantasies to the contrary. Even when the curriculum of their public schools would seem to have been designed by educators more radical than the parents of most schoolchildren, the curriculum is typically administered in a way that reflects the essential caution and moderation deeply rooted in the common culture. The exceptions are, as exceptions tend to be, exceptional.

Though Ravitch clearly fears the imminent disappearance of the common

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culture, there is nothing to suggest that it is in fact about to disappear. What has disappeared, to some considerable degree, is one small, perhaps negligible mark of a common culture, which Ravitch values a good deal more than others do. No doubt about it: if the words “common culture” are taken to refer to a standard curriculum and a single, universally accredited set of canonical texts, then of course Ravitch is correct. Not all secondary-school children are today asked to read George Eliot’s *Silas Marner* or, indeed, the mediocre poems of generally mediocre American schoolroom poets like Longfellow, Bryant, and Whittier, who were a part of the required curriculum in all American schools in the 1950s, when I went to school. But if this is a loss – and some of us will be permitted to suggest that it is not – it will certainly seem less than grave if, in place of the old schoolroom poets, students instead read – as many do today – the more demanding Emily Dickinson and the more dangerously protean Walt Whitman. It is by no means the case that the texts once associated with a common curriculum were among the best works available even within the American or British tradition.

Ravitch rightly worries that schools in the United States today may be “more concerned about social issues than about teaching classic literature,” but she herself would seem also to privilege social issues in her concern for a common culture. She does not argue that the curriculum once favored in American literature classrooms was superior *as literature* to the literature taught today, although we are meant to infer from the tone of her essay that, had she wished to do so, she might well have made that case. The emphasis, where the common culture is concerned, is on the word “common,” and one intention of Ravitch’s essay is to describe the loss, or elimination, of a

“common fund of knowledge needed to sustain a truly democratic society.” The important reminders, liberally scattered throughout the essay, that “great literature does not comfort us” or “make us feel better about ourselves,” that it can help young people especially “to form critical and independent minds,” nowhere come with assurances that the literature once contained in the common curriculum generally met those high standards or that the literature often taught in classrooms today – Melville’s *Billy Budd* and *Benito Cereno*, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* or *The Sun Also Rises*, Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* – is less likely to satisfy Ravitch’s standards. The point she makes, rather, is that we cannot create or sustain a common culture when we have no common curriculum, and that such a curriculum must be designed by people with a genuine feeling for literature *and* for “a truly democratic society.”

Of course, Ravitch knows as well as I do that great literature does not always promote democratic values. She deplores the ascendance of educators who would eliminate from the curriculum literature that is “controversial or emotionally charged,” and one assumes that she would as well deplore a curriculum committed only to books promoting what she took to be “correct” political values. Ravitch wishes to make the case for the indispensability of classic literature in the classroom and to dismiss as a reflection of a deplorable investment in politically correct attitudes our educators’ concern about “social issues.” But Ravitch is, in fact, as concerned as others with the use of the literature classroom to inculcate and promote the common values required for the creation of a “truly democratic society.”

The contradiction in Ravitch’s stance is in itself of little importance. But the

idea that a common culture requires a common curriculum is, at the least, problematic. Many of us would be pleased to draft a standard curriculum and to see our own cherished draft approved and adopted by school boards across the country. Like other educators, I can make a powerful case for the value to children and adolescents of the literature I love. But the fact is that a great many teachers would regard much of the literature in my draft proposal as eminently resistible and would have perfectly respectable reasons for preferring other works and for wishing to teach an alternative curriculum. It is not modesty but experience that makes us loath to suppose that others are benighted if they do not accept the pedagogical advantages of the curriculum we happen to favor. I have no reluctance to argue on behalf of a particular curriculum in a setting where I have some influence – in my own English department, for example – but it is probably foolish to expect that educators everywhere will now come to agree on a list of essential texts, or that, if they fail to agree, the several contrasting curricula in service will inevitably reflect no valid standards at all.

Moreover, when I think of an essential “core” curriculum, I don’t see why nineteenth-century American or British literature should at all seem superior – as instigations to critical thought or, simply, as literature – to works by “foreign” or contemporary authors. The “diverse” curriculum increasingly common in our schools offers, at its best, much more than colorful reminders of “difference” or instigations to “tolerance.” Children required to read novels by Toni Morrison or J. D. Salinger, or essays by James Baldwin – these are American writers widely taught in our secondary schools – are being confronted not with uncontroversial or emotionally bland works but with material they are apt to find troubling and properly challenging. Just

so, children who are asked to read Nadine Gordimer’s *July’s People* – a work assigned to many of my college students in their respective high-school classrooms – are confronted with a South African landscape unfamiliar to most of them and with an ambiguously charged narrative unlike any other they have read. The literature often taught in the schools today, in other words – from Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* to Russell Banks’s novel *Rule of the Bone* – is at least as complex and rewarding as the literature favored fifty or eighty years ago. The fact that schoolchildren in Baltimore will read Gordimer while the kids in Philadelphia will read Banks is decidedly less important than the fact that literature, genuine literature, is being taught in most of our schools. It is not a common curriculum that is wanted but a curriculum genuinely invested in literature and teachable by – inspiring to – teachers who will want to convey their enthusiasm, and their reading skills, to students.

Ravitch is right to caution that, in some school districts, parent and teacher groups with a partisan, provincial, or puritanical view of education are installing a curriculum that has little feeling for literary value and even less feeling for a rich and complicated view of the world. Educators with an entirely instrumental and therapeutic view of culture represent a danger to education as many of us continue to understand that term, and some of us, perhaps inspired by Ravitch, have begun to do battle with those educators in our own communities. But Ravitch will only confuse the case she wishes to make if she continues to insist that a common curriculum is indispensable to a vital democratic society. If there is a decline in civic virtue today, its causes are apt to be more elusive and various than a misconceived nostalgia for a common curriculum can suggest.

Thomas Bender

Reforming the disciplines

Much is wrong with our schools. The title of Diane Ravitch's essay may imply that the predicament of K-12 education is the legacy of the "culture wars," but her essay shows the problem to be both different and larger. The content of the K-12 curriculum has not been hijacked by postmodernists; rather, it has been privatized – entrusted to commercial publishers. This circumstance seems to be the result of an unholy alliance between education schools, publishers, and state departments of education. Professors of history and of English, be they old-fashioned or avant-garde, are not a part of this alliance, and they have tended to ignore the whole business of K-12 education. (Mathematicians and natural scientists, by contrast, have played a large role in America's schools since World

War II, often with strong support from the National Science Foundation.)

The current situation is by no means unprecedented. At the turn of the last century, the American Book Company, in league with the emerging education profession, cornered the textbook market. Over time, the situation worsened: Ravitch's examples are even more appalling than those described twenty years ago by Frances FitzGerald in *America Revised* (1979), her pathbreaking history of history textbooks.

Most K-12 history textbooks are unreadable. And who could possibly discover a fictive world worth knowing in the "literary" selections described by Ravitch?

Of course, students should read books that challenge them, that introduce them to times, places, and experiences novel and provocative to them. More than anything, as Ravitch insists, they should experience intellectual freedom and the intellectual adventure that it promises. The curriculum should connect with the world students know, but carry them beyond it, enabling them to develop what Ravitch elegantly calls a "sympathetic imagination." Neither the schools that most children attend nor the mass media that fill so many of their waking hours offer such experiences. If

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the “Empire of Boredom” cannot compete with Disney or Oliver Stone, the solution is not to adopt in the schools and other cultural institutions the style and lessons of the dumb and ever dumber mass media.

What to do? Like many others today, Ravitch finds the solution in testing – national testing based on an established curriculum. Unlike France, the United States has never had a publicly defined national curriculum – although we seem to have allowed private enterprise to define a thoroughly unsatisfactory simulacrum of one. The development of national history standards revealed that it is possible for scholars to agree on a curriculum that could stimulate students and provide them with both a fund of knowledge and critical/analytical capacities, but it also showed two other things. First, it demonstrated the absence of a connection between the historical profession and the educational policy establishment, and, second, that political agreement is difficult to achieve in a self-consciously decentralized, pluralized, and formally democratic society, especially when demagogues in high places, like Lynne Cheney, inflame public opinion.

The national history standards controversy was largely about different definitions of the civic purpose of history. Cheney had a very narrow vision of that purpose, favoring a curriculum that fostered a simplistic notion of patriotism rather than a critical understanding of the past.

History, of course, does have a civic purpose. As a professional discipline and classroom subject, history emerged with the modern nation-state, and it was expected to form national subjects, citizens. Yet it always had as well a larger, more general purpose: the development

of a method for the critical analysis and informed judgment of the causes and implications of official policies and broader social change.

Ravitch recognizes these two aspects of historical learning, but she does so rather indirectly, leaving their relationship a bit obscure. She speaks mostly about knowing the history that holds us together as a special people: the history of our political democracy, our heritage, our common culture. At the same time, however, she associates herself with a more cosmopolitan view of history through her embrace of William Torrey Harris and Mario Vargas Llosa, who insist upon the importance of human similarities across cultural, racial, and national boundaries. The reality is a bit more complex. Any national curriculum must acknowledge and explore a variety of solidarities and identities, some smaller than the nation, others larger. It must explicitly address the relation between parochial feelings of identity, our common identities as Americans, and those experiences and hopes we share with human beings everywhere.

I would not rule out testing on these grounds. More worrisome is the problem Matthew Arnold pointed out long ago: using rote methods to teach to the test. The great virtue of American education is, in fact, its relative diversity, which, when built upon, can nourish imagination and invention.

While I certainly agree with Ravitch and with Richard Atkinson, president of the University of California, that curriculum-based tests like the SAT II or the AP tests are superior to the nearly contentless SAT tests in both their fairness and their likely impact on the K-12 educational system, we must look elsewhere for the solution to our problems. Or, put differently, I am agnostic about the sort

of testing Ravitch proposes. Let us give it a try, but let us not mistake it for a panacea.

The unhappy mix of privatization, bureaucracy, and distorted professionalism that characterizes our educational system must still be addressed. Ravitch does not have much to say about the schools of education that determine policy in state after state. These deliberately contentless institutions are wired into the state educational bureaucracies. There – not in the culture wars – is the source of the problem Ravitch identifies.

It is nevertheless true that academics have become part of the problem. Our K-12 schools suffer from the abdication of responsibility by those invested in the scholarly disciplines. For too many academics, especially after World War II, the disciplines became ends in themselves; scholars in our colleges and universities felt no obligation to concern themselves with secondary education. A century ago, by contrast, academics in the humanities were deeply involved in what Ravitch would call a standards movement. The Committee of Ten (1893), chaired by President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard and including William Torrey Harris, recommended an academic or “college prep” curriculum for secondary schools. Over the next quarter century in a series of American Historical Association (AHA) committees historians worked to establish a history curriculum for schools and colleges. These historians were scholars of stature, leaders in the profession. They presumed a place at the policy table.

Of course, that was a time when two presidents of the United States, Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, also served as presidents of the AHA. As the election of George W. Bush reveals all too glaringly, the public no longer considers learning or intellectual rigor to

be a relevant qualification for leadership. That historical tendency toward anti-intellectualism, which is both very old and as alive as ever today, does not help the cause of education in America. Yet to attribute the withdrawal of scholars to a pervasive anti-intellectualism is too easy an explanation.

While academics – and I should include myself here – speak about broadening the horizons of students and encouraging them to take on new challenges, they have enclosed themselves more and more within the comfortable velvet prisons of their specializations. This inclination has developed the furthest in philosophy, political science, and economics, where most practitioners have adopted an otherworldly and self-referential formalism.

In most of the social sciences, one can date this withdrawal to the 1960s. For history and English, the two disciplines that are Ravitch’s focus, the story is different. A distorted professionalism prevailed. Scholarship on vital topics flourished, but this scholarship became increasingly specialized. Academic identities became more individualistic, even careerist. Professors thought of themselves as researchers, perhaps researchers who taught, and sometimes even as public intellectuals – but rarely did they see themselves as educators. They were thus cut off from general conversations about education to which they could have given substantive depth. That experience, moreover, might have usefully countered the specialization that was cutting them off from the public. When humanities professors stopped thinking of themselves as educators, they had less sense of connection with the K-12 education system, except perhaps as parents. Education was someone else’s business, even among those who took their own classroom teaching very seriously.

This excursion into a schematic history of academic professionalism brings me to the present challenge, at least from the perspective of higher education. An ambitious, committed, and aggressive community of educators that includes academics in the arts and sciences is the best bet for reviving a content-based K-12 education.

The episodic campaigns to restore history to the school curriculum (such as that currently being waged by the National Council for History Education) will have a chance of success only if all academic historians are willing to devote themselves to them. And if we are to have teachers properly prepared to teach such a curriculum, university scholars will have to collaborate with their fellow K-12 educators. Content and pedagogical strategy must be brought together, but under the auspices of those committed to content.

Academics will have to take time off from writing specialized articles and monographs long enough to write rigorous and stimulating textbooks for all grade levels. They may have to attend and speak at board of education meetings. To gain access to the policy world, they will have to challenge the schools of education directly or, better, forge content-based collaborations with their colleagues on the other side of the campus. And if publishers do not respond, academic organizations will have to produce textbooks and educational materials themselves. (Two examples of what can be done: the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California at Los Angeles, a collaboration between historians and education specialists, has produced outstanding

educational materials; and for many years, the AHA has produced useful guides for teachers.)

There are some signs of change, at least among academic historians. A growing number of historians are getting involved in rethinking the content of K-12 education. Some years ago, the AHA created a Vice Presidency for Teaching, and quite distinguished historians committed to all levels of history education have held that position. At many universities across the country, history faculty are working with local schoolteachers – sometimes in concert with schools of education. In New York City, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History brings together university historians and K-12 teachers every summer to explore ways of conveying current scholarship to the nation's children. And with substantial funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the National Council on Education and the Disciplines is seeking to establish stronger curricular connections between colleges and high schools. But the task is large, and these are scattered, even marginal, efforts.

It is easier, no doubt, to push through a system of national testing. And it might help. But it is not enough. If we are to achieve a history curriculum in our schools that provides our children with a fund of knowledge, critical and analytical skills, and a richer social imagination, we need to bring the disciplines more fully into the development of curricula, the training of teachers, and the writing of tests, textbooks, and other teaching materials.

Andrew Delbanco

It all comes down to the teachers

Diane Ravitch takes us on a discouraging tour of the “Empire of Boredom” – an imaginary world created and ruled by censors and marketeers, where young people conquer all obstacles and old people are as vigorous and cheery as the cover models in *Modern Maturity* magazine. It’s unreasonable, as Ravitch says, to expect children to be interested in such a world. The literary genre best suited to represent it seems to be the textbook, which, according to Ravitch, is assembled nowadays with so much tact and caution that the result is unrelieved banality. No wonder that, rather than take school seriously, most children prefer to watch *Temptation Island*, where envy and desire are up front all the time.

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I have to take Ravitch’s word for it that “the range of forbidden knowledge seems just to keep growing” among textbook publishers and those empowered to evaluate their products. My own son and daughter are past high school, and, while they were going through those bumpy years, they were fortunate not to have had many textbooks inflicted on them. Textbooks, I suspect, have never been a good basis for teaching and learning; they have always been either tentative (*America Revised*, by Frances FitzGerald, gives a good account of the history of American history textbooks) or – to use Theodore Sizer’s terms – “compendious” and “mushy.” Textbooks are by nature reductive. They thin out the complexities of history into filaments strung between Cause A and Effect B. The only textbook I have ever read that is written with tension and urgency is William James’s *Principles of Psychology* – but the truth is, I have not read very many.

I realize that saying this may make me sound snobbish or insouciant about the practical problems of the public school classroom, where teachers may not have the knowledge, or students the skills, to approach the past through primary documents or interpretive books. In the “elite” private university where I teach, I

see relatively few casualties of the mind-numbing system Ravitch describes, and my own childhood was spent mainly in a private school where textbooks and tests were a minor part of the experience. I cannot assess the realities of a world that I know mainly from second-hand accounts by educational reformers and from a few first-hand memoirs by teachers and students. And I certainly do not mean to suggest that curricular choices of the sort Ravitch describes do not make a difference, or that state-mandated testing standards cannot provide useful incentives for public schools to serve students better. Nor am I competent to assess Sizer's sly suggestion that Ravitch's essay confirms (unwittingly) the bad effects of "centralized state and national control of the schools' curriculum." My best guess is that sometimes state intervention helps and sometimes it hurts, and that Ravitch is right that "those hardest hit by the conditions I have described are the sons and daughters of parents who lack the means to send their children to outstanding suburban schools or to private schools."

In short, Ravitch's indictment of current editorial and curricular norms in K-12 education seems mostly right – but also unsurprising. I appreciate her indignation that more schoolchildren are not given the opportunity to encounter great literature. I share her dismay at the prestige of "groupness." I recognize the vapidness of the pseudo-theoretical generalizations that students, largely ignorant of history, are expected to recite in essays and on exams.

And yet – perhaps this will sound odd coming from someone who has recently published a book celebrating the American classics – I don't quite share her outrage at the banishment of the eminent authors she mentions. In fact, I find myself wondering, with Howard Gard-

ner, whether it is really "necessary for young Americans . . . to have read certain key texts in the humanities" in order to become educated. It's useful to recall that authors we now deem classic (Ravitch names Melville, Dickens, Emerson, and Jack London), were once regarded as interlopers for whose sake the true (Greek and Latin) classics had been shunted aside. Melville, after all, was considered an obscene and half-mad writer in his own time and for a considerable time thereafter. Before Edmund Wilson revamped him as a brooding proto-modern genius, Dickens was regarded by many critics as a vulgar sentimentalist; and Jack London found favor in the Soviet Union because of his socialist sympathies and putatively proletarian sensibility. As for Emerson, he has been regarded by estimable critics as suffering from the same poverty of imagination that Ravitch attributes to the authors of dull textbooks: Yvor Winters once described Emerson's universe as a habitation fit only for "amiable imbeciles."

The fact is that arbiters of these matters have never agreed – and will never agree – on which are the "right" books. Of course I believe, with Ravitch, that it is foolish and self-defeating to shield children from the presence of suffering and injustice throughout history, and that literature helps us confront these realities. Nonetheless, I wonder if her emphasis on the content – or contentlessness – of today's curriculum does not miss the main point with which we ought to be concerned.

The main point is captured by Theodore Sizer when he says, "in reality it all comes down to the teachers." At every stage of my own life, my education was affected most directly by a teacher.

Many kinds of readings can be turned to good use by a good teacher, who has the power to awaken students to their

own distinctiveness by putting them in contact with a world different from their own. The aim of liberal education ought to be, in the nice phrase that Ravitch quotes from William Torrey Harris, “self-alienation” – distancing oneself, that is, from one’s inherited assumptions by waking up to the fact that other human beings, past and present, experience the world differently from the way we do.

In teaching Jane Austen in the core curriculum at Columbia College, for example, I found that this experience of self-alienation is not easily achieved even by students who have benefited from good fortune and been selected for high aptitude. In trying to get a fruitful discussion going about *Pride and Prejudice* in what might be called our post-marital culture, I realized that many of my students regarded Jane Austen’s preoccupation with courtship and marriage as some kind of eccentric or outmoded prudery. My job was to help them see, through Austen’s eyes, how young women in the emerging middle-class society of late eighteenth-century Britain had to reconcile their yearnings for self-fulfillment with family and class obligations from which there was no escape.

“Self-alienation” does not require a prescribed reading list, and is not likely, in my view, to be much advanced by any textbook. But it can be helped along by a teacher who responds to stirrings of imagination in the best students and provokes lesser students to begin to think. The aim of such a teacher is to help students engage with the past – an aim that can be achieved through art, music, or any number of books. In other words, the perennial challenge in humanistic teaching and learning is to grasp the pastness of the past – or, as some literary theorists like to say, its “alterity.”

This objective, I think, is often missed in our schools and, for that matter, in our colleges and universities – and I don’t think standards or tests or better textbooks are going to restore our ability to attain it. Howard Gardner rightly says that “one can learn to think historically” by studying either Thomas Jefferson or the Ming dynasty. Neither task is easy. In the latter case, the cultural distance is stark and large, and so the difficulty of thinking historically about Ming politics and aesthetics – especially given the linguistic obstacles – can be overwhelming. In the former case, the challenge may seem smaller because of our relative proximity to Jefferson as a “founding father” of our own nation. But the difficulties in thinking about Jefferson are equally daunting because the point is neither to enshrine him as the author of the Declaration of Independence nor to pillory him as an apologist for slavery. The point is to understand how a man of his intelligence and learning could combine in one cultivated mind the advocacy of human rights and the defense of slavery. If we can help our students actually to enter Jefferson’s mind by feeling the force of the ideas and attitudes he drew from his own culture, we will have gotten them started on “thinking historically.” As a teacher, I must and do believe that thinking about the past is at least a partial antidote to smugness in and about the present.

Thinking is hard work – and inciting thinking in someone else may be even harder. Only well educated, well compensated, and well respected teachers can possibly do it. Sizer’s list of the requisite minimal conditions seems about right: “Respect. A fair wage. Appropriate conditions for work. Authority.”

Among the rewarding experiences of my own professional life was the time I spent some years ago leading a seminar

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sponsored by the National Humanities Center for a group of teachers from a nearby North Carolina public high school.¹ The aim was to give these teachers a chance to recover the intellectual and moral passion they had originally felt for their calling – to treat them not as functionaries of a bureaucratic system that besieges them with training sessions and “enrichment” protocols, but to treat them as mentors, pastors, and, most of all, as thinking citizens. Since then, through the education initiatives that supplement its residential fellowship program, the National Humanities Center has continued to bring humanist scholars into the classroom with high

¹ I described this experience in a short article entitled “Converting Life into Truth: Seminars for High School Teachers,” *Ideas: Journal of the National Humanities Center* 4 (2) (1996): 59–62.

school teachers – on the premise that they deserve attention and respect from those of us lucky enough to make our living in institutions of higher learning.

Other private and public organizations, including the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, have mounted similar efforts. I hope that the presidents and deans of our colleges and universities will recognize the crisis of morale in K-12 education and will find ways to encourage their faculty members to work with front-line teachers, who are our best defense against the threats Ravitch describes. In pointing out that the problems she identifies are not novel but chronic, Sizer and Gardner give us all the more reason to decry and assail them.

Joseph A. Buttigieg

On Gramsci

Antonio Gramsci was born in Sardinia in 1891 and died in Rome in 1937. Frail from birth – he was less than five feet tall – he suffered from poor health throughout much of his life. Awarded a scholarship to attend the University of Turin, he joined the Socialist Party in 1914, on the eve of the Great War. Seven years later, already well-known as a journalist and as a leader of Turin’s insurgent factory council movement, Gramsci joined a walkout at a Socialist congress in Livorno and helped to found the Italian Communist Party, subsequently representing the party as a member of Parliament. In 1926, four years after the rise to power of Mussolini’s fascists, Gramsci was arrested and imprisoned, despite his immunity as a legislator. While in prison, he kept a series of notebooks that

were posthumously published starting in 1948 – thus securing Gramsci’s reputation as perhaps the most original Marxist thinker of his generation.

There is no significant phase of Antonio Gramsci’s life, political activity, and writings in which some aspect or another of educational theory and practice does not figure prominently. The very fact that he was able to acquire an education at all, let alone go on to become one of the leading intellectuals of his generation, is remarkable in itself. His physical debility and his family’s straitened circumstances, to say nothing of the logistical difficulties of having to attend schools that were far from his small town of Ghilarza, he seems to have overcome through sheer determination. How he managed to compensate for the woe-filled inadequacies of the Sardinian schools (themselves on the periphery of the notoriously weak Italian educational system) he attended, with their primitive facilities, retrograde pedagogical practices, and many poorly qualified teachers, is not so easy to explain.

The letters he wrote to his family during his years in prison contain many retrospective vignettes of his childhood from which one gathers that while he greatly enjoyed playing outdoors in the countryside, he was also an avid reader

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with a good memory, and had the necessary self-discipline to study hard. When, thanks to a scholarship, he moved to Turin, then Italy's most industrially advanced city, to attend university, he was further hampered by poor health and abject poverty, even while adjusting to a radically different environment. Again, his hunger for learning enabled him to surmount the obstacles and extract all he could from the academic and cultural opportunities available to him.

Whether Gramsci ever actually graduated from the University of Turin remains unclear, and ultimately does not much matter – except, of course, to a biographer. What does matter is that Gramsci's enormous sacrifices to acquire an education were not motivated by a desire for material success. He did not look at education as an avenue to professional qualification, much less to a lucrative career; nor did he seem to pine for an academic post. Instead, he regarded education as the “harmonious development” of one's personality and as a liberation from the constraints and limitations of one's immediate environment and social situation.

It is impossible to exaggerate the extent to which Gramsci's views on education are intertwined with his lived experiences. He returned frequently to the topic in his letters from prison, not out of nostalgia but for very immediate practical reasons. In addition to a profound interest in and concern about the development and education of his two sons, Delio and Giuliano, who were living with their mother in Moscow, he evinced an almost paternal preoccupation with the upbringing and schooling of his niece, Edmea, who was being brought up by his mother and sisters in Ghilarza.

The numerous letters in which Gramsci discusses the formation and the vari-

ous stages of development of the youngest members of his family need to be read alongside his reflections on education in the prison notebooks. Not only do the letters amplify and even help clarify the views and ideas set forth in the notebooks, they also enable one to appreciate how Gramsci's theorizing remains anchored in, and stems directly from, his analyses of concrete, material reality. This is not an aspect of Gramsci's thought that one may choose to ignore, especially since in many of his notes (including the selection that follows) Gramsci complained about the gap between what Francesco De Sanctis called “*scienza e vita*” – that is, between learning and life, between the intellectuals and the people, between theory and practice.

Gramsci's interest in education extended well beyond questions concerning the upbringing of children and their formal education from kindergarten through university. In his political activities among the Turin factory workers, in his prolific output as a journalist, and in his organizational work as a party leader, education occupies so central a place that it almost amounts to an obsession.

Gramsci is, perhaps, best known for his theories of culture and its intersections with politics. One must bear in mind, however, that his concepts of culture and education are inseparable. It is impossible not to notice how in his writing on culture he often uses the same vocabulary he employs when dealing with education. Thus, for example, one of his earliest articles, “Socialism and Culture” (1916), contains several phrases that recur in the notes on education reproduced below. Attacking a popular misconception of culture he writes: “We must rid ourselves of the habit of conceiving culture as encyclopedic knowledge; a concept in which man is regarded as a mere receptacle to be stuffed full

with empirical data and disconnected brute facts....” Instead, he goes on to explain, “culture is something quite different. It is organization, discipline of one’s inner self, a coming to terms with one’s personality; it is the attainment of a higher consciousness by means of which one succeeds in understanding one’s own historical value, one’s own function in life, one’s own rights and duties. But none of this can come about through spontaneous evolution....”

Convinced that the primary task of the workers’ movement was to remedy the failures of an educational system that condemned the less privileged strata of society to ignorance, cultural impoverishment, and hence political impotence, Gramsci dedicated much of his energy to the task of what today we would call “adult education” or “continuing education.” Without carefully studying this period of Gramsci’s life – including not only his writings but also his various initiatives to set up cultural associations, revitalize the socialist newspapers, launch correspondence courses, etc. – it would be difficult to arrive at an adequate understanding of the real significance of his concept of education and the thrust of his theories about it.

The prison notebooks are themselves a product of Gramsci’s views on education. The primary reason why he so desperately sought to obtain permission to write in his cell was that he believed it to be the duty of the political prisoner to use his time in jail to study; and, in order to study seriously and in a “disciplined” manner, Gramsci felt he needed to take notes, and to organize his ideas more or less systematically in writing.

Gramsci’s prison notebooks are thus a monument to the kind of rigorous self-discipline that, in his view, a good education should impart.

This is not, however, what makes it necessary for anyone seriously interest-

ed in Gramsci’s views on education to read the notebooks in their entirety. The need arises, rather, from the singular nature of the program of study and research that Gramsci undertook and of which the notebooks are the direct record. They constitute a massive, labyrinthine, fragmentary work in progress in which Gramsci pursued various threads of inquiry, which crisscrossed repeatedly to form an intricately woven ensemble of analyses, critiques, and theories. As a result, it is virtually impossible to pursue one motif, no matter how major, independently of several others. The small selection of notes on education reproduced here represent only a fraction of the numerous pages Gramsci wrote that, in some way or another, pertain to the topic of education.

Their immediate context is a “special” notebook in which Gramsci transcribed, with substantial modifications, some notes he had written in an earlier notebook (Notebook 4) on the question of the intellectuals. Yet, it is not sufficient to just bear in mind that Gramsci approached educational issues and problems within the larger context of an inquiry into the function of intellectuals in society and the (in his view, none too glorious) role they played in Italian history. The full resonance of these selected passages would be missed – and, indeed, some of the observations they contain may be misunderstood – if one were to ignore Gramsci’s two-pronged refutation of positivism and idealism, or his copious reflections on folklore, religion, language, journalism, popular literature, Americanism and Fordism, the role of the political party as an educator in civil society, the state of Italian culture, the history of subaltern social groups, and the “Southern question.” Above all, the role of education in Gramsci’s thought cannot be properly appreciated unless one recognizes that it resides at the very

core of his concept of hegemony. “Every relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship,” he wrote (Notebook 10, II, §44). It would be fruitless, however, to try to locate the concept of hegemony in a specific note or notebook; it is the leitmotif of his entire prison opus.

One need hardly add that any serious interpretation of Gramsci’s notes on education would have to take into account the specific policies that were enacted by Mussolini’s government, the views of the minister of education and philosopher Giovanni Gentile who designed the fascist school reform, and the fact that Gramsci’s ability to criticize the regime’s policies openly and directly was severely limited by the prison censor’s watchful eye. Still, it is not difficult to decipher Gramsci’s main objections to Gentile’s policy.

In his notes, Gramsci criticizes both the deleterious effects of the Gentile reform and also the philosophical rationale behind the reforms. This rationale appears in a series of lectures that Gentile had delivered in Trieste some years prior to becoming minister of education. The lectures were deemed important enough at the time to be published even in English (with a laudatory preface by Benedetto Croce) in a volume entitled, precisely, *The Reform of Education* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1922). Gentile’s starting point was philosophical idealism; his educational reform was a translation of his abstract theories into practice – a practice imposed upon an entire nation.

One of the salient features of the “*ri-forma* Gentile,” enacted on May 6, 1923, was its separation of technical and vocational training from “classical” education. Through a system of exams, Gentile’s reform made sure that “classical” education was reserved for the prepara-

tion of select students who were meant to move on to the universities. (Not incidentally, it also made religious instruction mandatory only at the elementary school level.)

Gramsci thought that the new system was discriminatory; it perpetuated the exclusion of the majority of peasant and working-class children from the influential upper rungs of the social hierarchy by channeling them at a very early age into vocational tracks. He also disapproved of the additional barriers the fascist policy presented to women in pursuit of a full education. In a letter of May 4, 1931 to his sister Teresina, in which he alludes indirectly to the fascist government’s insistence that the primary responsibility of women was to bear and rear children, Gramsci wrote: “today in our country feminine activity confronts very unfavorable conditions, even from the early years in school, such as, for example, the exclusion of young girls from scholarships, etc., so that in the competition women must have qualities superior to those demanded of males, and be endowed with a greater measure of tenacity and perseverance.”

Gramsci’s unapologetically progressive views on the education of women must be borne in mind, lest the circumlocutory remarks in the notebooks about the “old” school be taken to suggest that Gramsci was advocating the preservation of, or a return to, Italy’s educational system before the 1920s. Nothing could be further from the truth. In his thinking about education, as in his theories of culture more generally, Gramsci’s starting point was invariably his lived experience, out of which he sought to distill the basic elements of a rigorous educational philosophy – and the lineaments of a democratic and equitable national school policy.

Antonio Gramsci

From the 'Prison Notebooks'

Selected and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg

§1. ...One may say, in general, that in modern civilization all practical activities have become so complex and the sciences¹ so intertwined with life that each practical activity tends to create a school for its own administrators and specialists and, hence, to create a group of advanced specialist intellectuals to teach in these schools. Thus, alongside the type of school that may be called "humanistic" – namely, the oldest traditional type of school whose purpose it was to develop in each individual human being an as-yet-undifferentiated general culture, the fundamental power to think and to find a direction in life – a whole system of special schools is being created at various levels for entire vocational branches, or for professions that are already specialized and precisely defined.

Indeed, one may say that the educational crisis raging today is linked, precisely, to the fact that this process of differentiation and specialization is taking place chaotically, without clear and precise principles, without a carefully studied and consciously established plan. The crisis of the curriculum and organization of the schools – that is, of the gen-

eral orientation of a policy for the formation of modern intellectual cadres – is, to a great extent, an aspect and a complication of the more general and comprehensive organic crisis.

The fundamental division of schools into classical and vocational was a rational scheme: the vocational school for the instrumental classes, the classical school for the dominant classes and the intellectuals. The development of an industrial base in both city and country increased the need for the new type of urban intellectual: the technical school (vocational but not manual) was developed alongside the classical school. This, in turn, called into question the very principle of the concrete pursuit of general culture, of the humanistic pursuit of general culture based on the Graeco-Roman tradition. This pursuit, once questioned, can be said to be destroyed, since its formative capacity was largely based on the general and traditionally unquestioned prestige enjoyed by a particular form of civilization.

The tendency today is to abolish every type of school that is "disinterested" (not motivated by immediate interests) and "formative"; or else, to leave only a scaled-down specimen of such a school for a tiny elite of gentlemen and ladies who need not bother with preparing

¹ In this instance, "sciences" (*scienze* in the original Italian) is used in the sense of "branches of knowledge."

themselves for a future career. The tendency is to continue propagating specialized vocational schools in which the student's destiny and future activity are predetermined. The crisis will have a solution, which, logically, should be along the following lines: to start with, a common school of general, humanistic, formative culture that properly balances the development of the capacity for working manually (technically, industrially) with the development of the capacities for intellectual work. From this type of common school, the students, having gone through repeated tests in vocational orientation, would move on to one of the specialized schools or to productive work.

One must bear in mind the growing tendency of every practical activity to create for itself a special school, just as every intellectual activity tends to create its own cultural associations. These associations assume the function of post-scholastic institutions that specialize in setting up the conditions that enable one to keep abreast of advances made in one's field of expertise. One may also point out that, increasingly, decision-making bodies tend to separate their activity into two "organic" aspects: the deliberative activity, which is of the essence to them; and the technical-cultural activity wherein questions that need to be resolved are first examined by experts and analyzed scientifically. The latter activity has already created an entire bureaucratic corps of a new structure; for in addition to the specialized bureaus of experts who prepare the technical materials for the deliberative bodies, a second body is created, made up of functionaries who are, more or less, disinterested "volunteers" selected from industry, banking, and finance companies.

This is one of the mechanisms by which the career bureaucracy ended up

controlling the democratic regimes and parliaments; the mechanism is now extending itself organically and it is absorbing within its circle the great specialists of private enterprise, which thus controls regimes as well as bureaucracies. This is a necessary, organic development that tends to integrate personnel specialized in political technique with personnel specialized in the concrete problems of administering the essential practical activities of the great and complex societies of modern nations. Any effort to exorcise these tendencies from the outside is, therefore, futile; it only gives rise to moralistic sermons and rhetorical jeremiads.

One must consider the question of modifying the training of the technical-cultural personnel, completing their culture in keeping with the new exigencies, and of developing new types of specialized functionaries so that, collectively, they would complement deliberative activity. The traditional type of political "leader," whose only training was for juridical-formal activities, is becoming anachronistic and represents a danger to the life of the State: the leader must possess that minimum of general technical culture that will enable him, if not to independently "produce" the right solution, at least to assess the solutions proposed by the experts and then choose the correct one from the "synthetic" viewpoint of political technique....

An important issue that needs to be examined when dealing with the practical organization of the common school concerns the various school grades that correspond to the age and the intellectual-moral development of the students and the goals that the school strives for. The common school, or the school of humanistic formation (with "humanism" understood broadly, and not just in the

traditional sense) or general culture, should aim to insert young people into active life after bringing them to a certain level of maturity, of intellectual and practical creative ability, and of an independent sense of direction and initiative. The fixing of the age for compulsory education depends on the general economic conditions; for the economic conditions may make it necessary to demand of youngsters and of children some immediate productive contribution. The common school depends on the ability of the State to underwrite the expense of the schoolchildren's maintenance currently borne by the family; in other words, it transforms the budget of the nation's ministry of education from top to bottom, complicating it, and enlarging it to an unprecedented degree.

The whole function of educating and forming the new generations becomes public instead of private, because only thus can it embrace all the generations without divisions of group or caste. This transformation of scholastic activity, however, requires an unprecedented expansion of the practical organization of the school system; that is, of buildings, scientific materials, the teaching corps, etc. The teaching corps, especially, would have to be enlarged since the lower the ratio between schoolchildren and teachers, the greater and more thorough the effectiveness of the school – but this brings with it other problems, for which there is no easy or quick solution. The problem of buildings is not simple either, because this type of school should be a boarding school with dormitories, dining halls, specialized libraries, rooms suitable for seminar work, etc. Initially, then, the new type of school will have to be, and cannot but be, specifically for restricted groups of youngsters selected through competition or officially recommended by appropriate institutions.

The common school should correspond to the period that is currently represented by the elementary and secondary schools, reorganized not only in terms of content and teaching methods but also in terms of the various levels of the educational process. The first elementary level should not be longer than three to four years, and besides inculcating the fundamental “instrumental” elements of learning – reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history – it should devote special attention to something that is currently being ignored: “rights and duties”; namely, the basic notions of State and society as primordial elements of a new conception of the world that opposes the conceptions of the world conveyed by various traditional environments, or what one might call folkloristic conceptions of the world. The didactic problem that has to be worked out: how to attenuate and enliven the dogmatic approach that necessarily characterizes these early years. The rest of the course should not last longer than six years, so that it should be possible to complete all the grades of the common school by the age of fifteen or sixteen.

One might object that such a course of study is too hard because it is too fast paced for it to achieve effectively the results that the present system of classical education aspires to but fails to achieve. On the other hand, one may say that the new system, taken as a whole, should contain within it the general elements that in fact make the present system too slow, at least for some of the students. Which elements are these? In a number of families, particularly among the intellectual strata, children find in their family life a preparation, extension, and integration of school life; they absorb from the “atmosphere,” as it were, a whole assortment of notions and aptitudes that facilitate their educational progress in

the formal sense. They have already acquired and they develop knowledge of literary language, that is, the means of expression and of knowledge that is technically superior to that of the average school population between the ages of six and twelve.

Thus, urban schoolchildren, by the very fact of living in a city, have already absorbed by the age of six a wide assortment of notions and aptitudes that make their progress through school easier, more profitable, and faster. The essential elements, at least, of these conditions must be established in the organization of the common school. Furthermore, one must assume that the development of the common school would be paralleled by the development of a network of kindergartens and other institutions in which, even before they reach school age, children would become accustomed to a certain collective discipline and acquire preschool notions and aptitudes. In fact, the common school should be organized like a boarding-school with a collective life, twenty-four hours a day: a school that is freed from the existing forms of hypocritical and mechanical discipline, and where studying would be done collectively with the assistance of the teachers and of the better students, also during periods of so-called individual study, etc.

The fundamental problem arises during that stage in the existing school system that is now represented by the lycée. As a form of instruction, the lycée of today does not differ in the least from the earlier grades, except for the abstract assumption that, as a result of being older and of the experience they have already accumulated, the students are more mature intellectually and morally.

In fact, between the lycée and the university – that is, between the school

proper and life – there is a leap, a real break in continuity, and not a rational transition from quantity (age) to quality (intellectual and moral maturity). There is a shift from an almost purely dogmatic form of teaching, in which memorization has an important role, to a creative phase of autonomous and independent work; a shift from school, where the discipline of studying is authoritatively imposed and controlled, to a phase of study or professional work in which intellectual self-discipline and moral independence are theoretically unlimited. And this takes place immediately after the crisis of puberty when the ardor of instinctive and elemental passions is still struggling against the restraints of character and moral conscience in a formative state. In Italy, moreover, where the “seminar” system is not widespread in the universities, the shift is all the more brutal and mechanical.

For this reason, then, the final phase of the common school must be conceived and structured as the decisive phase, during which the aim of the school is to create the fundamental values of “humanism,” the intellectual self-discipline and moral independence needed for subsequent specialization, whether of a scientific character (university studies) or of a directly practical-productive character (industry, civil service, business administration, etc.). The study and learning of creative methods in science and in life must begin in this final phase and no longer be a monopoly of the university or be left to the vagaries of practical life. This phase of school must already contribute to developing the element of independent responsibility in individuals; it must be a creative school.

(A distinction must be made between the creative school and the active school – including the active school shaped by

the Dalton method.² The common school is entirely an active school, even though it is necessary to place limits on libertarian ideologies in this field and to affirm vigorously the duty of the adult generations – that is, of the State – to “shape” the new generations. The active school is still in its romantic phase, in which the elements of struggle against the mechanical and Jesuitical school have been morbidly exaggerated for oppositional and polemical reasons; it must enter the “classical,” rational phase and find in the goals it seeks to attain the natural source for developing its forms and methods. The creative school is the apex of the active school. The purpose of the first phase is to discipline and hence, also, to level out; to obtain a certain kind of “conformism,” which may be called “dynamic.” With the “collectivization” of the social type as a foundation, the purpose of the creative phase is to expand the personality that has now become independent and responsible, but with a solid and homogeneous moral and social conscience. Thus, a creative school does not mean a school of “inventors and discoverers”; it indicates a phase and a method of research and of knowledge rather than a “pre-determined” program that demands originality and innovation at all costs. It indicates that learning occurs, primarily, through the student’s spontaneous and independent effort; the teacher functions only as a friendly guide, as happens, or should happen, in the university. To discover a truth by oneself, without external suggestions and prompt-

ings, is a creation, even if the truth is an old one – it demonstrates one’s mastery of a method. It indicates that, in any case, one has entered the phase of intellectual maturity in which new truths may be discovered. In this phase, then, the basic learning activity will take place in seminars, libraries, and experimental laboratories; the organic information for a professional orientation will be acquired in this phase.)

The advent of the common school signals the beginning of new relations between intellectual work and industrial work, not only in the school but in social life as a whole. The common school principle, therefore, will be reflected in all the organisms of culture, transforming them and giving them a new content. The question of the new role that the universities and the academies might assume. Today these two institutions are independent from one another, and the academies are the symbol – often justifiably ridiculed – of the existing disjunction between high culture and life, between the intellectuals and the people (hence the measure of success enjoyed by the Futurists in their early period of anti-academic, anti-traditionalist, etc., *Sturm und Drang*). In the new system of relations between life and culture, between intellectual work and industrial work, the academies will have to become the cultural organizations (for intellectual coordination, growth, and creativity) of those individuals who on completion of the common school move on to professional work; and the academies will also have to become the forums for the encounters between those individuals and the denizens of the universities. Those members of society who are engaged in professional work must not lapse into intellectual passivity; they should have available to them (through collective rather than individual initia-

2 In Notebook 9, §119, Gramsci remarks that the “Dalton method is nothing other than an extension to secondary schools of the methods of study followed in Italian universities where the student is left completely free to study on his own.”

tive, as an organic social function recognized as a public necessity and utility) specialized institutes in every branch of research and scientific work with which they may collaborate and in which they will find all the necessary support for whatever cultural activity they might want to engage in. The whole system of academies has to be reorganized and revitalized from top to bottom....

§2. *Observations on the school – in search of the educational principle.* The split, produced by Gentile's reform, between elementary and secondary school on the one hand and high school on the other. Prior to the reform, a very marked division of this kind existed only between vocational school on the one hand and secondary school and high school on the other. Elementary school was placed in a kind of limbo because of some of its particular characteristics.

In the elementary schools there used to be two components that contributed to the education and formation of children: the basic elements of natural science and the notions of the citizen's rights and duties. The basic elements of science were meant to introduce the child into the *societas rerum*; the notions of rights and duties were meant to introduce him into civil society and the life of the State. The scientific ideas clashed with the magical conception of the world and nature that the child absorbs from an environment imbued with folklore. Likewise, the notions of rights and duties clashed with the inclination toward individualistic and provincialist barbarism, which is itself an aspect of folklore. School education struggles against folklore and all its sedimentations of traditional conceptions of the world, in order to propagate a more modern conception.

The basic, rudimentary elements of the modern conception of the world are acquired by learning of the existence of the laws of nature, that they are objective and intractable, and that man has to adapt himself to them in order to master them; and by learning of the existence of civil and State laws, that they are the product of human activity, and that they are established by men and can be altered by men for the purposes of collective development. Civil and State laws organize humans in the manner that is historically most suitable to enable them to master the laws of nature, that is, to facilitate their work.

Work is the specifically human way of actively participating in natural life in order to transform it and socialize it more and more thoroughly and extensively. One may say, then, that the educational principle upon which the primary schools rested was the concept of work. The power of expansion and productivity of work cannot be fully realized without an accurate and realistic knowledge of the laws of nature, and without a legal order that organically regulates human interaction – a legal order that must be respected through spontaneous conviction and not just as an external imposition; a legal order that men must, of necessity, recognize and propose to themselves as freedom, and not merely out of coercion. The concept and the fact of work (of theoretical-practical activity) is the immanent educational principle in the elementary school, because it is by means of work that the social and State (rights and duties) order is introduced and integrated into the natural order.

The concept of equilibrium between the social order and the natural order based on work, on human theoretical-practical activity, produces the first elements of a perception of the world free

from all magic and sorcery and provides the ground for the subsequent development of a historical, dialectical conception of the world. This enables one to understand movement and flux, to appreciate the amount of effort and sacrifice that the present has cost the past and that the future is costing the present, to understand the present as a synthesis of the past, of all past generations, projecting itself into the future. This is what the elementary school was based on. Whether it yielded all its fruits, whether the teaching corps was consciously aware of their task and its philosophical content is another question. It is a question that entails a critique of the level of civic consciousness of the entire nation of which the teaching corps was merely an expression – albeit, a more dismal expression, and definitely not an avant-garde.

It is not entirely true that instruction differs from education; the excessive insistence on this distinction has been a serious error of idealist pedagogy, and its consequences are already evident in the school system that has been reorganized by this pedagogical theory. Instruction is quite different from education only if one assumes that the learner is merely passive, a “mechanical recipient” of abstract notions, which is not only absurd but is even “abstractly” denied by the very same supporters of pure education who oppose mere mechanical instruction. The “certain” becomes “true”³ in the consciousness of the child.

The child’s consciousness, however, is not something “individual” (still less

individualized); it is, rather, the reflection of that segment of civil society in which the child participates, of the social relations established within his family, neighborhood, village, etc. The individual consciousness of the overwhelming majority of children reflects civil and cultural relations that are different from and antagonistic to those represented in the school curriculum: the “certain” of an advanced culture becomes “true” within the framework of fossilized and anachronistic culture.

There is no unity between school and life; hence, there is no unity between instruction and education. Therefore, it can be said that, in the school, the instruction-education nexus can only be enacted by the living work of the teacher – provided that the teacher is aware of the differences between the type of culture and society that he represents and the type of society and culture represented by the students, and that he is aware of his duty to accelerate and control the child’s formation in keeping with the struggle of the superior type of culture and society against the inferior one.

If the teaching corps is inept and the instruction-education nexus is unraveled in order to resolve the problem of teaching with flimsy schemes exalting the educational principle, the teacher’s work will become even more deficient. The result will be rhetorical schools devoid of seriousness, because the certain will lack material solidity and the true will consist only of words – precisely rhetoric. The degeneration is even more evident in the literature and philosophy courses at the secondary level.

Previously, students at least accumulated a certain “baggage” or (if one prefers) a “fund” of concrete notions; now that the teacher is expected to be primarily a philosopher and an aesthete, the student ignores concrete notions and

3 Gramsci is alluding to a distinction made by Giambattista Vico in *La scienza nuova* (1725); for example, in §137: “Men who do not know what is true of things take care to hold fast to what is certain.” For a complete English translation, see *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas G. Bergin and Max H. Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).

“fills his head” with formulae and words that, more often than not, mean nothing to him and are promptly forgotten. The battle against the old school system was justified, but reforming it was not so simple as it appeared. Curricular plans were not the problem, people were – not the persons who were teachers themselves, but the entire social complex of which people are the expression.

In reality, a mediocre teacher may succeed in making his students become better *informed*; he will not be able to make them better educated. He will go through the mechanical part of the lessons scrupulously with the conscientiousness of a bureaucrat; and, if the student has an active mind, he will give order to the accumulated “baggage” on his own and with the help of his social milieu. With the new programs, which coincide with a general lowering of standards in the teaching corps, there will not be any “baggage” to put in order. The new programs should have abolished examinations entirely: to sit for an examination now must be a terribly greater “gamble” than before. A date is always a date, whoever the examiner might be, and a definition is always a definition. But a judgment? An aesthetic or philosophical analysis?

The educational efficacy of the old Italian secondary system, as it was set up by the old Casati law,⁴ was not to be sought in (or negated by) its declared aim to be (or not be) an “educative” school system. Rather, one must look at the fact that its structure and programs were the

expression of a traditional mode of intellectual and moral life, of a cultural climate that thanks to a most ancient tradition permeated all of Italian society. This climate and way of life became moribund and the school lost touch with life – hence the crisis in education. Critiques of the programs and disciplinary structure of the old school system mean less than nothing if they fail to take these circumstances into account.

So, one comes back to the truly active participation of the student in the school, which is only possible if the school is linked to life. The more the new programs affirm and theorize the student’s activity and his working relationship with the teacher, the more they are designed as if the student were merely passive.

In the old school, the grammatical study of Greek and Latin, together with the study of their respective literatures and political histories, constituted an educational principle – in that, the humanistic ideal symbolized by Athens and Rome permeated the entire society; it was an essential component of the nation’s life and culture. Even the mechanical character of the study of grammar was motivated by the cultural perspective. Individual elements were not learned for an immediate practical-professional purpose: it seemed disinterested, because the interest was, rather, the interior development of personality, the formation of character through the absorption and assimilation of the whole cultural past of modern European civilization. One did not learn Latin and Greek in order to speak them, to become

4 The Casati Educational Law (named after Vittorio Emanuele II’s minister Gabrio Casati), enacted in 1859, established for the first time a comprehensive and centralized system of public education in Piedmont and Lombardy. After unification, the provisions and regulations of the “Casati Act” (as it was also known) were

made to apply to the whole country. Although it underwent some modifications over the years, the Casati Law remained the basis of the Italian educational system until it was replaced by the Gentile Reform in 1923.

a waiter, an interpreter, or to write business letters. One learned them in order to know first hand the civilization of the Greek and Roman people, which was the necessary precondition of modern civilization; in other words, one learned these things in order to be oneself and to know oneself consciously. Latin and Greek were learned by way of grammar, mechanically; but the charges of mechanistic aridity are very unjust and inappropriate.

This issue concerns children; they should be made to acquire certain habits of diligence, precision, physical composure, mental concentration on particular subjects – these things cannot be acquired without a mechanical repetition of disciplined and methodical acts. Would a forty-year-old scholar be able to sit at a desk for sixteen hours on end if, as a child, he had not acquired compulsorily, through mechanical coercion, the appropriate psychophysical habits? This is where one has to start if one wants to bring up great scholars, and pressure must be applied across the schools in order to be able to produce those thousand, or hundreds, or just dozens of first-rate scholars that every civilization requires. (To be sure, there is much that can be improved in this field by means of adequate financial support for scholarship, and without resorting to educational methods of the Jesuits.)

Latin is learned (or, rather, it is studied) and it is analyzed down to its smallest basic units; it is analyzed as a dead thing. This is true, but every analysis carried out by a child is bound to be an analysis of a dead thing. Besides, one must not forget that wherever Latin is studied in these ways, the life of the Romans is a myth that, to a certain extent, has already interested and still interests the child, so that the dead always harbors the presence of a greater living being. So, the language is dead, it is ana-

lyzed as an inert object, as a cadaver on the dissecting table, but it comes back to life continuously in the examples and the stories. Could Italian be studied in the same way? Impossible. No living language could be studied in the same way as Latin: it would be and *would seem* absurd.

No child knows Latin when he starts to study it with this kind of analytic method. A living language could be known, and it would take just one child who knows it to break the spell: everybody would rush to the Berlitz school. Latin (like Greek) appears to the imagination like a myth, even for the teacher. One does not study Latin in order to learn Latin. For a long time, in keeping with a cultural-scholastic tradition whose origin and development one might research, Latin has been studied as an element in an ideal educational program – an element that epitomizes and fulfills a whole set of pedagogical and psychological requirements.

It has been studied to accustom children to studying in a particular manner, to analyzing a body of history that can be treated as a cadaver that returns continually to life; to accustom them to reasoning, to schematic abstraction (while retaining the ability to descend from abstraction back into real, immediate life), to perceiving in every fact or datum what is general (the concept) and what is particular (the specific). How could the continuous comparison between Latin and the language one speaks not be educationally significant? It encompasses the distinction and definition of words and concepts; the whole of formal logic, including the contradiction between opposites and the analysis of distincts;⁵ the historical movement of

5 For Gramsci's critique of Benedetto Croce's "dialectic of distincts" see, especially, Notebook 10.

language as a whole that changes over time and is not static. . . .

This does not mean (and it would be foolish to think so) that Latin and Greek, as such, have intrinsic thaumaturgical qualities in the sphere of education. It is the whole cultural tradition, which lives on even – and especially – outside the school, that in a given milieu produces these particular results. Besides, one can see how the transformation of the traditional sense of culture has plunged education – and the study of Greek and Latin – into a crisis.

It will be necessary to replace Latin and Greek as the fulcrum of the formative school, and they will be replaced; but it will not be easy to deploy the new subject or set or subjects in a didactic arrangement that yields equivalent results in the educational and general formation of the individual from the childhood years to the time he is old enough to choose a career. During this span of time, the course of study, or most of it, must be (or, appear to the students to be) disinterested; in other words, it must not have immediate, or too immediate, practical purposes: it must be formative while being “instructive,” that is, rich in concrete information.

In the present school, a process of continuing degeneration is taking place because of the deep crisis in the traditional culture and the conception of life and man. The vocational schools, which seek to satisfy immediate practical interests, are gaining the upper hand over the formative school, which does not have an immediate interest. The greatest paradox is that this new type of school appears and is proclaimed to be democratic, when in fact it is designed not only to perpetuate social differences but to crystallize them in Chinese forms.

The traditional school was oligarchic because it was intended for the children of the ruling groups who were themselves destined to rule; but it was not its mode of teaching that made it oligarchic. It is not its students' acquisition of leadership skills, nor its propensity to form superior individuals that gives a particular school its social character. The social character of the school is determined by the fact that every social group has its own type of school designed to perpetuate the specific traditional function – ruling or subordinate – of the given social stratum. In order to break this pattern, then, one must not multiply and classify vocational types of school but rather create a unified type of preparatory (elementary-secondary) school that would guide the youngster to the threshold of choosing a career and, in the process, form him as a person capable of thinking, studying, and ruling – or controlling those who rule.

The multiplication of types of vocational school, then, tends to perpetuate traditional distinctions; but since it also tends to give rise to new stratifications within these distinctions, it gives the impression of aiming for democracy. Take, for example, the unskilled laborer and the skilled worker, or the peasant and the surveyor, or the petty agronomist, etc. But the trend toward democracy, in essence, cannot mean merely that an unskilled laborer can become a skilled worker, but rather that every “citizen” can acquire the ability to “govern” and that society places him, even if only “abstractly,” in general conditions to make this possible. Political democracy aims at removing the difference between those who govern and those who are governed (in the sense of government with the consent of the governed) by ensuring that those who are governed

acquire gratis the skills and general technical preparation that are needed. But the type of school that is being developed as a school for the people does not even attempt to keep up this illusion. School is being organized increasingly in such a way as to restrict the base of the governing stratum in possession of technical preparation – this is taking place in a social and political environment that further restricts the possibility of obtaining these skills and technical-political preparation through “personal initiative.” As a result, instead of overcoming social group divisions there is a return to juridically fixed and ossified “rank” divisions. The multiplication of vocational schools – in which, increasingly, specialization starts at the very outset of one’s education – is one of the most conspicuous manifestations of this tendency.

Apropos of dogmatism and critical history in the elementary and secondary schools: it should be noted that the new pedagogy has chosen to attack dogmatism in the schools by targeting the field of instruction and the learning of concrete information. In other words, it has chosen to attack precisely that field in which a certain dogmatism is practically indispensable and can be reabsorbed and loosened only in the course of the whole cycle of the program of study (one cannot teach historical grammar in elementary and middle school). Yet, the new pedagogy has been forced to put up with the introduction of dogmatism par excellence in the field of religious thought and, implicitly, to see the entire history of philosophy described as a succession of wild ideas and delusions.

The teaching of philosophy: the new course of study impoverishes education and, in practice, lowers its level (at least for the overwhelming majority of students who do not receive intellectual support outside the school from their family or their home environment, and

who must rely solely on the information they receive in the classroom). To be sure, from a rationalistic viewpoint, the new course of study looks fine, as fine as a utopia. Traditional descriptive philosophy, reinforced by a course in the history of philosophy and by the reading of a certain number of philosophers, seems to be the best practical thing. Descriptive and definitional philosophy may be an abstraction, just like grammar and mathematics, but it is pedagogically and didactically necessary. 1=1 is an abstraction, but nobody is led to think that 1 fly equals 1 elephant. The rules of logic, too, are abstractions of the same kind; they are like the grammar of normal thought, but they still need to be studied because they are not innate – they are acquired through work and reflection.

The new curriculum assumes that thinking presupposes formal logic, but it does not explain how one acquires it; so, in practice, the new curriculum assumes that formal logic is innate. Formal logic is like grammar: it is assimilated in a “living” way, even though it is necessarily apprehended schematically and abstractly. For the student is not a gramophone record, a passive and mechanical receptacle, even if the ritual conventionalism of exams sometimes makes him look like one. The relation between these educational systems and the mind of the child is always active and creative, just like a worker’s relation to his tools. A calibrating instrument, too, is an ensemble of abstractions and, yet, without calibration it is not possible to produce real objects – real objects that are social relations and implicitly contain ideas. The child who toils over *Barbara*, *Bàràlipton*⁶ performs a strenuous task, to be sure, and ways should be found to en-

6 “*Barbara*” and “*Bàràlipton*” were terms used by students as mnemonic devices for memorizing different types of syllogism in classical logic.

sure that he doesn't have to work any harder than is absolutely necessary. It is equally true, however, that he will always have to work hard to learn to control himself and his physical movements; in other words he has to go through a psycho-physical apprenticeship. Many people have to be persuaded that studying, too, is a job and a very tiring one, with its own special apprenticeship, not only of the intellect but of the muscular-nervous system as well. It is a process of adaptation, a habit acquired with effort, pain, and tedium. The growth of mass participation in secondary education brings with it the tendency to slacken the discipline of studying, to call for an "easing off."

Many even regard the difficulties of study as artificial, since they are accustomed to think that only manual labor is hard and strenuous work. It is a complex issue. Undoubtedly, the child of a traditionally intellectual family gets through the process of psychophysical adaptation more easily: even as he enters the classroom for the first time, he already has numerous advantages over the other students. He has already learned from family traditions how to fit in; he finds it easier to concentrate since he is already used to physical self-discipline, etc. Similarly, the son of a city worker suffers less when he starts working in a factory than does a peasant's son or a young peasant already formed by rural life. Even diet has its importance, etc., etc. That is why many common people (when they do not regard themselves as stupid by nature) think that the difficulty of study entails some "trick" at their expense. They see the "gentleman" (and for many, especially in rural areas, gentleman means intellectual) complete, smoothly and with apparent ease, work that costs their sons tears and blood, and they think there is a "trick." In a new

[political] situation these problems may become very severe, and it will be necessary to resist the tendency to render easy that which cannot become easy without being perverted. If the goal is to produce a new stratum of intellectuals, with specialists of the highest caliber, from a social group that has not traditionally developed the appropriate aptitudes, there will be difficulties of unprecedented proportions to overcome.

§3. The distinction between intellectuals and nonintellectuals, in reality, refers only to the immediate social function of the professional category of intellectuals. In other words, it takes into account the preponderant aspect of a specific professional activity: whether it is weighted more heavily toward intellectual elaboration or toward muscular-nervous effort. This means that while one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of nonintellectuals, because nonintellectuals do not exist. Yet, the relation between the effort of intellectual-cerebral elaboration and muscular-nervous effort is not always the same; hence there are different levels of specific intellectual activity. There is no human activity that is totally devoid of some form of intellectual activity; *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*.

Apart from his own occupation, every individual, ultimately, carries on some form of intellectual activity; that is, he is a "philosopher," an artist, a man of taste, he shares a conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it – that is, he helps generate new ways of thinking. The problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals, then, consists in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that is present in everyone to a lesser or greater degree, modifying its re-

lation to the muscular-nervous effort. The goal is to arrive at a new equilibrium and to ensure that the muscular-nervous effort itself – insofar as it is an aspect of general practical activity that is perpetually changing the physical and social world – becomes the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world. Traditionally and in common parlance the intellectual is typified by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist. As a result, journalists who think of themselves as men of letters, philosophers, artists, also believe that they are the “true” intellectuals. In the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labor of even the most primitive and unqualified kind, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual. The weekly *L'Ordine Nuovo*⁷ operated on this basis to develop certain

forms of new intellectualism and produce its new concepts; and this contributed in no small measure to its success, since this approach corresponded to latent aspirations and was congruent with the development of the real forms of life.

The mode of existence of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, an exterior and momentary generator of sentiments and passions, but in active involvement in practical life, as constructor, organizer, “permanent persuader” – not a mere orator, and yet superior to the abstract mathematical spirit. From technique-as-work one moves on to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remains a “specialist” and does not become a “leader” (specialized + political).*

7 The first issue of the weekly *L'Ordine Nuovo*, co-founded by Gramsci, appeared on May 1, 1919. On the front page it displayed the slogan: “Educate yourselves because we’ll need all your intelligence. Rouse yourselves because we need all your enthusiasm. Organize yourselves because we need all your strength.” Within a year its print run grew to about 5,000 and was circulated mostly in Turin and the rest of Piedmont. In January 1921, *L'Ordine Nuovo* started

appearing as a daily. It was shut down in December 1922 following a series of violent attacks and repressive measures by fascist squads and the security forces aimed at intimidating communists and socialists in Turin.

*“Scattered Notes and Jottings for a Group of Essays on the History of the Intellectuals,” from Notebook 12, translated from Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, 4 vols., ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 1514 – 1551.

David E. Bloom & Joel E. Cohen

Education for all: an unfinished revolution

We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build the youth for our future.

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

Societies throughout history have acknowledged the importance of education to human progress. From ancient Egypt's Books of Instruction to ancient

Greece's Academy, from early Quranic schools to the modern Western world, civilizations have attempted to ensure their prosperity by educating their youth. Smaller societies, too, from villages in Yemen to dwellers in the African bush, have invested time and resources in education for similar reasons.

Universal education has been on the global agenda since the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed free and compulsory education to be a basic human right. The 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by all but two of the world's governments, reaffirmed this right as a legally binding obligation. Since then, there have been many high-level international commitments to education for all.¹ Several scholars have also envisioned broadening its reach. But none of these international declarations has sufficed to translate right into reality. None of these scholarly reports takes on the linkage of basic and secondary education with other parts of the education system and with other sectors. None gives a balanced consideration of all

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¹ Just this year, the World Bank announced a new effort to ensure that all children would receive an elementary education. At the same time, officials acknowledged that they would probably not reach this goal by the target date of 2015.

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modalities of education (in addition to the classical schoolroom). None identifies workable solutions to the economic, political, and cultural obstacles to achieving universal basic and secondary education. Finally, none of these international declarations endeavors to document in detail the globally transformative effects that would follow from educating well all the world's children with the equivalent of today's primary and secondary education.

There is ample room, then, for further inquiry and discussion oriented toward action at the global, national, and community levels. It cannot be taken for granted that the educational models and methods of today's industrial countries will be appropriate and feasible to bring education of high quality to all children in the rest of the world.

In recent decades, progress toward universal education has been unprecedented. Illiteracy in the developing world has fallen from 75 percent of people a century ago to less than 25 percent today. The average number of years spent in school in developing countries more than doubled between 1965 and 1990, from 2.1 to 4.4, among those age twenty-five and over.²

However, while the number of people with access to some schooling has increased, improvements at the secondary level have been patchy. Whether the lack of progress is due to a lack of political will, a lack of resources, bad implemen-

tation of good ideas, or other factors, separately or in combination, is unclear. Acknowledging past failures and finding out what went wrong, as well as finding the reasons for progress where progress occurred, are crucial to future success.

At the same time, improvements in the quality of primary education have also been less than impressive. In many areas, official statistics disguise fundamental flaws and exaggerate the progress made. Largely focused on enrollment and literacy, the data reveal little about the quality of education. (Even the concept of the "quality of education" is problematic, likely to be culturally dependent, and in need of further analysis and operational definition.)

Rote learning is the norm in many developing-country schools, and a lack of well-qualified teachers means that many children receive only the rudiments of an education. Many others whose attendance at school does not endure much beyond registration day miss even that. Of the 1993 cohort that entered primary school in developing countries, nearly one-fourth failed to reach the fifth grade.

Enrollment data also camouflage absenteeism and grade repetition. In inefficient educational systems, many students repeat years of schooling. In Brazil, for example, 26 percent of primary and 20 percent of lower secondary school students repeated their grades in 1997. On average, Brazilian students repeat over two years of classes, which accounts for a significant amount of the total years spent in school.³

Even with 4.4 years of education, the developing world lags far behind the industrialized countries, where the corresponding figure is 9.4 years. Over 45 per-

2 UNESCO, *Compendium of Statistics on Illiteracy*, 1990 ed. (Paris: UNESCO Office of Statistics, 1990); Robert J. Barro and Jong-Wha Lee, "International measures of schooling years and schooling quality," *American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings* 86 (2) (1996): 218–223; Task Force on Higher Education and Society, *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2000).

3 UNESCO/OECD World Indicators Programme, *Investing in Education: Analysis of the 1999 World Education Indicators* (Paris: OECD, 2000).

cent of adults in the world's least developed countries, moreover, are illiterate, and gender differences are wide.⁴ In low-income developing countries, according to World Bank figures for 1999, 19 percent of males and 31 percent of females aged fifteen to twenty-four years were illiterate.⁵

The authors of this essay are part of a collective effort to develop and implement a detailed program to make more progress in educating *all* of the world's children. We believe it is possible and desirable for all children to receive high-quality primary and secondary schooling, through ten or a dozen years of education, whether in traditional or nontraditional settings. In what follows, we will describe the background of our effort, and the steps underway to convert our vision into a workable plan – and a working reality.

In 1990, a World Conference on 'Education for All' was held at Jomtien, Thailand. The 155 countries represented at this conference jointly pledged to provide primary education for all by the year 2000, and to ensure that children and adults would "benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs."

Progress toward meeting these goals was reviewed ten years later at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal. Much had been achieved: for example, some countries have come close to achieving universal primary education since Jomtien. Much more remains to be done, however. The net enrollment ratio for primary education (that is, the number of pupils in the official school-age group as a percentage of the total popu-

lation in that age group) in sub-Saharan Africa rose from 54 percent in 1990 to 60 percent in 1998, and in southern and western Asia it rose from 67 percent to 74 percent over the same period.⁶ At this slow rate of progress, sub-Saharan Africa would require another half century, and southern and western Asia another quarter century, to obtain 97.5 percent net primary enrollment. Such progress is simply too slow. Parts of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa continue to lag behind. One hundred and thirteen million primary school-age children remained out of school as of early 2000, and the quality of educational delivery and responsiveness to student need remained patchy.

Enrollment ratios still vary widely by gender. For example, in 1998 the net enrollment ratio for primary education in sub-Saharan Africa was 66 percent for males, but only 54 percent for females; in the Middle East and North Africa, it was 80 percent for males and 71 percent for females; and in southern and western Asia, 79 percent for males and 67 percent for females. For the world as a whole, including developed countries, the primary net enrollment ratio was 87 percent for boys and 80 percent for girls.⁷

Demographic trends mean that developing world educational systems are likely to come under increasing pressure. While 1998 UN Population Division projections foresee few dramatic changes to the global school-age population over the next half-century as a whole, they project large increases in the countries that can least afford it.

The growing population of primary school-age children, in conjunction with raising primary school enrollment rates

4 UNESCO, *World Education Report* (Paris: UNESCO, 2000).

5 World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001).

6 UNESCO, *Education for All 2000 Assessment Statistical Document*, 29, 33

7 Ibid.

to 100 percent throughout the developing world, would result in approximately 15 percent more primary students by 2015 than in 1995. However, a much larger problem in achieving universal education will be in secondary schools. In 1997, secondary school enrollment in developing countries stood at 281 million, with another 264 million not enrolled.⁸ The population of ten- to fourteen-year-olds – the age range for which data are easily available, and which approximates the secondary school years – will grow by 65 million from 1995 to 2015.⁹ Thus, full secondary school enrollment will require the enrollment of over 300 million more students in 2015 than in 1995.

By far the greatest increases will be needed in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the two regions with the lowest current enrollment rates. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, only 26 percent of children are enrolled at the secondary level – an increase of just 4 percentage points since Jomtien in 1990. In South Asia, although secondary gross enrollment rates have risen sharply since 1970, at 45 percent they remain well behind the global average. In the least developed countries overall, at most 19 percent of children attend secondary school.¹⁰

The Dakar Framework for Action that emerged from the World Education Forum simultaneously renewed the inter-

national community's commitments and implicitly acknowledged its inability to achieve its stated goals, extending the deadline to 2015.¹¹

New thinking on designing and implementing a high quality education for all the world's children is clearly needed. In today's knowledge economy, primary education, while essential, is not enough. In the developing world, secondary schools, colleges, and universities have yet to reach large numbers of potential students. Low standards are a persistent problem in many areas where poverty is endemic.

Policymakers are now coming to acknowledge these failings more fully. 'Education for All' has not been achieved. We need new ideas, new strategies, and new efforts if the goals laid out at Jomtien, and our more ambitious goals, are to be realized.

The case for providing an 'Education for All' can be made on four different grounds: humanitarian, sociological, political, and economic.

The humanitarian case is straightforward: Education enables human beings to develop their capacities so that they can lead fulfilling and dignified lives. Promoting equality of opportunity through education can be a powerful response to those who believe that the recent process of globalization has increased inequality and further marginal-

8 UNESCO online database.

9 United Nations, *World Population Prospects*, 2000 rev.

10 Each of these figures is a gross enrollment rate – that is, the ratio of the number of students enrolled in secondary school to the number of children in the population who are in the age group normally expected to be enrolled in secondary school. Children counted in the numerator may be older than the normal ages for secondary school because they started school late or because they had to repeat one or more years of schooling. A gross enrollment

rate, therefore, may exaggerate or overstate the fraction of children of secondary school age who are enrolled in secondary school. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Gross enrollment ratios by level of education," 2001; available at <<http://www.uis.unesco.org/en/stats/statso.htm>>.

11 UNESCO, "Education for All," 2001; available at <http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/index.shtml>.

ized the poor. Education of high quality helps people give meaning to their lives by placing them in the context of human and natural history and by creating awareness of other cultures. (We address below the formidable task of specifying what we mean by “education of high quality” when we sketch some preliminary thoughts about the goals of education.)

A second justification for basic and secondary education is sociological. Social and cultural capital, which are crucial ingredients in the development process and ones that enhance the operation of other development channels, can be greatly strengthened by education. Schools can help foster a sense of community. A good education empowers people to take responsibility for their own lives and for improving the lives of those around them. The Jomtien Declaration highlights the importance of education to furthering the cause of social justice, human rights, and social and religious tolerance – all vital to ensuring international peace and promoting sustainable human development.

A third justification for universal education is political. Education is popular among voters. It can also, as Francis Fukuyama has argued, “create the conditions necessary for democratic society.”¹² “It is hard to imagine,” he continues, “democracy working properly in a largely illiterate society where the people cannot take advantage of information about the choices open to them.” Both domestic and international political stability, too, are affected by education or its absence. Dictators, for example, who can have serious destabilizing impacts on their regions, often endure because the limited educational level of their

12 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 116.

subjects makes it more difficult for a populace to mobilize against them.¹³ At the level of international politics, education has an important contribution to make to global peace and stability, as modern technology makes it possible for the problems caused by poor education anywhere to affect other countries everywhere.

A fourth and perhaps most persuasive argument for universal education is economic. For over two hundred years economists have been struggling to answer one simple but fundamental question: Why are the people of some countries richer than others? Why did Australia surge ahead of Argentina? Why are the Asian Tigers so far ahead of South Asia? A classic answer has been that some countries have more natural resources and physical capital and better technology than others, and that these advantages allow them to create greater income and wealth. But the truth seems to be more complex. Beginning in the late 1950s, economists expanded the notion of capital to include human capital as well. Education, or investment in people’s capacities, raises people’s productivity and provides a foundation for rapid technological change. Each year of schooling in developing countries is thought to raise people’s earning power by over 10 percent.¹⁴

Education can also operate indirectly by promoting good health and a demographic transition from high fertility and high mortality to low fertility and low

13 We recognize, of course, that a well-educated population is not a guaranteed barrier to the power of dictators. The most notable exception is that of Nazi Germany.

14 Gene Sperling, “Educating the World,” *New York Times*, 22 November 2001; George Psacharopoulos, “A reply to Bennell,” *World Development* 24 (1996): 201.

mortality. The spread of schooling increases possibilities for the growth of national income, and that additional income helps to finance additional education, which leads to more income, in a virtuous spiral.¹⁵

Amartya Sen has shown how the economic success of Japan in the last 150 years was driven by its focus on expanding education before economic development was underway. The contrasting fortunes of China and India in moving toward an open, market-oriented economy further support the importance of education. India's "massive negligence of school education," Sen argues, meant that the country was ill-prepared for economic expansion. The spectacular success of China's economy, on the other hand, since it began to open markets in 1979 was built on a highly literate population produced by a strong basic education system, which attempted to include all girls as well as all boys.¹⁶

The economic argument, however, is not, by itself, sufficient. Well-educated populations in the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the Indian state of Kerala, for example, have failed to build strong economies. There are limits to what education can achieve when its effects are neutralized by other obstacles to development. Some of the Gulf states, whose growth has been founded on oil rather than education, show that universal education is not even necessary for economic growth.

15 David Bloom and David Canning, "Cumulative Causality, Economic Growth, and the Demographic Transition," in Nancy Birdsall, Allen C. Kelley, and Steven W. Sinding, eds., *Population Matters: Demographic Change, Economic Growth, and Poverty in the Developing World* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 165–197.

16 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42–43.

Indeed, the case for universal education must rest finally on the best available empirical evidence for *all* of its possible benefits – humanitarian, sociological, political, *and* economic.

Those who promote the benefits of education must demonstrate that education is an essential component on the path to greater quality of life in the future if they wish to convince political leaders and their constituencies to take meaningful action. The arguments for education as an essential complement to other factors of development and to other factors of national interest must be analyzed, the likely cost of progress measured, and the practical actions agreed on, while taking into account the lessons learned from previous successes and failures.

The field of international development is littered with apparently good ideas that failed to deliver their promised benefits. The failures to achieve universal basic and secondary education have many causes.

Economists have long argued that education should be a policy priority for developing countries, but many governments have so far done little to raise educational attainment beyond increasing primary enrollment rates. Some of the obstacles are material: a lack of funds and inadequate infrastructure. Some obstacles derive from limited local capacity to change. But among the greatest problems is lack of political will for an initiative whose benefits will accrue substantially to nonelites and remain invisible until far into the future.

Developing countries spend around \$240 billion a year of public money on primary and secondary education.¹⁷ As

17 Authors' calculations based on data from Task Force on Higher Education, *Higher Education in Developing Countries*.

there are approximately one billion children aged six to sixteen in developing countries, the average expenditure is about \$240 per child per year – less than 10 percent of the comparable figure for high-income countries.

How much additional funding is really required is not obvious from these figures because some countries are apparently able to educate children very well at relatively low cost. For example, Cuba spends below \$1,000 of public money per primary school student per year, less than most other nations of the Western Hemisphere. Yet Cuba's primary school students rank far higher in terms of standardized test scores than those of any other country in the Latin American region.¹⁸ More generally, there is much to learn from studying success stories of both countries and regions within countries.

Another view of the financial obstacles to the spread of education is given by estimates of what it would cost to put every child in quality primary education by 2015. Gene Sperling quotes recent UNICEF estimates of \$7 billion and \$9.1 billion per year and an Oxfam estimate of \$8 billion additionally annually.¹⁹ On their face these cost estimates seem implausibly low, especially in comparison with amounts that are currently being spent.²⁰ A recent World Bank Working

18 Christopher Marquis, "Cuba Leads Latin America in Primary Education, Study Finds," *New York Times*, 14 December 2001, A22; Task Force on Education, Equity, and Economic Competitiveness in Latin America & the Caribbean, *Lagging Behind: A Report Card on Education in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas, Inter-American Dialogue, November 2001).

19 Gene Sperling, "Toward Universal Education: Making a Promise and Keeping It," *Foreign Affairs* 80 (5) (September/October 2001): 7–13.

20 If we divide these estimates by the estimated number of children of primary school age who

Paper has given a higher estimate of \$10–15 billion per year.²¹ This is not a trivial magnitude, but even it surely pales in comparison to the full costs of not educating these children. In any case, more data and analysis are sorely needed here.

Rising enrollment figures are likely to magnify the strain on government budgets. The strain may be moderated insofar as there are some natural economies of scale in the provision of education (development of educational materials and tools for educational management, for example). On the other hand, it may be magnified as a result of the need to recruit larger numbers of qualified teachers.

While a lack of funding has undoubtedly been a problem in some countries, the fact remains that even where good schools are available, many children do not attend them. The opportunity cost of attending school is particularly significant in poor areas, because sending a child to school prevents him or her from making an economic contribution to the family. Out-of-pocket costs such as for school fees, uniforms, or textbooks may also be beyond the reach of many poor families. Even if the labor market offers reasonable rates of return on investments in schooling, families may decline to undertake the investments insofar as education promotes migration (urban and international), the benefits of which do not necessarily accrue to the family left behind.

were not in primary school in 1998, namely, 113 million (UNESCO, *Education for All 2000 Assessment Statistical Document*, 9), we get a cost of \$62 to \$81 per child per year.

21 Shantayanan Devarajan, Margaret J. Miller, and Eric V. Swanson, "Goals for Development: History, Prospects, and Costs," *World Bank Working Paper* 2819 (April 2002): 16, 22–26.

Gender inequality can also depress enrollment rates. In many of the poorest areas of the world, girls do not receive the same education as boys. Parental concerns about the personal and sexual security of their daughters may make them reluctant to send daughters to schools away from home, to classrooms without female teachers, or to schools without latrines separated by sex. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, only 69 percent of girls enroll in primary school, compared to 84 percent of boys.²²

Promotion of female education has strong potential to trigger virtuous development spirals. Educated girls generally have fewer children, so that educating one generation of girls makes it easier to educate the next. The children of educated mothers generally enjoy healthier lives than those of less educated mothers, and hence are better able to learn. They also have lower mortality, so they are better investments for the educational system.

In addition, education directly improves the quality of life and the economic potential of the educated girl herself. Increasing the number of female teachers, expanding schools so that sexes may be separated where that is deemed culturally desirable, and working to eliminate gender discrimination in the labor market can all help to cut gender bias and increase enrollment rates further.

The poor quality of education is another major factor behind low enrollment statistics. Obsolete curricula, a lack of educational materials, inadequate classrooms, and poor teacher quality all reduce the incentive for children to attend school.

In many areas, moreover, the drive to increase enrollment rates has had a det-

perimental effect on educational quality. In such areas, the number of teachers has not kept pace with the number of students, and student-teacher ratios have risen as a result. A study in Tamil Nadu, India, for example, found that while the number of children enrolled in primary and lower secondary school increased by 35 percent from 1977 to 1992, the number of teachers rose by only 4 percent.²³ A falling ratio of students to teachers is no guarantee of rising educational quality, as Argentina appears to have discovered, but the trend in Tamil Nadu goes in the wrong direction. Improved access to education may therefore become a threat to quality.

Higher enrollment rates do not lead to greater knowledge or skills if teaching quality is low. Low salaries and poor teacher training mean that highly skilled, motivated people are unlikely to be attracted to a teaching career. Large class sizes also tend to be a further deterrent to potential educators. Moreover, those who are attracted, if they are not judged and rewarded on the basis of their results, often have little incentive beyond normal worker's pride to improve their methods.

Effective reform requires more than articulating a sensible new vision for basic and secondary education. It requires appreciating the different goals of education in different cultures, and it requires developing the human and technological means necessary to achieve those goals. It requires a thorough quantitative assessment of present educational performance and a rigorous

23 P. Duraisamy, Estelle James, Julia Lane, and Jee-Peng Tan, "Is there a Quantity-Quality Tradeoff as Enrollments Increase? Evidence from Tamil Nadu, India," *Policy Research Working Paper* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1997).

22 UNESCO/OECD, *Investing in Education*.

projection of the expected consequences of future improvements. It also requires the mobilization of political will, building a broad-based consensus in favor of key reforms.

Governments, ministries of education, teachers, and parents all need to be enlisted in a renewed drive for universal education. These traditional agents of education will benefit from nontraditional partnerships with other government ministries, such as ministries of labor and of commerce, along with local, national, and multinational businesses – in short, with all parties that have a stake in a capable populace. An effective strategy requires an appreciation of national needs and concerns outside of basic and secondary education. It requires an objective account of each country's financial, human, and political resources. It requires sensitivity to each country's history and cultures to ensure the workability and legitimacy of the institutions that have to be built as part of the reform.

If governments and teachers are to be brought on board, the beneficial consequences of achieving universal primary and secondary education will have to be spelled out and, ideally, supported by credible data. An evidence-based strategy needs to identify the mechanisms through which education enhances the quality of life by promoting health, human dignity, and economic growth.

For example, education may affect a population in a variety of ways: by cultivating skills and disseminating knowledge; by raising social status; by increasing earnings in the labor market; by lowering fertility rates; by enhancing the sense of personal autonomy; by broadening cultural horizons.²⁴

24 National Research Council, *Critical Perspectives on Schooling and Fertility in the Developing World* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999).

If knowledge and skills acquired in schools are the main avenue of influence on demography, then curricular content is crucial. If, on the other hand, contact with a culture outside the home, or potential earnings and the opportunity costs of high fertility are the main avenues of influence, then the content of the curriculum may not be so crucial. This is one reason why careful research is critical to the formulation of policy.

Cross-national comparisons and research into the effect of education on foreign direct investment, international competitiveness, inequality, and poverty will be instructive for policymakers and educators alike. Because considerable research on these topics has already been carried out, new efforts should build on what is already known and clarify areas of uncertainty.

Of course, not every regime will welcome every likely consequence of providing an 'Education for All.' Marshaling the evidence that education changes the aspirations of women, brings down fertility rates, and promotes a demographic transition (by, for example, increasing age at first marriage, age at first birth, use of family-planning services, and encouraging parents to invest more time and money in fewer children) will act as a spur to some governments – and perhaps as a deterrent to others.

In addition, governments may react in varied ways if there is reason to think that money spent on universal education detracts from the achievement of potentially competing social goals, such as improved health.

Still, if it can be demonstrated empirically that universal education is finally in the interest of every society, then most governments are eventually liable to join in the effort. And if businesses, too, can be persuaded that universal education is a public good, then they too may be will-

ing to bring their innovation and creativity to the table, and perhaps even some money.

One of the most sensitive issues in any effort to promote universal basic and secondary education is the definition of goals. Goals must be clearly laid out so that the success of programs can be continuously monitored. At the local level, those who will be most affected by locally adopted goals should not be excluded from the tasks of adapting educational goals to local knowledge and aspirations. To stimulate thinking and provoke discussion about possible shared goals, we offer the following suggestions:

- The skills taught should include reading with understanding, writing with clarity, and speaking with confidence. (The choice of language or languages in which these skills are practiced is likely to be a national or local issue.) The skills taught should also include numeracy, that is, the ability to read and understand the kinds of quantitative information encountered in daily life, plus the ability to compute as required in the contexts of daily life. (These fundamental skills with words and numbers are to be distinguished from the specialized disciplinary skills of literary and mathematical analysis.) Additional skills worthy of attention include peaceful ways to manage and resolve, where possible, conflicts and differences within and between a variety of cultural units. The conflicts and the means of resolving them will differ culturally (e.g. compromise vs. consensual discussion vs. majority vote vs. appeal to tradition) but the skills of dealing peacefully with conflict may have widespread or universal value. Other important skills include the ability to analyze and make choices about personal life and work, and the

ability to be productive and find satisfaction in personal life and work.

- The knowledge to be imparted must focus on both the self and others. In human terms, others might include the family, the local community, other communities and cities, the nation-state (if relevant), other countries and cultures, and humankind. In nonhuman terms, others might include other living species and the major nonliving components of the Earth. “Other” will also refer to other times, including the sources and limitations of our understanding of past and future. These domains of knowledge can be approached through the perspectives of the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the arts and humanities. For example, understanding the self in scientific perspective provides a vehicle for instruction in health and human biology and behavior.
- The attitudes to be instilled must also refer both to the self and to others – though here the goals of a universal education are liable to provoke controversy. How will schools balance the values of individuality and of collective concern, of innovation and conformity, of initiative and obedience, of competitiveness and cooperation, of skepticism and respect? The industrial model of classroom education, with students sitting silently and obediently at desks arranged on a grid and listening to an authoritative teacher, with classes starting promptly when the bell rings, conveys a different set of values and attitudes than many alternative modes of education.

The goals of education for children around the world will shape the kinds of people we and our children will live among. More is at stake in defining and assuring a quality education for every

child than defeating terrorism, or lowering population growth rates, or expanding world economic growth, or spreading democracy and the rule of law – though all of these in our view are worthwhile consequences. Also at stake are the inventiveness and civility of the people among whom we will live, and the richness of our own opportunities to learn from them.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences is currently assembling a task force to examine the rationale, means, and consequences of providing a quality education to all the world's children at the primary and secondary levels. The project aims to synthesize what is known about many of the issues raised above, and also to identify what needs to be known, in order to formulate policy options for moving forward.

The Academy project has six features that, in combination, set it apart from previous efforts to promote universal education.

First, instead of taking the value of universal education as self-evident, the project will be analytical. It will attempt to document in detail who benefits and to what extent and how. Thus the value of education is taken as a hypothesis to be evaluated, not as an axiom.

Second, the project will be cross-sectoral in orientation, attempting to evaluate the interactions of education with competing and complementary contributors to human well-being, such as public health (including family planning and reproductive health), jobs, nutrition, and physical infrastructure.

Third, the project will be cross-sectoral in expertise. It will encourage fresh perspectives from economists, developmental psychologists, demographers, statisticians, historians, cultural anthropologists, medical and public-health workers, and others to complement the

expertise of those who already work in education.

Fourth, the project will consider education by all means, including but not limited to enrollment in primary and secondary school.

Fifth, the project will explore the view that the goal of *primary* education for all is not ambitious enough. The project will extend this goal through *secondary* education.

Sixth, the project will take into account the interactions of universal and local criteria for what constitutes education of high quality.

Ideas for means of reaching children to educate them will benefit from drawing on successful efforts to change large, complex systems in other fields. Educational programs may benefit from experience with successful delivery methods in national and international efforts in, for example, agriculture and public health.

The project will examine whether and how new technologies can be harnessed to promote a more effective and equitable distribution of education. It will also evaluate teacher development efforts where education is to be delivered by teachers.

These large goals will eventually have to give way to specifics, such as 'Where will the implementation of the plans developed by the first phase of the project start?' 'Who should be involved?' 'Where will the money come from?' 'How can students study at night in villages with no electricity?' 'How are poor families going to be persuaded to let their children study instead of work?' Delivery methods will inevitably need to be judged on their economic viability as well as by their human and political advantages.

The research is not intended to compare formally universal basic and secondary education to other instruments

of development. It is not trying to model rigorously the whole development process. It is meant to take a critical look at previous thinking in the field and assess both the desirability and the feasibility of a global effort to involve governments, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, families, and individuals in the drive for primary and secondary education for all.

The Academy's scholarly analysis and dissemination of research results will complement other efforts under way to develop support for universal education at the level of grass-roots organizations and at the level of national and international political leadership (for example, the Global Alliance on Basic Education proposed by Gene Sperling²⁵).

We hope that the Academy's research will support and improve the policies advocated by other groups, while receiving

stimulation from the practical questions they raise. A coordinated approach to global educational development that combines analytical research with popular and political advocacy seems more likely to be effective than advocacy without research – or research conducted without effective advocacy.²⁶

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25 Sperling, "Toward Universal Education," 7–13.

Poem by Larissa Szporluk

Death of Magellan

We're struck by the sun
when it's gone;

the sure foot pauses.
Heaven was lost

when up and down
lost meaning.

Valor was lost
when all that mattered

was seeking elixir
within. The nearest star

is who we were
four years ago,

who we're not,
in terms of light,

eight years later.
The galleons, the flota,

his arm inside the armor
Severed like a log –

not a day goes by
that we don't find

an unfound body
to bemoan.

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Fiction by Madison Smartt Bell

Petrified forest

Alvin bought the dinosaurs in a fit of mall-bound depression. He had a gig playing acoustic in a record superstore, six to eight, Tuesday through Thursday, finger-picking blues miked and piped through the house PA. A novelty. . . . It paid a decent hourly rate but it made him feel like a department store mannequin. The way the shoppers would look through him. Sometimes a kid might stop and stare. Hired to turn music into Muzak. Hell, he was lucky to get the work.

Thursday night when he got paid, he blew half the money on CDs before he got out of the store, then tramped the blazing booming corridors of the mall, disgusted with himself, the guitar case dragging down one arm and the slick plastic shopping bag swinging from the

other. Spending, spending. . . . Oncoming waves of shoppers parted around him. He was going against the flow. Over-dressed women shellacked in make-up, old folks taking their constitutional exercise here where it was relatively sheltered and safe, packs of mall-rats bur-nishing their attitudes. One slump-shouldered scrawny specimen flipped back his long hair in a gesture that reminded him of Ethan, screwing an unlit cigarette into his slack lips, but it wasn't Ethan, on second glance, which was good because Ethan was most definitely supposed to be home right now, watching Mary-Margaret, Meg.

Alvin cheered up, thinking of her. As he couldn't seem to find his way out of the mall he turned into a toy store – one with pretensions to education, creativity, and so on. The dinosaurs were in a clear plastic cube by the register, molded figurines in merry colors, each about the size of his thumb. Triceratops, Brontosaurus, Tyrannosaurus Rex. . . he could not recall the names of the others, but there was a pamphlet strung to the box that appeared to explain.

He paid, and headed for his car. The route required him to pass the Rainforest Café, with its rubber robot gorillas and its fake thunderstorm, its utterly phony admonitions to do this and that

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to “save the rainforest.” If you’d made the place up, no one would believe it. His mood blackened, but he stopped all the same, when the robot alligator shifted and raised its head to roar at him from its fake pool near the entry. He wasn’t the only onlooker – the place hadn’t been open for long. Lowering the guitar case, he dug a coin from his pocket and hurled it into the rubberized maw. This gesture was supposed to help “save the rainforest” according to a nearby sign, and the robot’s rubber gullet was already choked with copper. *Brother*, Alvin thought sourly, *we’re two of a kind*.

He hefted the guitar case and turned away; now he wasn’t far from the doorway into the parking garage. Ought to quit that gig, he thought, but he’d quit too many things already. Besides, he needed the money.

By the time he’d clambered into his rust-bucket, the CDs he’d bought seemed more worth having. Alvin’s car had these three virtues: it ran, it had a powerful stereo, and it didn’t look remotely worth breaking into – a good thing, considering the amount of guitar gear he was apt to have stashed in the trunk. He jack-knifed himself behind the wheel and shook the music store bag out over the passenger seat. Five minutes later he was in reissue heaven, blasting Captain Beefheart down the Jones Falls Expressway all the way to Hampden.

“Finally, somebody,” Paula grumped as she let him in. It seemed that Ethan had gone down the block and failed to reappear, so Paula was hassled, and running late – she hadn’t got her skirt on over the black fishnet pantyhose.

“Don’t put that shit on while I’m still in the house,” Paula said, scoping the Beefheart CDs in his hand. Alvin shrugged and laid the boxes on the sill beside the door. Whatever. He watched

her, scissoring back up the stairs. Good legs, even if she was his sister. Paula looked ten years younger than forty-two, or fifteen years, on a good day. He followed her up the stairs and stood framed in the bathroom doorway, watching her watch herself in the mirror. Meg was splashing in the tub. Alvin sat down on the edge and stroked back her wet hair. Dampness seeped into the seam of his jeans.

“Al,” Meg said. “Hi, Alvin.” She slid under and looked at him winsomely, up through the water, lips pursed and cheeks blown full. He caught himself holding his own breath, until she’d surfaced with a smile.

He shifted his seat and turned toward the mirror. Paula didn’t look like him. She was nose to nose with her reflection. Her thick hair, cut to graze her shoulders, was hennaed a deep red, striking against her clear, translucent, alabaster skin. With a set of needle-sharp makeup pencils, she made undetectable adjustments to her lower lip, her lashes, studying, intent. Her reflected eye caught his, and locked.

“So what’re you looking at?”

“Pretty lady,” Alvin said, and broke the contact, shifting his eyes to the wall.

Paula lifted a leather miniskirt from the towel rack and stepped in and hauled it up over her hips. “Zip this up for me, wouldja, bro?” She cut a glance at her wristwatch. “Man, I need to get moving. You can finish up here, right? She still needs her hair washed.”

“I’m on top of it,” Alvin said. Paula whipped a disco purse on her shoulder and clashed down the carpetless stairs. Alvin stood in the upper hallway above her. On the threshold, Paula glanced again at the CD boxes and glanced back at him.

“Don’t be playing this ugly stuff where she has to hear it,” she said.

“Hey, come on.” Alvin put his palms in the air. “I got *Trout Mask Replica!* This stuff is like, unfindable.”

“Yeah, right,” Paula sniffed. She checked her keys, her cigarettes. “On vinyl.”

“Love you too,” Alvin said. “Have fun.” *Not too much fun*, he added as she swung through the door, his silent, secret rider. He’d signed on for Thursdays by her rules: no comments and no questions. Through the slowly closing screen door rose a whiff of spring.

He knelt by the tub, lifting the dinosaurs from his jacket pocket and rattling them in the lucite cube. Meg’s amazed expression was a pure pleasure. One by one he lined them up on the porcelain rim. Her eyes zoomed in and she scooted nearer.

“Leaf eater,” she said, touching the Brontosaurus. “Meat eater.” She pointed at T-Rex.

“Right,” Alvin said. He nudged the Tyrannosaurus’s open red mouth against the swooping neck of the Brontosaurus and fretted the two figurines together, making a growling sound in his throat. Meg giggled nervously, pleased, retreating to the corner of the tub with her fingers pressed on her lower lip.

Washing her hair was a bit of a hassle, as she was deathly afraid of getting soap in her eyes. Afterward he tumbled her on Paula’s bed and buffed her dry with a fluffy towel, made her laugh by doing motorboat with his puckered lips against her stomach. He combed her chestnut hair – Paula’s natural color – and dressed her in a yellow cotton jumper.

Paula’s row-house had a tiny front porch, just big enough for a metal glider. The corpse of a sunflower dangled out of a clay pot on the railing – Paula was not gifted with an especially green thumb. But the people on the opposite corner had managed a few roses. Meg played

solemnly on the steps with the dinosaurs, absorbed. Alvin rocked in the glider, stroking his heels against the concrete, nursing a beer. The air was soft and sweet as fresh laundry, inspiring a pleasant restlessness. He wondered where Paula was at that moment, where Ethan was a bit more pointedly, since it was getting late. By turning his head to left or right he could look down a long recession of other people’s porches on the row. Three houses over there were some kids, and in the opposite direction a cat sat licking its paws on a concrete divider, but otherwise, no action.

He went indoors and quickly stirred the sauce on the stove and grabbed another beer and changed the record. Wouldn’t do to leave Meg alone on the stoop, not for more than half a minute. Music leaked softly from the windows behind him, when he’d resumed his seat on the glider. Not that he meant to take his musical orders from Paula (who had once been a total Pat Benatar fan, who even now possessed soundtrack albums) but maybe Captain Beefheart *was* a little extreme for a three-year-old. Even a three-year-old afflicted by Ethan’s taste for Nine Inch Nails, Meat Puppets, and a whole slough of Goth awfulness. Therefore Alvin was playing Van Morrison, ‘Brown-Eyed Girl,’ which he privately considered to be Meg’s theme song.

When the disc had played out he brought Meg into the kitchen. He ate a plate of spaghetti, and gave Meg enough to smear on her face and the walls. She needed a change of clothes and a sponging after that. He settled her with the dinosaur movie and washed the dishes, then sat on the couch with Ethan’s Strat and a headphone amp, to drown out the TV. A rice-burner Strat, Korean-made, but it would play. Alvin had talked Paula into getting it, offering the headphone amp, which he’d picked up cheap, as the

clinker. He doodled for an hour before he heard the slap of Ethan's skateboard on the porch outside the screen.

"Mom's pissed," Alvin said, with extra quotation marks around it, his eyebrows rising. A skunky smell, ever so slight, had come in the door with Ethan, and Alvin noticed his eyes were a bit reddish as he flipped back his glossy long black hair. Well, he hadn't been above smoking a bowl himself at the age of thirteen, though of course that was before they'd come up with this genetically engineered stuff where half of one hit would erase your whole brain.

"You gonna rat me out?"

"Dude," Alvin said, "you are *already busted*." He tapped the side of his head. "You were supposed to be here from seven? With Meg?"

"Right. Whatever." Ethan jacked the skateboard with the ball of his foot. The wheels banged down on the bare floor.

"Keep it down, will you?" said Alvin, who'd just noticed that Meg had fallen asleep, head sideways on the carpet, ringed by a circle of dinosaurs. "You eat yet? There's spaghetti you can nuke if you want it."

"Yeah." Ethan rolled the skateboard against the door and headed for the kitchen, his super-wide baggy blue jeans dragging, hair hanging down his back just so. A whole riff of sarcastic remarks ran through Alvin's head, unspoken. He remembered his own father ragging on him about his hair and clothes, back when. Ethan didn't take after the family. *His* father was supposed to have been this very exotic Chinese-African-Malay pirate that Paula assured them they were all lucky never to have met. Or maybe he was some sort of wayward Pakistani. Who knew? One nigger was pretty much the same as another as far as Alvin's father was concerned, and the old man had dropped out of touch pretty

thoroughly once Ethan's milk chocolate features appeared on the scene. Ethan was a very good-looking kid, though. Maybe too good-looking, Alvin sometimes thought, for his own well-being. This was not a problem Alvin himself was burdened with.

In the kitchen, the microwave bell went off. Alvin propped the Strat against the wall, and scooped up Meg, who burrowed against him sweetly, without waking. One dinosaur was still clutched in her hand – the little T-Rex, Alvin noticed. He drew the sheet over her, pushed the door to, and carried the tomato-stained jumper downstairs.

"Got the munchies, have we?" he remarked.

Ethan paused for a moment with his loaded fork hanging in the air, peering cannily over his high cheekbones at Alvin. Then, without saying anything, he completed the delivery of pasta into his mouth. Alvin rinsed the jumper, squirted on some spot remover, and set it to soak in a pan of cold water.

"Alvin," Ethan said. "You gonna let me on stage this weekend?"

"You wanna play the Hat?" Alvin said. "You want to sit in on blues, you'd be welcome." Ethan in fact had a nice touch with blues slide, though it didn't really seem to interest him much. He was tossing his hair back now, dismissing the suggestion.

"Well," Alvin said. "You can't get up there with 'Smells Like Teen Spirit.' Everybody's gonna walk out. Including the rhythm section."

"I was thinking Mojo's," Ethan said, dropping his empty fork on the plate. "Saturday, late."

"Yeah, maybe..." Alvin considered. It was true that just about anything went at the last set at Mojo's. "There's legality issues, you know."

"Aw, man –"

“Plus which I doubt you’re really gonna be going out this weekend, once Paula catches up with you.”

Ethan looked away, letting the dark wing of hair fall to hide his profile. He drummed his fingers on the table.

“You want to work something up for the Hat?” Alvin said. “I got the acoustic, out in the trunk.”

“I dunno,” Ethan said. “I’m kinda tired right now.”

Crashing, Alvin thought, and then, *take it back.*

“Anyway, I got homework.”

“Whoa,” Alvin said. “Now that’s pretty desperate.”

A vast white alkali flat unrolled across the field of his dream, ringed with serrated purple mountains at the horizon. The glowing chemical pallor of its surface was studded all over with chunks of stone prehistoric tree trunks, streaked with lurid veins of blue and red. A weird vermilion light pulsed from the sky. Alvin’s vision rushed low over the scene at a frightening speed, like a strafing aircraft. Over it all was a thundering jumble of bass and drums, like the pounding feet of some many-legged uncoordinated animal, scrawl of guitar noise and a voice chanting – *the sky ain’t blue no more – what’s on the leaves aint dew no more.* The movement stopped and there was cold stasis, stone logs scattered in the acrid dust. A long-winged black shadow passed overhead, and Alvin felt a burst of fear and enlightenment. *Now I get it,* the dream was thinking, *now I know why little kids like dinosaurs!* He jerked forward, coming awake with his heart beating fast and his mouth cottony, a blanket tangled around his legs on the downstairs sofa-bed. The noise was Paula opening the door, blue dawn light outlining the frayed edges of her hair.

Alvin got up and padded into the kitchen. Paula was diving in the refrigerator, her leather skirt crooked, loose on her hips.

“Tell me you didn’t drink all the beer,” she grumbled. But she’d already garnered a can of Natty Boh by the time she finished the sentence.

“Rough night?” Alvin said, knowing that he shouldn’t. Paula had just discovered the jumper soaking in the pan.

“Goddammit, what the hell happened here?” She wheeled on him. “She was cleaned up, Alvin, she’d already been fed – man, I’ll *never* get those stains out.”

“You won’t have to,” Alvin said, feeling his throat close down, the strangling pressure – *it’ll always be this way.* “I’ll get it taken care of before I leave.”

“Yeah, right.” Paula seemed to crumple. “Okay, so I’m cranky.”

Now in what sense of the word would that be? He didn’t even want to think it. “Paula,” Alvin said. He gathered the base of her head in his right hand. “You need to crash, no?”

“Yeah, okay.” She dropped her forehead on his shoulder, then looked up. “Alvin, can you cover the day?”

“I’m good to noon,” Alvin said. “After that I got lessons.”

By twelve-thirty he was blasting south on the beltway, Beefheart roaring in his ears, his mind adrift on the matter of Paula. What she was into, what he owed her. He hoped to God she wasn’t smoking rocks again. That was such a hard one to come back from. He had a tendency to speed up behind that thought, and forced himself to lighten his foot on the gas – no use getting a ticket, anyway. Tortured horn music boiled from the speakers, foaming disorder and ugliness. He owed her big time, that was a fact. Paula was ten years older than Alvin,

and she'd come through for him when nobody else would or could the last two years of high school after Mom had signed into the crazy house for keeps.

The rug's wearing out that we walk on, Captain Beefheart howled. Soon it'll fray and we'll drop dead into yesterday – Alvin was barely half-hearing it now. Paula, he thought, what are we gonna do? She'd been a wild child already back then, long gone from the house before Mom checked out permanently, running with the local bikers and dancing for dollars in the strip clubs out Eastern Avenue, doing whatever the hell she pleased. But if she felt like it she could dress for success and pound the hallways of the high school, hassle the teachers and guidance counselors. Not a one of them could stand up to her. She'd made them all help keep Alvin's nose in reasonably frequent contact with the grindstone, and she'd backed up the concept herself at home. Made sure he took the SATs and filled out college applications, and she'd been behind him, some of the time, through seven years at three institutions: psychology, anthropology, musicology . . . and no degree at the end of it all. What did you get for all that effort? The Alvin of today, Thursday night babysitter. Paula deserved her Thursday night out. All her work was night work, cocktail waitressing and such, which was part of the problem, Alvin thought: when you got off at 2 a.m., your apron full of tax-free cash and ready for some R&R, cocaine in some form seemed a logical choice. He'd walked her through rehab one time already. He had done that. But if there had to be a second time it would be harder – for her; you got the idea that nothing was really gonna change. A decent boyfriend might help, but Paula tended to walk all over nice guys. In her quest for somebody who could handle her, she was apt to bring

home mean sons of bitches, which was something else Alvin didn't want to think about, and wasn't allowed to think about, as a matter of policy.

Doing it wrong seemed to run in the family, along with the latent schizophrenia, and by the time Alvin pulled into the parking lot of George's Jungle of Guitars, he was flashing on that one time he'd tried acid, back when, and Paula's blaze of righteous fury: *Don't you know that's not for us? Not for me and not for you. I don't care what your moron friends are telling you – don't you know where that can take you? You wanna end up with Mom and Bruce, doing life in the rubber room, drawing funny pictures on the wall with your own shit?*

Alvin had parked but he left the car running, Beefheart still banging hard on his ears. Through the spotty windshield he distantly registered his first guitar student, unpacking his case from the trunk of *his* car. Fact of it was, he barely remembered Bruce at all – Bruce was only two years younger than Paula, and when Alvin was eight Bruce had gone on a bad trip that lasted a long time, till he finally scored a successful suicide just before his twentieth birthday. The guitar student was moving his way across the lot. He tapped on the window, then flinched when Alvin rolled it down.

"Yipe," he said. "What *are* you playing?"

"This is classic," Alvin informed him, feeling his own grin uncomfortably tight on his face. "Captain Beefheart." He cut the motor; the music died. "You're probably too young to appreciate it."

They were young, mostly, his guitar students, teenagers or even younger than that, a few of them. Now and then a grownup might crop up unexpectedly, apt to have smarter ears than the punk kids, but also of course slower hands. And there you had it. Alvin kept a CD Walkman jacked into the amp in the

back room of the Jungle where he received his clients. He'd learn whatever crap the kids brought in and teach it back to them in a half-hour's time. It kept them happy, so their parents paid George, and George paid Alvin, and all was cool.

He made it back to Fells Point by dusk, and humped the Gibson case up the narrow turns of the stairway to his third floor apartment, which he was lucky to have, given the rush of gentrification round the nabe. The place was a little grotty just now, since Amy had been gone for about ten days, working trade shows in Charlotte and Atlanta. When was she due back, Monday? Amy didn't exactly live with him – she had most definitely kept her own place so far, but still there was a tendency for her to sleep over, partly because Alvin's place was walking distance from twenty or thirty nifty night spots – the Greenwich Village of Baltimore! ... or anyway some people wanted to call it that.

Amy had influence. Squeaky-clean influence. Alvin lowered the guitar case – not quite enough clear space on the floor to accommodate the whole thing. He sniffed the air. A film of dust lay over it all, more guitars in and out of their cases, zillions of CDs that came in the mail on account of reviews Alvin wrote for the local giveaway rag, stacks and shelves of books from all his forlorn uncompleted specialties. The baseboards were lined with the couple of thousand LPs Alvin had collected, though his snazzy vertical turntable was nonoperational for some obscure high-tech reason. He definitely ought to find a way to vacuum before Monday. Still more definitely, empty the cat box, but not now.

Free food at the Hat Club was part of Alvin's deal, and the kitchen wasn't bad

at all. He got a plate of steamed shrimp and a bowl of gumbo and ate slowly, chasing it with beer, as the rest of the band drifted in and set up. Friday at the Hat was eight to one a.m., mostly blues standards. Every now and then they might mix it up with some of the poppier Van Morrison, Bonnie Raitt, a few other acts like that, but usually it was blues changes behind it all. The last set was open mike for singers, and maybe a stray horn player might wander in, but normally they knew who they were dealing with, nothing was apt to get too strange. Ethan didn't turn up all night, which Alvin was just as happy about – he wasn't in the mood to struggle with him over pushing the repertory.

A good feel on the stand throughout the evening, Alvin thought, and everybody down in the groove. He wasn't even registering the other players as the people they were, the people he knew – just bass, just drums, just rhythm guitar, until it all cooked up together, married like flavors in a stew, and his own lines reeling out effortlessly without his having to plan or think. He was riding a rising tide of euphoria and though he knew it would eventually drop him in a trough, he felt too good to worry about it now. People were getting off on it too, especially, Alvin noticed, one heavysset girl with thick black hair and an East Indian cast to her features, who stayed with her breasts resting on the rail of the bandstand and a rapt, stoned smile on her face.

But no. Alvin was not in the spirit of that sort of adventure. He felt too good. When the last set was done he wrapped his gear, passed on all invitations for afterhoursing, and slid out.

Good cheer was still with him when he woke the next morning with the weight of Bill the Cat bearing down on his

chest. One dark wing of his dream passed over the desert and was gone, leaving yellow sunshine spilling in through a tumble of vines from the pots on the sill. He sat up and Bill slid to the floor and collected himself, yowling for tuna. Once Alvin had fed him, the big ginger tabby compressed himself to undulate under the sash and out, walking the concrete sill to the nearest fire escape. Alvin kept that window locked on a two-inch gap – too small for a thief to extrude a guitar.

He loaded up the back of his car with junk CDs to be sold or traded. It was too early for the secondhand shops, though, so he drove to Paula's instead. Meg was out on the steps, and when he climbed out of the car she ran over and gave his leg a hug so hard it squeezed her eyes shut, and sent a warm wave splashing from his heels to the top of his head.

Paula sat on the glider, looking slightly stunned.

"Man," she said. "She likes to get up early. You gonna be around a while?"

Alvin took Meg up to the playground, using the stroller since it was a fair distance, though cool, and he figured he could use the walk. They did the slide and the swings a few minutes, then closed in on the whirligig. Alvin ran around and around, pushing it till everything blurred, then jumped aboard himself and collapsed against her; they held on to each other, breathless and dizzied, until the wheel had coasted to a stop. He kept at it until he was completely winded.

They strolled back to the house. The dinosaurs were scattered under the glider, most of them anyway. "I see Triceratops," Alvin said. "I see Brontosaurus, but where is my man T-Rex?"

Meg's face clouded over. From the doorway, Paula gave them the cut-throat signal. Alvin shut up.

"T-Rex is a bad guy," Paula explained, when Alvin followed her into the kitchen. She'd showered, her hair was still wet, and she looked fresher. "Want some coffee?"

When she opened the cupboard, Alvin saw the inch-high Tyrannosaurus erect and gaping pinkly among the mugs.

"Yeah," said Paula. "We had to put him jail. He kills the other ones. Bites their necks."

Alvin had a twinge. You could never know for sure. The cupboard door swung shut and Paula poured coffee into the mug she'd selected him.

"Thanks for covering," she said. "I caught a few Zs – did me good." She shook back her damp hair. "You're up pretty early yourself, aren't you? What's your program for the day?"

"Same old." Alvin checked his watch. "I better get going, dump my promos before lessons start. It's Mojo's tonight, if you're looking for trouble."

He finished his coffee on the glider. Meg had picked up the dinosaurs and had them claiming turf in and around the flowerpot with its blasted sunflower. Peace among the leaf eaters. She was intent, muttering their lines under her breath. She barely noticed the kiss Alvin left on the top of her head as he went down the steps toward his car.

As he twisted the key, Ethan bore down on him, shoelaces flapping, pants cuffs fraying against the pavement, the uncased Strat clamped under one arm. The skateboard stuck out of a neon orange backpack slung to his opposite shoulder. Along with his Eurasian good looks, Ethan was furnished with built-in cool – his face never gave much away, but just now there seemed to be a certain urgency in his movement.

"Alvin. Ride me down to the Jungle?"

Alvin shot him a dubious look. "Are you straight with Paula?" He pumped

the gas to keep the car from stalling.

“What’s the idea, you want to put buckle scratches on all the new guitars?”

Ethan tossed his sleek hair. “Man, I’ll change strings for George all day, I’ll polish, I’ll sweep, whatever.” He spotted the promo CDs jumbled over the back seat.

“Hey, you’re going trading.”

Alvin popped the passenger door.

“Okay. Get in.”

They spent a profitable hour or so running the strip of buy-sell-and trade shops off Greenmount. Alvin kept himself under restraint, and got away with near a hundred dollars cash, plus a few items he knew he really shouldn’t pass up. He let Ethan spend thirty dollars of credit, on the theory it was free money anyway, averting his eyes from the actual selections. But once they were back in the car, Ethan held up a Marilyn Manson jewel box.

“Not in my automobile,” Alvin said.

“No way.”

“Come on, you haven’t even heard it.”

“But I know what it is.” Alvin said.

“Look, I had to live through Alice Cooper. Ozzy Osbourne. Gimme a break.”

“You’re getting old, unk.”

“Right, and look what I’m missing.”

He dug out one of his recent Beefhearts from the crack between the seats. “Here, you want crazy, give this a spin.”

From the corner of his eye he thought he saw a flicker of interest drift over Ethan’s expression. *Lick My Decals Off, Baby*. The title ought to appeal to him, along with the pseudo-spooky cover design, and hey, the package was thirty years old. For a second Alvin felt like his old man, trying to indoctrinate somebody in the genius of Lawrence Welk or whatever, only in reality the old man was tone-deaf. Beethoven’s Ninth and the hum of the refrigerator were all the same to him. Alvin had got his ears from dear old crazy mom, along with of course

some other things too. Ethan had slipped in the disc and immediately Alvin punched it up to track 9. The onslaught of guitar and percussion was like being slapped silly by a whole bunch of polka-dot socks full of sand.

He spun up the volume knob as the car charged up the ramp to the southbound JFX. The music broke over them, battering, beating. When he’d found a lane he snuck another glance at Ethan. Expression of patient endurance, more or less. Okay, the kid was hard to read. Where do you start explaining this stuff? The plunging irregular rhythms, surging and braking bursts of guitar, horns squealing over it all like pigs in the slaughterhouse. How everything that seemed careless was calculated down to the last note and beat, how it managed to seem randomly, brutally stupid, when underneath it was so smart. There was the beauty below the ugliness, organization at a whole other level, secret principles of order. He remembered when Ornette had first opened up to him as music instead of lunatic noise, the same thing too with the more difficult phases of Coltrane. But now he was completely tongue-tied, so far as Ethan was concerned. You heard it or you didn’t. So much for musicology.

As the song ended Ethan turned to him with a lemon-sucking expression. “I think this may be too *advanced* for me, Alvin.”

“Sarcasm doesn’t become you,” Alvin said, though in fact it suited Ethan well enough. The disc had moved on to ‘The Buggy Boogie Woogie’ with the reasonably simple blues riff that got that one going, so Alvin launched an explanation of how it was *all* rooted in the blues, those long gritty fibrous tubers and energetic runner-roots that groped all over everywhere, fondling the most complex incomprehensible vagaries of the music.

...By the time they got to the Guitar Jungle he was even boring himself.

Ethan was a good boy, relatively speaking, for most of the afternoon, kept himself busy doing minor guitar service and took care not to do anything to annoy George – nothing like the last time he visited the shop, when he'd managed to put on a bird's nest of hairline scratches on the back of a three thousand dollar Paul Reed Smith guitar. Then, sometime between four and five when Alvin had surfaced from the back room for a breath of air, Ethan was gone, or almost gone. Alvin saw him climbing into the flame-red Suzuki Brat belonging to Rotten Robert, a schoolmate with pierced lips, a driver's license to make him more dangerous, and a disagreeable attitude which had moved Paula to weld the "Rotten" onto his name.

Not so much as a wave good-bye. I'm not his daddy anyhow, Alvin reminded himself, watching Ethan's hair flutter out the window as the Suzuki squealed around the lot and bounced onto the street. The thought didn't comfort him much. But Paula didn't call to check, not for the rest of lesson time. At dusk Alvin drove home with the thought of cleaning, but instead he unplugged the phone and took a nap with Bill the Cat. The message light was blinking when he woke up, but he didn't listen; it was already time to hit his Saturday gig.

Mojo's was a different scene from the Hat, different band too, except for Alvin. The drummer was a coke fiend – he wouldn't last long, but he was hot while he lasted. It was way less bluesy than the Friday night show. They took whatever requests they could handle, and let people sit in more or less on demand. You could count on everyone to be drunk, and tonight Alvin was included, by the time the clock hands converged on the twelve. His good mood was still holding

up and yet he sensed it fracturing around the foundation, beginning to splinter into those whirling dots and bright shards. Drinking on top of that situation was not necessarily a good idea, but Alvin could drink free at Mojo's – part of his deal – and the food was lousy here.

At the post midnight break he was feeling no pain, though he did experience a prick of something or other when Rotten Robert rolled in with Ethan behind him, packing the Strat with its dangling cord. All of a sudden he remembered inviting Paula, and if she showed up and found Ethan in here ... Bam-Bam the bouncer also seemed to be bugged about something; Alvin inclined his ear so he could hear him over the jukebox and the surf of crowd noise.

"Yo, how much under age is your nephew, exactly?" Bam-Bam said, aiming his blimpy finger at the boys at the bar. Apart from their youthful complexions they fit in well enough, as Mojo's drew a fair contingent of the pierced-navel-blue-hair crowd.

"Hey," Alvin said. "You let him in."

"For you." Bam-Bam dropped the meat slab of his hand on Alvin's shoulder, which was already cramped from holding up the Les Paul for three hours.

"Christ," said Alvin. "Don't do me any favors." He slipped the hand and moved toward the bar, thinking to make sure they didn't get served hard liquor, but Ethan had already slithered away, and Alvin wound up face to face with Rotten Robert, whose eyes most certainly didn't look right. By Golly, I think the little rat-fink is tripping, Alvin thought. Or is it me? His head twirled, searching for Ethan, who was just now climbing the stand. He'd cooked something up with the coke-head drummer –

"Quick," Alvin said. "Gimme two cigarettes." He tore off the filters and stuck them in his ears, just before the shock

wave of guitar noise crashed down over the bar.

Bah bah ba-ba-ba- b'bah ba-ba-ba-
I wanna be sedated....

"And another shot of Bushmills," Alvin added, finding himself amused with Ethan's stunt, against expectation – if you had to do stupid, this was quality stupid. He looking around – a fair majority of the clientele appeared to be getting off on it too, and the night manager didn't look especially pained.

Cigarette filters or no, Alvin's ears were ringing when Ethan got done. He checked the clock: time to get back on the stand. As he shifted his weight the fat drunk in the polo shirt joggled him with an elbow.

"Alvin, huh, Alvin? So Alvin, where's the Chipmunks?"

Yuk Yuk Yuk – the fat guy's fat wife thought this was really funny too. There was often someone who thought of this gag, when the band members got introduced by name from the stage.

"I ate'm," Alvin said, his smile freeze-dried flat from one ear to the other. "Run'm on skewers. Roll'm in olive oil, toss'm on the grill. You ought to try it, man. Extra crunchy."

He didn't stay to see their faces, but midway through the final set he did throw in a number Chipmunks style. 'I Wanna Be Sedated' one more time, complete with helium falsettos. It was Mojo's, you could do whatever you wanted. The fat couple seemed to have already split, and Ethan was on his way out the door, giving Alvin a high sign to show he'd got the joke. It was too late for Paula to show. Alvin let himself down a little. But then, about ten minutes after last call, while the band was packing gear and the manager was gathering the empty stools, that heavy-set Indian girl showed up out of nowhere. Okay, so

he'd noticed her earlier in the night. Maybe he'd winked at her, blown her a kiss. She was wearing an angora sweater with little pearl buttons mostly undone, to show off her navel ring and a wide swathe of cleavage. She stooped over Alvin as he knelt on the floor, laying the Les Paul away in its case.

"Tell me the truth," she said. "Do you really grill chipmunks?"

Alvin looked up in time to see her touch her upper lip with the pink point of her tongue. She was so close he felt surrounded by her nice natural smell, which reminded him of a warm baked potato.

"Why don't you just come on up to my place," he told her. "I'll grill you every chipmunk I got."

Dread suffused his dream that night, the heavy feet thundering like kettle drums among the tumbled stone trunks, the terrible roaring, the long shadows of wings blotting out the blood-stained sky. Dream-Alvin could not catch his breath; his struggling inhalations sucked up acrid dust from the desert floor. He woke with his head and heart pounding out of sync, mouth cottony from the booze. The room was a funk of sex and cat piss. Light from the doorway lanced the bed. Alvin sat up, head full of doom. He already felt the situation completely, though he could not yet remember its particulars.

"Ohhhh!" Amy's trim silhouette was framed in the blazing doorway. Her hands worked, square-cut nails digging into her palms. "Oh," she said. "I wanted to see you. You bastard, Alvin. I just couldn't wait."

Beside him, the Indian girl came part-way awake, batting a clot of tangled hair from her face. Her heavy breasts spilled over the sheet as she came up on one elbow, her eyes bleary. Alvin got out of

bed, naked and sticky. His ludicrous reflected image flicked across a long cracked mirror propped on a pile of books against the wall. It seemed right. His outside ugliness was on the inside too. It was a fair deal. What you saw was what you got.

He came nearer to Amy, but not quite within her reach. He didn't quite know what she might do when she was angry. Alvin never fought with his girlfriends; they didn't last long enough for that.

"I am not going to cry." With her slim fingers slightly trembling, Amy disengaged the key he'd given her from her ring and let it spill from her hand to the floor. "I am *not* going to cry over you."

"I know you're not," Alvin said, his voice calm. He held out his bony hand, hapless in the space between them. "You're okay."

"Yes," Amy said, with a deep gulping breath. Alvin knew this would be the last time he looked so closely into her clear eyes. "Yes," she said. "But I'm not so sure about you."

Sunday was not at all a good day. Sunday was reserved as free time for Alvin. No lessons, no gigs. This week he had small use for his freedom. Part of it was down to the foreordained cycle of his humors, which had dumped him into the slough once again. Of course there had been unpleasant events as well. He spent the day in the apartment, spinning Captain Beefheart discs and trying to pick up the guitar parts. Couldn't do it. With his best concentration it was still beyond him, the rhythms too disjointed, the shifts from discord into harmony too complex. He could hear it, but he could not play it. It was over his head. It happened often enough that when Alvin raked through his rubble in search of something that would make it all worthwhile, something to transmute every-

thing he'd abandoned into sacrifice, he came up with nothing. He was not really a very good musician, only a competent hack. Everything that had gone into making him came to nothing. Alvin's father had told him so, in those last spasms of bitterness before he broke off contact altogether. Alvin had not been able to stop himself from taking the message to heart.

He had evolved to a dead end. The spider plants spilled their vines over the window sill, green and golden in the evening light, then turning grey as it grew darker. Bill the Cat slid in and out under the window sash, pursuing his own missions. Sometimes the phone rang, but Alvin let it go – the box captured each call after the first ring anyway. It would always be this way. Everything was written in stone. He lay on the snarl of his smelly sheets, thumbing the remote to play the same track over and over.

If the dinosaur cries with blood in his eyes and eats our babies for our lies....

There was a grim satisfaction to be found where that line landed. But late in the evening he grew restless, and went down to the street. Presently he found himself in his car, driving up to Paula's.

It hadn't been a great day up there either. Alvin could feel this, a sort of crackle in the air, before he'd even opened the door to his car. When he was walking up the steps, he heard Meg crying desperately from the window of her room. Paula ripped the door open just as his hand grazed the knob. She was set to start shouting, but when she saw his face she subsided a little.

"Oh, it's you," she said, and backed out of the doorway.

"You were expecting?"

"I'm expecting to take a bite out of

Ethan when he ever shows up,” Paula snapped. “He’s on the run, the little bastard.”

That last word clanged unpleasantly in Alvin’s head. “Better watch how you call him that,” he said. “He’s apt to bring it back to you, one of these days.”

Paula’s face turned scary colors. “Oh yeah?” she said, her voice rising. “Oh, please, *please* give me your advice – yeah, right, my *hero*, where the hell have *you* been all day? I called and called, left a hundred messages, I know damn well you’re laying up in one of your funks, listening to the phone ring.”

Alvin slapped the door shut behind him with a backward scrape of his heel, to muffle the shouting from the neighbors, and sidled along the wall away from her. He’d never been especially fond of violence.

“Just tell me, how could I survive without your help, Alvin, all you do for me? Without you helping Ethan on his little getaways – Oh, yeah, I saw him jump in your car – if not for scaring Meg to *death* with your goddamn stupid dinosaurs – ”

“What?” Alvin said. He took a step toward her. “What?”

“You heard me, Alvin, she’s like *terrified*, she can’t sleep, she won’t eat, she’s got *nightmares*, she won’t come out of her room. She’s rolled up in a ball up there, waiting for T-Rex to come bite her neck, and this is all thanks to *you*, Alvin. Thank you! Thank you *so* much for all you do to make my life better – ”

Alvin’s overload switch cut off. He could see Paula’s face working, turning deeper shades of purple, spittle flying from her mouth, but he couldn’t hear her anymore. What if Paula had not had her wild beauty? he thought. If she’d been cursed with the looks of Alvin? That might have been simpler in a way. The way it was now could be confusing.

What you saw was beautiful Paula, but what you got, sometimes, was this.

Presently she ran up the stairs and banged the door shut to her room. Alvin went into the kitchen and ran some cold water over his hands and patted it on his temples and the back of his neck. The hangover was still working on him, among other things. He fished in the fridge for a beer and stood with it in his hand unopened. Audio signals were beginning to reach him again, and Meg was still crying, up in her room. He put the beer back and opened the cupboard. Tonight, all the dinosaurs were in jail. Alvin dropped the Tyrannosaurus in his pocket and went up the stairs in his sock feet.

“Hey,” he said, swinging open the door of Meg’s room. “Hey.” She was locked in her crying and wouldn’t or couldn’t respond, crumpled on the bed at the edge of the yellow-brown aura cast by the nightlight plugged into the baseboard. He lowered himself to the edge of her bed, and began to pat her rhythmically on the back. How could you know what was going to shake out? He remembered a year ago, more or less, Meg had been fascinated with a clip from Disney on the video, “Pink Elephants on Parade.” The thing was a cartoonist’s acid trip – literally, Alvin was pretty sure, now that he’d seen it again as a grown-up. Meg watched the tape over and over in rapt silence, her face inches away from the screen. Later on, after she learned to talk, they came to find out it terrified her. She watched it because she was too scared to stop, like a bird hypnotized by a snake.

Alvin swung himself onto the bed and spooned himself around her. He covered her navel with his palm and tried to breathe calm into her. When the shaking of her shoulders slowed he began to talk

in a low voice. "Look," he said. "Listen, Meg, listen to me. Some Tyrannosaurus-
es are mean. Some Tyrannosaurus-
es hurt the other dinosaurs. But our T-Rex
is a nice T-Rex. He's strong, but he's a
good guy. He'd never bite our dinosaurs.
He protects them. He's nice to them. He
protects them from the bad ones, so
none of our guys get hurt."

Meg rolled toward him, turning her
red-rimmed eyes up to his face. Cau-
tiously Alvin worked the T-Rex out of
his pocket and held him hidden in his
hand.

"It's true," he said, nodding solemnly.
"I'm telling you the truth here, Meg." He
revealed the dinosaur. "You want him
back?"

Meg stretched out her arm and point-
ed at her nightstand.

"That's right," he said. "Now, that's a
good place. He can watch over things
from there."

Next to a wad of damp Kleenex, the
Tyrannosaurus stood erect in his inch-
high posture of defense. Alvin turned
him, slightly, so that he faced the door.

Twenty minutes later, when Meg was
asleep, Alvin covered her and crept out.
He collared two beers from the kitchen
before he risked a knock on Paula's door.

"Whatever," she groaned. "Come on
in."

Alvin entered. Paula raised her face
from the pillow, her eyes dark holes.

"The way we fight," he said, "we
might as well get married." This was a
special family in-joke. Back before Mom
took her last trip to the bin, Paula had
done what she could to stand between
Alvin and a whole lot of serious marital
screaming. Now she favored him with a
watery smile, rolling over and raising
herself on the pillows to accept the beer.

"That would be incest, dumb-fuck,"
she said. "They'd come and take my kids
away."

Alvin jerked his head to the other

door. Paula's bedroom featured a ram-
shackle balcony, overlooking the patch
of backyard and an alley full of tin trash
cans. There were two rusting chairs and
a crate for a table, overhung by a branch
of a Heaven Tree just beginning to leaf.
Alvin patted his shirt pocket and found
the two defiltered cigarettes; he hadn't
changed shirts since Mojo's. He lit them
both and passed one to Paula, who ac-
cepted it without a word. As Alvin was
an infrequent smoker, the first two drags
delivered him a considerable buzz.

"Sorry I went off on you like that,"
Paula said in a low voice. Her profile
flared in the cigarette glow. "Sometimes
I just can't take it. I had to call in sick to
work, when Ethan didn't show. You
know, there comes a time when you just
lose it."

"Sure," Alvin said. "I know."

"I wish I knew how to pry Ethan loose
from Rotten Robert. . . . Oh, hell. I wish a
lot of things."

"Don't we all," Alvin said.

Paula turned toward him, a movement
of distress. Her face was drawn, but it
came to Alvin from the whole way she
was acting, her rate of recovery from the
evening's explosion, she probably *wasn't*
back on the pipe. And that was some-
thing. He felt his own mood bottom out,
leveling on the ocean floor. Ready now
to start the slow climb toward the sur-
face, one more time.

"Alvin, I -"

"Don't," Alvin raised his hand. He
meant to say he didn't bear malice.

"Don't, really. It's okay."

Paula switched back to face the alley,
leaned forward to tip ash across the rail.
"And Meg," she said. "You know, it just
cut me all up. She was so scared and mis-
erable, and I couldn't help her."

"Right," Alvin said. "I talked to her. I
think we may have it figured out."

Paula's face twisted again as she
leaned toward him. She was going to

thank him, he could see. She was going to tell him he *did* make a difference. She was going to tell him nothing was his fault.

"Hey," Alvin said, "It'll be okay."

Paula subsided, without saying anything. She ground out her cigarette on the end of the crate and put her bare feet up on the rail. Alvin slid down in his chair. The damp breeze was shifting the curled new leaves. Down the block a car door banged; a voice was raised briefly, unintelligible. A black kid coasted his bike through the alley, sprockets ticking gently. Alvin heard Paula breathe out with a sound not quite a sigh. He said, in the moist dark, "Who loves you?"

When Paula had tapped out, Alvin humped up on the downstairs couch. He was too tired to make it home; he didn't even have the juice to flip out the sofa bed. But he hadn't quite drifted off to sleep when he heard Ethan scratching on the window.

"Forgot my keys," Ethan said, when Alvin had opened the kitchen door. He craned backward over the kitchen stair rail and peered up at the second floor windows. "She asleep?"

"Yeah," Alvin said.

Ethan produced a pack of Kools and balanced one in the corner of his mouth, fumbling in his pocket for a light.

"I think you're still in the doghouse, dude," Alvin said. "Weren't you supposed to be keeping Meg tonight?"

"Man," Ethan said querulously. "I *had* her all afternoon, you know. I just went down to the corner with Robbie. The Suzuki had a flat."

"Oh yeah? What happened?"

"Like I said, it had a *flat*."

"I mean with Meg, this afternoon. She went all weird on her dinosaurs."

"That?" Ethan puffed menthol and shifted his weight, shadows from the

kitchen window warped across his face. "Yeah, well, we were watching *Jurassic Park*."

"You what? You moron, Ethan, you let her see that?"

"Robbie rented it, you know?" Ethan's smooth face was blank as ever. "Like, we *tried* to keep her out of the room."

"You tried to keep her out of the room."

"Yeah. But I guess she must have peeped in and saw some of it."

Alvin hadn't known his hand was in the air before he was trying to call it back, an effort that might have dampened the blow. More or less by chance his fingertips caught Ethan's cigarette and sent it whirling sparks into the yard by the trash cans. Ethan had snapped his head sideways with a catlike alacrity Alvin didn't much care for – the movement of someone who had been hit before. He thought of his father again, but the old man hardly ever hit; his thing was to slice you up with sarcasm. But there was a thing in Alvin: he could be set off, like Paula could be, but instead of screaming he'd be swinging. The whole time he'd just be seeing the white light and hearing the rush of the wind and he wouldn't even know what had happened until later. There was the time he'd shattered a fifth of Jack Black across the face of one of Paula's most unpleasant boy-friends, the one who liked to leave her scraped and bruised. The kitchen was a mess of blood and whiskey and broken glass after that one, but it hadn't been altogether a bad thing to do; it had established certain limits. That guy was a contender to be Meg's father, though Paula would never admit it for sure, and Alvin loved Meg a little too much, more than he had any right to, more than was reasonable or safe.

Ethan was watching him, without any sign of resentment or fear, expressionless and poised.

“You ought not to be smoking,” Alvin said. “It’s not good for your health.”

Monday, blue Monday, came as it must. Alvin resumed doing what he was supposed to do. He taught his lessons, drove down to play a session at a Washington studio. Decent money for that one, actually. He went through the whole distasteful business of collecting and returning the odds and ends Amy had left scattered around his place. Not so much of that as usual, actually, Amy being a bit of a neat freak. He emptied the cat box and cleaned the apartment and listened to his answering machine. Some one named Sujata had left a message with her number. Alvin figured it must be the Indian girl, though he couldn’t recall having learned her name. Considering the circumstances, he was touched and a little flattered by this. He thought perhaps he would call her before the weekend, for she might turn up at Mojo’s or the Hat. It would be the polite thing to do.

Thursday night he scooted fast from the ridiculous record store gig, and managed to escape the mall without spending any money. When he hit Paula’s she was dressed and downstairs already. One of her girlfriends had come by to pick her up, and they were having a fast one before they split. The stereo blared some techno slop that made Alvin want to roll himself in the carpet. But instead he took the gin and tonic Paula offered him. In a gap between tracks, he heard Meg upstairs, shouting delirious, “I am Tyrannosaurus Rex!” Then a lot of thump on her bedroom floor.

“Explain it to me,” Paula said, with a big eye-roll – part of the slightly exaggerated manner she sometimes adopted around other women. “Last week she’s terrified of it. This week she’s turned into it.”

Alvin rocked back on his heels. He didn’t quite know why.

“Kids and dinosaurs,” the girlfriend said. She asked her long Virginia Slim and began telling some anecdote about her own children and their dinosaur habit. The whole time she was giving Alvin the once-over, doubtless trying to figure out how he and Paula could possibly be related.

Once they’d left, Alvin killed their music. A moment of silence, to let his ears detox before he played anything else. He checked the kitchen to see what he might scrounge up for a supper. Shouts and periodic crashes from upstairs let him know that Meg was still deep in her game. He didn’t want to interrupt her, really, but he figured pretty soon he ought to go up and try to talk her out of jumping off the bed.

In ten minutes he had a pot of rice and beans underway and had mixed himself a second drink. He climbed the stairs, ice jingling in his glass. Meg’s door was ajar, and Alvin applied his eye to the crack. Meg, sweaty and disheveled, was racing around the room in a state of high excitement, roaring and shouting her mantra. She held the little T-Rex high in her hand like a beacon. Clearly she had no notion she was under observation. Alvin decided to leave her alone.

Downstairs he put on Coltrane, *Africa Brass*. Nothing near so discombobulating as Beefheart, but it did have serious, primordial force. Upstairs, from the timing of her crashes and cries, Meg seemed to have adapted to the rhythm of the bass and drum. I am Tyrannosaurus Rex! Alvin thought she was on to something. He thought she’d discovered the meaning of life. *Be strong*, he beamed at her from his brain, as he went into the kitchen to stir the beans. *Be fierce. Be terrible. Become what you fear.*

James Carroll

*on the crisis
in Catholicism*

In the winter of 2002, a few short months after the trauma of September 11, the Roman Catholic Church was hit by a tidal wave of revelations. While qualitatively different from the September catastrophe, it has been, for Catholics, a comparable trauma. The Church has been staggered in ways no one could ever have anticipated, even in a season of staggering events.

Early in January of 2002, the *Boston Globe* published a front-page story entitled "Church Allowed Abuse by Priest for Years." It was an account of how Boston's archbishop, Cardinal Bernard Law,

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and his predecessors had protected pedophile priests, enabling them to continue what was widely characterized as their predatory crime spree against children. This led to an unprecedented explosion of Catholic awareness of Church failures, especially among lay people.

At parishes across the United States, Catholics spontaneously gathered in large numbers to discuss a range of matters spilling over from the abuse crisis. As reports surfaced of financial settlements paid out to victims in secret over the years, Catholic philanthropists and foundations began demanding an accounting of the moneys provided to the Church, and average parishioners began withholding contributions from collection baskets.

One lay group, "Voice of the Faithful," founded at St. John the Evangelist Church in Wellesley, Massachusetts, quickly had 14,000 Catholics enrolled in its cause, which was defined by the slogan, "Keep the faith, change the Church." Even conservative Catholics, in rejecting the passive role traditionally assigned by the hierarchy to lay people, found themselves enlisted, perhaps despite themselves, in what the *New York Times* called "a quiet revolution."

But a revolution in Christian thought had been underway, in fits and starts, for a generation. Recognitions tied particularly to the Holocaust had led to the beginning of a massive postwar Christian reform, nowhere more profoundly than in the Roman Catholic Church. But the Church reform begun at Vatican II was not sustained, in part because Church authorities began to roll it back after the death of Pope John XXIII, and in part because the Catholic laity was never able to take the practical responsibility for the Church that the council had made theoretically possible. And under the pontificate of the charismatic and admired

John Paul II, the Catholic laity, with some vocal but always marginal exceptions, seemed happy to resume its traditional role as adjunct to “the Church,” which continued to define itself as, essentially, the priests, bishops, and pope.

In fact, defining the Church as “the People of God,” Vatican II had established the principles to which the new lay-dominated grassroots movement of change instinctively appealed in the wake of the abuse scandal. The tragic irony, of course, was that what the Holocaust had proven unable to do – spark a sustained awareness of the need for Church reform among a broad Catholic population – the priest sex scandal showed every sign of doing. This can reflect badly on Catholics, but it can also indicate the kind of power that is generated when a large moral problem is joined to the self-interest of the news industry. If the Holocaust never fully cracked open the Christian conscience, it is also true that it never gripped the media like a story involving sex and the disgrace of admired figures.

The Catholic Church, proven incapable of protecting the most vulnerable of its own members, has been humiliated in the early twenty-first century in ways that, despite its grievous failures in the past, notably its failure in relation to the Jewish people, it had simply not been humiliated in the twentieth century. Pope Pius XII, after all, may still be named a saint. The Church failed in the face of Hitler’s Final Solution because Jews never fully belonged within the circle of Catholic concern, but who occupies the very center of that circle if not Catholic children? This Church, indeed, has organized itself around its children – and that fact too fuels the scandal. The shock is that both pederast-priests and institution-protecting bishops betrayed *them*.

Still, the revelation here repeats what

was brought into the open by the Holocaust – the simple fact of the sinfulness of a Church that prefers to think of itself as the sinless “Bride of Christ.”

Indeed, that wish to be understood as above the human condition, an organization existentially incapable of sin, is part of what caused the Church to fail in both cases. Catholics have deflected the real meaning of Christian antisemitism, and have only partially dismantled what led to it in dogma and theology, for the same reason that bishops could not bring themselves to face the full meaning of priestly child abuse. “Sinful members” of the Church caused antisemitism, in this view, as “wayward priests” (and perhaps an “obsessive media”) caused the abuse scandal. Few Catholics would any longer define the Church as the “Perfect Society,” as popes once did, but Rome still insists on the moral perfection of the “Church as such.” If failures occur, they are always the result of the aberrant behavior of individuals – perhaps including individual priests, bishops, or even a pope – but never of the structural or institutional characteristics of Catholicism.

But is a genuine – and necessarily radical – reform of the Roman Catholic Church really possible?

I am inclined to answer that question with other questions: Who would have thought that real reform of the Soviet Union was possible? But a grassroots movement, beginning with an electrician nobody in a shipyard in Gdansk, made it so. Who would have thought real reform of the brutal apartheid regime in South Africa was possible? But a grassroots movement led from an island cell by a state-demonized prisoner made it so. In America, grassroots movements changed the legal and social status of black people, and a grassroots movement stopped the Pentagon’s escalations of the war in Vietnam cold. Around the

world, grassroots movements of women and girls, the feminist revolution, are changing every institution and society, even the most repressive.

And it is far from incidental to the project of Catholic reform that a grassroots movement that played a crucial role in ending the arms race – the joint Soviet-American International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985 – was co-founded by Dr. James Muller, who is also a founder, in 2001 at St. John the Evangelist in Wellesley, of Voice of the Faithful, the key grassroots organization of lay Catholics already referred to. The Catholic Church is a command society, but it is neither a brutal dictatorship nor an apartheid regime, and once the Catholic people fully assert themselves, real reform can follow.

Every Catholic has intensely personal reasons for wanting a renewed Catholicism – the consolation of the sacraments; access to transcendence; the healing memory of Jesus Christ, made present; a way to imagine life after death. But Catholics, too, see that the stakes for Church renewal are far greater than the merely personal. At a time when the global gulf between the rich and the poor widens exponentially every year – the very precondition of terrorism – will the Catholic Church maintain its character as one of the few institutions that inherently bridges that gulf? Will the Church sustain its traditional role as a defender of the poor, and its more contemporary function as a rare critic of free-market capitalism? In the twentieth century, the Catholic Church in Europe, and even more in America, overcame its ancient affiliation with wealth to become a friend to labor; in the developing world, often despite the Vatican, it has been on the side of liberation. Its image as a bulwark of social conservatism, in other words, is only

partly accurate. The Church has also been a force for progressive social change. Will it continue to be? Or, like other religions, will the Catholic Church, too, emphasize spiritual beatitude over the passion for justice?

As mindless superstition challenges every religion, and as new-age banalities increasingly supply the human need for a language of transcendence, will the Catholic intellectual tradition, which gave rise to universities and even to scientific rationalism, survive as more than a side-chapel of nostalgia in an otherwise enthusiastic Church? With scientific rationalism itself exposed by the twentieth century as an inadequate source of meaning, can Catholic thought contribute to *its* correction? Or will Catholicism follow major components of world Protestantism into the cul-de-sac of fundamentalism? Will biblical scholarship and historical criticism of theology, and the related capacity for basic correction of dogma, move from the margins of Catholic academia into parishes – or only into the past? Will the Catholic prejudice against violence, embodied in John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* and in John Paul II's opposition to war, including the wars of America, be lost to a world increasingly on the hair trigger? The September 11 catastrophe has shown how religious impulses can be perverted into sectarian fanaticism, resulting in violent horrors. Respectful exchange *between* religions, and correction *within* them, are now preconditions of world peace. Can the shaken Catholic Church rise to this challenge?

It is too soon to know the answer to these questions. But to put my own conviction simply: the twenty-first century urgently needs an intellectually vital, ecumenically open, and morally sound Catholicism, a Catholicism fully itself – that is to say, a Catholicism profoundly reformed.

Richard A. Shweder

*on the return
of the 'civilizing
project'*

The ranking of cultures, civilizations, and religions from better to worse may have gone out of fashion among academic anthropologists long ago, but such thinking is back, with a vengeance, and in some pretty fancy places. An “evolutionary” or “developmental” view of culture, reminiscent of the idea of the “civilizing project” that was used to justify European interventions in foreign

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lands in the last heyday of Western initiated globalization and Empire Building (roughly 1870 – 1914), has returned to the intellectual scene. And it is being used, once again, to classify as “backward,” “unenlightened,” or “insufferable” the beliefs and practices of other groups, nations, and even whole civilizations.

Consider, for example, events at two recent World Bank meetings, the first called “Culture Counts” and the second called “Gender and Justice in Africa.”

“Culture Counts” was a large international gathering held at the end of the last millennium in Florence, Italy. Although there were speeches by First Lady Hillary Clinton and the President of the World Bank, the intellectual highlight was the plenary academic session, which featured a keynote address by a prominent American economic historian. He reported on the last thousand years of what he presumed to be the universal race among nations to get rich and explained why cultural inheritance makes all the difference for whether a country is rich or poor.

China was probably leading the race one thousand years ago, he supposed, but they inherited too many xenophobic beliefs from their ancestors and didn’t want to trade with outsiders. So the Chinese fell behind and didn’t get a ship to the Atlantic Ocean until well into the nineteenth century. The keynote speaker then took the audience on an economic and cultural tour of the rest of the world. Culture counts everywhere, he said. In Latin America they have this attitude called “machismo”; so Latin men think they are little princes and don’t want to work. In Africa, okay yes the physical environment is not very good, but they fight all the time and they beat their wives. And then there is Southern Europe, where there is pious devotion to Catholicism. The Catholic Church

turned against Galileo and science. So Southern Europeans fell into ignorance and superstition. But now we have reached the year 2000. Look around! North Americans and Northern Europeans have won the race, and for good cultural reasons, the American exclaimed. Even before he could fully deliver his take-home message (“Get with the progressive program: Westernize your culture, model yourself after us, or remain poor!”) the Chinese delegate to the meeting had walked out of the room.

The second meeting, on “Gender and Justice in Africa,” was held at World Bank central in Washington, D.C., with satellite links to audiences in several African countries. A prominent Western liberal feminist, who apparently believes that progressive social change requires that the sisters of the world unite in opposition to a loathsome and oppressive universal patriarchy, delivered the following message to a predominately African female audience. Stop complaining about colonialism, she said. African traditions and customs were bad for women long before colonialism came along. She then referred to a sensational literary account of wife beating. As it turned out, the “sisters” in the audience were mainly united in opposition to what they perceived as the speaker’s neo-colonial attitudes, and all-too-familiar and high-minded first world missionary zeal. They certainly had some complaints about their men. But they still viewed them as members of the family and generally felt at home with them in their traditions. And they actually thought African females were pretty powerful, in their own way.

It is not surprising that for an American anthropologist of my generation the meetings I just described evoked a sense of *déjà vu*. Most American anthropologists who came of age in the postcolonial

period learned about cultural development and the idea that “the West is best” in their history of anthropology books, typically in a chapter about regrettable European theories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those theories were premised on the idea that all cultures or societies could be ranked or placed in stages, from low to high, from savage to civilized, from primitive to modern, from backward to advanced, culminating in the way of life of the English, the French, or the Germans. Associated with late-nineteenth-century cultural evolutionary theories was the civilizing project, known as the “White Man’s Burden” (although, then as now, it was understood to be a white woman’s burden too). It was assumed that the citizens of Europe had a moral obligation to enlighten, develop, and transform those who lived in backward, primitive, or “dark age” societies.

In those days the imperial liberal aim was to promote universal progress, which was associated with Northern European sensibilities and English (or French, or German) conceptions of an orderly society. In our own day, the gold standard for defining progress is often, if only implicitly, the United States – our wealth and free enterprise, our democratic form of government, our dedication to work, and our ideas about gender, sexuality, marriage, and the family. Otherwise, not much has changed: today, as in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, prominent Western scholars trumpet the superiority of our way of life; and today, as then, Western newspapers print sensationalized stories about barbaric practices in foreign lands.

“Afghan women face the world!” ran one recent headline. The implication was that our own local cultural standards for “normal” modes of communication, social affiliation, and face-to-face

contact provide the essential yardstick for measuring human progress and defining what all men and women must “naturally” want to do. The implication was that veiling in the Islamic world is a backward practice, that it is widely experienced as oppressive. That implication will certainly come as a surprise to many Islamic women, for whom the head scarf or the veil conveys a sense of dignified modesty, control, self-respect, civility, and a local socially endorsed conception of proper sex identity, gender relationships, and expressive signaling. That may be one reason that the burkha preceded the Taliban and is probably going to long survive the fall of Kandahar.

For much of the twentieth century, an introductory course in cultural anthropology, or at least its Platonic ideal, was meant to be an antidote to precisely that type of ethnocentric “up-from-barbarism,” “we’re developed/you’re not” thinking. The aim of such a course, which might be called “Anthropology 101,” was to enlarge the scope of our understanding of, appreciation of, and toleration for cultural differences. Its main message was this. Many things we take for granted as natural or divinely given or logically necessary or practically indispensable for life in an orderly, safe, and morally decent society are neither natural, nor divinely given, nor logically necessary, nor practically indispensable for life in an orderly, safe, and morally decent society. They are products of a local history. They are ways of seeing and being in the world which lend meaning and value to our own form of life. But they are not the only ways to construct a rational, worthy, and practically efficient way of life. They are matters of opinion, not absolute truth. They are discretionary forms, not mandatory ones. Nature and reason leave plenty of room for cultural variety, and we should too.

Of course, any intellectual approach that seriously challenges ethnocentrism is liable sometimes to produce highly controversial results. There would be little courage in the conviction that there is more than one way to construct a rational and morally decent way of life if such an attitude amounted to no more than a toleration or taste for each other’s foods and festivities. As a thought experiment, consider a potentially uncomfortable example: the practice of polygamy.

In light of the renewal of cultural developmental thinking, “polygamy” is once again receiving attention as a putative barbaric practice, the kind of thing done by savages and those with a “traditional” (read “underdeveloped” or “not yet sufficiently modern”) culture. I say “once again” because one is reminded of the great nineteenth-century polygamy debate in the USA. Despite the fact that there is a good deal of precedent for polygamy in the Bible, Mormons in the territory of Utah came under the gaze of that era’s civilizing project and were forced out of their religiously based marriage customs through legal sanctions.

In 1878 (*Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145) the United States Supreme Court was asked to decide whether a law prohibiting polygamy was constitutionally permissible, since it might appear to place a burden on the “free exercise of religion” by Mormons. The Court, in its wisdom, set out to define the limits on the coercive powers of the State, stating that “Congress was deprived of all legislative power over mere opinion, but was left free to reach actions which were in violation of social duties or subversive of good order.” That statement, of course, raises more questions than it answers. Is a cultural preference for monogamy over polygamy, even when expressed in conduct, more than a matter of opinion? Is polygamy really subversive of social order? Are there in fact

transcendental values or natural social duties that demand that kinship and family life must be organized solely around heterosexual monogamous family units?

Although no hard evidence was presented, the Court answered those questions in cultural developmental terms. They assumed that polygamy must be vicious and harmful to women and children and alien to the way of life of a civilized nation. They wrote, "Polygamy has always been odious among the northern and western nations of Europe, and, until the establishment of the Mormon Church, was almost exclusively a feature of the life of Asiatic and of African people." Whether they were right or wrong about the actual distribution of permissible polygamy among the cultures of the world, it seems apparent that the judges were implying more than just "that's the way we [the descendents of Northern and Western Europeans] do it here, so you must too." They were aware that on a world scale there is little agreement among the many cultures of the world about the single best way to organize kinship, marriage, and family life. Yet the existence of cultural diversity did not lead them to view their own preference for monogamous marriages as a matter of opinion or local cultural taste. Why? In part because they ranked the "Northern and Western nations of Europe" high in the evolutionary hierarchy of cultures and presupposed the superiority of European cultures at discovering moral truth.

What would Anthropology 101 have to say about the issue? How would it complicate our evaluation of the case? In fact, as anthropologists who study kinship have long known, polygamy per se is not subversive of social order. Typically in "polygamous societies" the vast majority of marriages are monogamous,

and the two forms of marriage have peacefully coexisted in almost every society where polygamy has been socially acceptable. Very many cultures of the world have found polygamy socially acceptable. In all such cultures there are healthy, happy, and socially dutiful people who have grown up or lived in polygamous households, including Mormon children prior to 1878. Indeed, it is rather doubtful that the likelihood of being healthy, happy, and socially dutiful in life actually turns on a family life issue of this type.

Polygamy may seem an exotic topic, but it is not just of historical or academic interest. In contemporary India, ever since the time of independence from British rule, civil order has in fact been enhanced (rather than disrupted) by allowing the large Muslim minority population the right to their own marriage laws permissive of polygamous marriages. Yet there is vocal opposition to this accommodation by liberal feminists and anti-Muslim Hindu fundamentalists (strange bedfellows indeed). In South Africa, where local ethnic group customs permissive of polygamy survived through the repressive years of the Apartheid regime, there are ongoing imperial liberal attempts to "progressively" reform society by mandating monogamy, although there is resistance as well, in the name of the "right to culture." It remains to be seen whether the contemporary leaders of Asia and Africa will now embrace the cultural preferences of "the Northern and Western nations of Europe" and react to the practices of their own ancestors as "odious." It would be ironic indeed if the "white man's burden" to eradicate polygamy from the world not only returned but was embraced by the cosmopolitan African elite.

Undoubtedly it was naïve of American

anthropologists to imagine that the civilizing project was an obsolete ideology associated only with the imperial liberalism of the late nineteenth century. The intellectual roots of the idea of progressive universal development run deep, and may even gain some force from the popular “Enlightenment” tale about the emergence of modern secular society in the West. The “Enlightenment” is a powerful myth about origins, much like the stories in the Bible and other sacred texts.

As the conventional story goes, once upon a time the West slumbered in intellectual darkness. Then about three hundred years ago, starting in countries like England and France, a great awakening occurred, as inquiring European minds became ever more rational, ever more able to know the truth about nature and human beings. As a result, “religion” (superstition, fantasy, ignorance, subjectivity) gave way to “science” (fact, education, objectivity, reason). Parochial group allegiances gave way to humanism, cosmopolitanism, and individualism. Hierarchical structures and top-down command systems gave way to autonomous structures. Church was separated from state, politics from science, power from truth.

For those who are secular missionaries, the “Enlightenment” story thus pro-

vides a charter for how to remake society and better the world in the image of the West. For those who are more theologically inclined, the idea that God blesses cultures in the sign of their prosperity now serves to justify the same mission. Either way, with the end of the Cold War, the temptation in the “West” to engage in “Enlightened” interventions into other peoples’ ways of life has become irresistible, once again. Indeed, the “West” and its prophets of progressive universal development are in a better position to have their way than any time since just before the outbreak of World War I.

Only time will tell whether intellectual history is repeating itself. One now looks to the heirs of twentieth-century cultural anthropology to join in a debate about the idea of progress and its implications for cultural diversity. One looks for rigorous and informed critiques of current developmental stories linking culture and economy, which tell a different or more complex tale about why some nations are rich and others poor.

Above all, one looks to pluralists of all kinds to teach us how to admire (and feel at home in) our own way of life without implying that it is the only kind that is worth living.

*The return
of the
'civilizing
project'*

Donald Kennedy

*on science
at a crossroads*

You might suppose that editing a scientific journal is easy work, and in the old days it may have been. After all, the authors all want very much to publish, and they don't have to be paid. The editor does have to keep peace between authors and to manage a process of peer evaluation that can sometimes be painful. But in the old days, there were fairly robust common understandings about what a research paper should contain; the editorial process didn't pose any special difficulties.

In recent years, however – as I have learned since assuming the editorship of *Science* – the task has gotten much more difficult. This is largely because the nature of science itself has changed dramatically.

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We are in the midst of a great revolution in the way basic research is conducted in the United States. It is not the first such change since World War II. When the time came to convert the vast military research venture that had been developed during the war into something more suitable for a peacetime economic recovery, a remarkable decision was reached under the leadership of Vannevar Bush: the government opted to invest resources in the same places in which the next generation of American scientists were being trained.

That momentous decision – quite unlike that taken by any other industrial democracy – created a vigorous, sprawling research system handsomely supported by federal funding, and largely located in the nation's universities. These, as a result, soon became known as "research universities," for better or worse.

The transformation wrought by that postwar revolution was extraordinary: it took American science away from being the province of a small, privileged elite and made it into a truly national venture. Its promoters found an inspiring label to suggest its promise: they called it the "Endless Frontier," a metaphor linking the unclaimed intellectual spaces of science with the unclaimed American lands of the nineteenth-century American West.

The second revolution in basic research began roughly forty years after the rise of America's research universities. After the "Endless Frontier" came what we might call the "Great Enclosure." Just as the public lands of the real nineteenth-century frontier were enclosed through the provision of a powerful set of federal policy incentives, so the public intellectual spaces of the Endless Frontier are now being enclosed by a new and different set of federal incen-

tives. The Homestead Act of 1862 made it possible for citizens to occupy 160 acres of Western land, improve that land while living on it for five years, and then take ownership. The Bayh-Dole amendments of 1980 made it possible for researchers or their institutions to patent the discoveries they made, even though the research that yielded them had been partially or entirely supported by federal funds.

In effect, the Bayh-Dole amendments have begun to accomplish for intellectual property what the Homestead Act had accomplished for physical property. The result has been a surge of basic research activity into the private sector – a surge accelerated by subsequent changes in the tax laws that have given strong encouragement to venture capital.

As a consequence, technology licensing is now a major activity in research universities. Faculty members are starting small companies to license their own inventions. And various other players – university administrators, government policymakers, and editors of scientific journals, for example – are all scrambling to negotiate the new terrain. These problems have arisen with particular force in the biomedical sciences. The growth of interest in biotechnology and the increasing cost of research have had a sudden impact on scientists not previously accustomed to commercial pressures. As a result, this sector has faced an unusually sharp transition, and in what follows I shall deal primarily with it.

For administrators at research universities, the challenge has been to sort through a maze of unprecedented and sometimes conflicting relationships. Some faculty members will start successful companies; their universities will hold the patents and then confront licensing problems.

Should there be a preference for non-exclusive licensing? Or is the faculty member's firm so clearly the only possible developer that exclusive licensing is both natural and preferable? Should the university co-invest with the faculty member in the venture, and if it does will that faculty member's colleagues perceive favoritism in subsequent decisions about space and salary? Suppose Professor X thinks that the university's research park is the right place to rent commercial space; do the Business Office and the Provost decide it together, or at arm's length? If Professor X's company offers the university a research grant to support work in X's laboratory, what should the terms be? And would it be appropriate for X to persuade one of her graduate students to stop thesis work for a year in order to solve a problem at the company? These may sound like hypothetical questions. But every one has arisen in a real university – and not once, but many times, in many places.

For faculty members, the problem is complicated not only by new relationships between academia and the business world, but by new developments in research methodology and changing expectations within the scientific community. For a researcher in the old days, the rules about publishing a scientific paper were clear: the paper reported all relevant methods and materials, so that other researchers could independently verify the results, and perhaps even extend the frontiers of knowledge by applying the findings in new areas.

For a researcher today, by contrast, the rules are anything but clear. The materials used in much contemporary current research – cell lines, monoclonal antibodies, knockout mice – are expensive to produce. Such materials ought to be freely available to other scientists, so

that they can verify the results of published papers; but since many such materials are produced by private corporations – or by academic competitors with commercial hopes – investigators have sometimes found it necessary to restrict access to materials and information that might be exploited by competitors for profit. “Material Transfer Agreements” have been developed to deal with that problem: institutions or individual investigators can restrict distribution of the material to for-profit entities, or claim reach-through rights.

At this point, a faculty member’s problem becomes a journal editor’s problem. Both have been affected by the contradictory ways in which different researchers may use the methods, materials, and results reported in a scientific paper. One may verify and seek to replicate a published result; another may exploit the reported methods, materials, and results in order to further proprietary research.

Having spent much time, knowledge, and experience developing a new cell line, capable of being exploited along a number of dimensions, should the author be obliged to hand it over to competitors – so that they can profit from his research? It is fairly standard practice for academic researchers to delay publication until the next generation of work is done, or until a patent claim has been made. For the researcher in a company, the expectation of future profits might well lead to a decision not to publish at all. Academic scientists by contrast may rush to get an exciting result out quickly – though they may also want to limit the access of others to the critical material for purposes beyond verification. That creates a tough challenge for a journal editor, because not only have materials and methods grown more elaborate, the data (gene sequences, crystallographic coordinates and data, epidemio-

logical tapes) have grown more complex as well.

Today many databases are made accessible by being posted on the Internet because they are simply too large to be printed. Should journals require particular repositories? If the research was supported with public funds, should the source of funds or the journal require that the repository be a public-sector repository? Can a depositor of such data make it available freely to certain (i.e., academic) users, but charge for access by commercial entities?

Some researchers have tried to regulate access to their data – to the chagrin of other researchers. The problem has not been resolved, and it is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon, certainly not by the editors of scientific journals acting alone. One example will suggest the complexity of the current situation. GenBank, a widely used database for gene sequences, is run by the Public Health Service. How freely can the information contained in such public databases be used by others? In the case of genome sequences, for example, to what extent does the poster of the sequence retain a form of ownership, and to what extent is it to be considered in the public domain as though published?

This problem was initially “solved” by a gentleman’s agreement among publicly funded scientists who worked with gene sequences. The “Bermuda Accord,” as the agreement was called, has given rise to concerns that those who post sequences cannot enjoy the rewards of their labor. Other scientists can download the data, perform analyses, and publish their own papers – sometimes even before the sequencers consider their datasets to be in final or publishable form.

One scientist at a major sequencing center has argued, though hardly persuasively, that posted sequence data are un-

published materials, and that others who use them for their own analyses and publish the results are guilty of misappropriation of data – a form of plagiarism under the definition currently used by the National Institutes of Health.

A special problem for scientific journals arises from the new level of basic research activity in the commercial sector. Scientists in for-profit concerns sometimes want to publish an exciting new result, yet reserve some, or all, of the methods or primary data for proprietary purposes.

There is a public interest in getting important science out from under the shield of trade secrecy, but the ‘community standard’ in science has been that no exceptions should be made to the rule that all relevant methods, material, and results should be made available to other scientists. Yet, in fact, there have been a growing number of exceptions to this rule. For example, *Science* – the journal I now edit – published a paper several years ago in which a proprietary dataset from seismographic explorations conducted by Exxon was used to reconstruct the history of sea-level rise. Because of intense interest in the subject, and also because of the high quality of the paper, the journal decided to allow the authors to treat the Exxon dataset as a proprietary trade secret. The prestigious journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has, within the past three years, published two papers in which data essential to confirming the claimed result were available to commercial researchers only for a price, and another in which sequence data were not available at all.

That same National Academy of Sciences, meanwhile, is conducting a committee exercise aimed at defining appropriate standards for access to data and materials. That is likely to be a difficult task, coming as close to home as its own journal.

To complicate matters further, in some kinds of research it is difficult to decide what data is properly regarded as “primary” and therefore ought to be disclosed. In the case of a health study, for example, is it the individual interview sheets? The tapes on which the interview data are entered and summarized? The summaries reflecting the means, variances, etc., of the numbers?

In laboratory studies, published papers traditionally have included a complete account of the methods, tables containing averages from individual observations, etc. No editor or reader would think to demand the individual observations themselves. Some congressional investigators have nevertheless required the submission of laboratory notebooks, counter tapes, and the like; and the recent Shelby Amendment, pursuant to a rule issued by the Office of Management and Budget, makes the primary data of certain kinds of research accessible under the Freedom of Information Act.

The issue of how much an author must disclose in a paper is further complicated by substantial differences among the ‘community standards’ that apply in various disciplines.

Economics, which is increasingly mathematical and clearly enjoys status as a science, depends heavily on large sets of quantitative data. The majority of economics journals do not require that authors make their data available to others – even, in many cases, to reviewers or commentators. Indeed, some government sources of social-science data limit access to a small number of favored institutions and authors. Even though *The American Economic Review*, a leading journal in the field, stipulates that data must be shared with anyone who asks to see it, the instructions to authors note that if the data is proprietary, then the editor may be willing to waive this requirement.

These are trying times for the editor of a scientific journal. With the explosion of basic research in the commercial sector, old assumptions and customs are being challenged – and the old assumptions already differ from one field to another. Indeed, the strains being felt in the world of research publication are merely echoes of strains being felt in every phase of the research enterprise itself: strains felt not just by editors, but by faculty, university administrators, businessmen, and researchers themselves. Moreover, the complexity and diversity of contemporary science make it unlikely that the current revolution in basic research will alleviate these strains any time soon.

Two things at least seem clear to me: The old rules no longer work. And no single set of new rules can resolve the myriad problems that researchers, like editors, must now face.

Richard Sennett

*on welfare & the
psychology of
dependence*

Dependence is a deep, and deeply unsettling, social relationship. Those who must ask others for help risk losing face, and respect, especially in the eyes of strangers. Yet our intimate experience tells another story. Imagine a lover who declares, “Don’t worry about me; I can take care of myself. I will never become a burden to you.” We should show him the door; this non-needy creature could never take our own needs seriously.

In private life, dependence ties people together. A child who could not depend on adults for guidance would be a profoundly damaged human being, unable to learn, deeply insecure. As adults, if we avoided people sicker, older, and weaker than ourselves who needed help, we

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would at best have a circle of acquaintances, not friends.

It is in the public realm that dependence – especially on the state – is seen as shameful, particularly to modern welfare reformers. At a recent Labour Party Conference, Tony Blair declared that “the new welfare state must encourage work, not dependency.” Welfare policy now emphasizes self-reliance and temporary assistance – as much to build up the self-esteem of the poor as to save money for the state.

When reformers like Blair evoke the psychological virtue of a smaller welfare state, I often think of the Cabrini-Green housing projects in Chicago, where I grew up after World War II. When I was living there in the late 1940s, Cabarini was a place for people like my mother who couldn't afford to house themselves. By the 1960s, it took care of broken families, teenage mothers, and drug addicts; the dependency was greater, the shame supposedly worse. Yet even during Cabrini's grimmest days in the 1980s, when shootings were a routine occurrence, many residents felt a surprising affection for “home.” We had no other resource, but we also had to wrest from what was given to us something that we valued in ourselves.

Much of the outside world indeed regarded tenancy in public housing as demeaning: the authorities thought they had to do something to save the Cabrini residents from themselves. In the case of Cabrini, the welfare reformers resorted in the end to the ultimate solution. In 1995, much of the project was destroyed, the houses bulldozed, and the land leveled, upon which are now rising expensive and quite beautiful townhouses.

The impulse to wean people from dependency has moved welfare reform into a much wider sphere to include unemployment benefits, medical care,

schooling, and provisions for old age. This drive to reform the lives of the poor and the needy only deepens the puzzling divide between the private and the public sides of dependence – welfare clients, like any one else, trying to transmute their need for others into something positive in themselves.

Why do liberal reformers assume that dependence is demeaning? A generation ago, Daniel Patrick Moynihan put it this way: “To be poor is an objective condition; to be dependent, a subjective one as well. Being poor is often associated with considerable personal qualities; being dependent rarely so.” The explanation he arrived at for the subjective corruption of the pauper, of the welfare client, was that “[Dependency] is an incomplete state in life: normal in the child, abnormal in the adult.”

Moynihan applied to the welfare state a long-standing argument in political thought – what one might call “the infantilization thesis.” In his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), John Locke explored why an adult might behave in public like a needy child. Locke's nemesis was the statesman Sir Robert Filmer, who maintained that the absolute power of kings resembled the authority of a father over his children. Locke accepted that in the family, in private, the reign of a father over his children was one of just dominion and submission. But the father's power was legitimate, in Locke's view, only because the capacity to reason independently was undeveloped in the child. As human beings grow up, they become more able to judge and act rationally, and so become able to rule themselves:

[The father's] command over his children is but temporary . . . a discipline to their education . . . yet his power extends not to their liberty when they are once arrived

to ... the years of discretion. The father's empire then ceases, and he can from thenceforward no more dispose of the liberty of his son than that of any other man.

A legitimate state should enable citizens to free themselves from paternal dependence.

What happens if the state blocks the capacity to reason independently and rationally as an adult? Then, in psychological terms, adults may regress to childhood as it was experienced in the private realm. In advancing this idea, Locke spoke not only as Filmer's antagonist, but as a sociological observer of courts – notoriously the English court of Charles II, though his observations would apply with even greater force slightly later to the French court of Louis XIV at Versailles, both filled with dukes and duchesses devoted to playtime. The court's fripperies, revolving around deep intrigues for the most trivial favors, mindless boredom, and the endless search for amusement, came at the expense of rational self-rule; these were truly “children of the King.” They had no being but his command, no desire but his wish.

A century after Locke, in a famous answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?,” Kant also invoked the danger of infantilization: “Enlightenment is Man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. *Immaturity* is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is *self-incurred* if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another.”

The sharp-eyed reader will notice that Kant and Locke do not quite agree. For the former, adult immaturity is ‘self-incurred,’ for the latter, social and political conditions force men to behave like

boys – a disagreement of great importance to later welfare policy.

Still, both philosophers concurred in what they saw as the remedy for the dishonor of dependence: the ability to exercise rational sovereignty over one's self to the greatest extent possible; in particular, both entreat the adult individual to take nothing the powerful say as true simply because one depends on them. Judging rationally for oneself makes one think like an adult – and so earn the regard of others. The “infantilization thesis” has profoundly shaped modern beliefs about mutual respect. Denial of the opportunity to act like an adult is the great Lockean fear. This fear carries a tragic weight: it diminishes the possibility of trust among unequals; it inhibits confidence in or surrender to the judgment of others. Mutual respect requires the maintenance of a certain wary distance.

In the workings of the welfare state, this liberal formula has an undeniable logic. The patient to whom a doctor explains nothing, the student taught by rote commands, the employee who is ignored – all have become spectators to their own needs, objects worked upon by a superior power. Communist practice could be found as well on this side of dependency's coin; in the Soviet empire, spectatorship dominated everyday life beneath the crust of collective ideology.

Such modern-day liberal reformers as Tony Blair and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, like Locke and Kant before them, meant to establish the dignity of citizens as adults. They meant to challenge regimes that demand servility, producing citizens who are spectators to their own needs.

Yet this liberal inheritance badly serves us now in thinking about our own society. We need a politics of welfare

based on richer social-psychological insights.

Consider the concept of maturation. Political liberalism has drawn a sharp contrast between childhood and adulthood; it has further assumed that human beings enter the public realm as adult citizens, like a moth suddenly emerging from a chrysalis. This view is reflected in a variety of laws establishing the 'age of consent' or the 'age of reason,' when a citizen is considered mature enough to vote or enter into sexual relationships.

What modern psychologists dispute about the chrysalis image is the finality it implies. Most developmental psychologists assume there is a constant passage back and forth between childhood and adult experience. Memory does that work; rather than simply recovering facts about the past, memory goes back and forth between past and present, reworking and reinterpreting. For this reason, regression to childhood has a far richer and more positive meaning to Freud than it did than to Locke; regression forms part of the psychodynamic of reasoning.

Of course, Tony Blair was not elected for his views on regression. What's more politically salient in his views is his wish to rescue people from the shame of dependency, which is, of course, a culture-specific belief – every belief is. But it's useful to keep in mind just how culturally specific the sense of shame surrounding neediness really is.

The Japanese word *amae*, for instance, expresses quite a different range of sentiments than the English word dependence. In Japanese culture people routinely depend on help from other adults, expecting to be cared for as by right. Businessmen and politicians do so, as well as paupers. Among strangers in cities, for instance, *amae* becomes the practice of *tanomu*; *tanomu* behavior

seems to dramatize the sheer fact of helplessness – weak deferential smiles, hands turned out slightly in appeal. Strangers in the Japanese cities who practice *tanomu* in asking for directions, in shopping, or in bars, expect, however, to reciprocate when others approach them for help in turn. Each moment of helping out creates an immediate connection between people who otherwise don't know one another. The psychiatrist Takeo Doi uneasily likens *amae* to what Western psychoanalysis calls 'passive object-love.' Uneasily, because in Japan surrender is not a loss of face. Shame comes to the person who fails to respond; shame comes to the indifferent individual.

In Western psychological thinking, shame has been more tied to competition than to the brute fact of dependency. Freud's contemporary Alfred Adler coined the term "inferiority complex" to convey the feelings of inadequacy aroused by the unequal results of competition. A loyal socialist if eventually a disloyal Freudian, Adler argued that competitive experiences in the market economy were most likely to breed shame in adults; market failure rather than the welfare state would generate loss of self-esteem in modern society.

A subsequent psychoanalyst, Gerhart Piers, sought to give shame-as-inadequacy a richer meaning. He understood the experience of shame as an inner sense of incompleteness, whatever the hard evidence of achievement or gratification. A person who has failed to achieve "fulfillment" imagines there is something wrong with him or herself, but that gnawing sense of incompleteness is also a creative motor, driving men and women finally to do something "right," whether or not they do it better than others.

Adler's notion of an "inferiority complex" raises a doubt about modern ef-

forts at welfare reform. Welfare reformers have imagined that in forcing people to work, a demeaning chapter would close in their lives. But what if another demeaning chapter then opens? If Adler is right, the fact that these new workers are likely to be at the bottom of the occupation heap will breed a sense of inferiority. If Piers is right, they may well also enter into the more “normal” condition of internal longing for what they lack – a longing that may be impossible to satisfy, but which may also drive people forward.

On both counts, what we should be searching for in welfare policy is to make people more competent, rather than simply more independent. To become competent they may well need stable, life-long help; the state should provide that support without treating those in need as parasites.

Psychological investigation puts forward a second and equally important aspect of shame that divorces this sentiment from the experience of dependence. It involves that “loss of face” that is linked to exposure, to nakedness. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud tied shame explicitly to the naked body; he did so because of the German word itself for shame, *Scham*. In both men and women, *die Scham* names the genital zone; the pubic mound is *Schamberg*, pubic hair *Schamhaare*. In the *Three Essays* Freud therefore took shameful exposure to be an erotic exhibition.

For psychologists writing after Freud, the sexual component of nakedness has mattered less, the social conditions of exposure more. Thus Erik Erikson, in an elegantly simple formula, proposed that shame occurs when someone is rendered “visible and yet [is] not ready to be visible” – for example, when a child struggling to read is being singled out by a teacher for making a mistake. Sylvan

Tomkins finds something cunning about the experience of exposure; he instances the “child who covers his face in the presence of the stranger, but who also peeks through his fingers so that he may look without being seen.” What adults, like children, often want is to control the conditions under which they see and are seen.

Lockean liberalism put a great emphasis on the transparency of political relationships, fearing secret state powers hidden away from the scrutiny of citizens. His ideas proved an important source for modern demands for freedom of information. But his legacy has also had a more paradoxical aspect, in the desire to make social relations as transparent as political ones. Wanting to know who someone “really” is obviously violates his privacy. It gives him no room to hide.

One of the subtler cultural consequences of the Lockean tradition is to make people feel demeaned if they have to expose their neediness – with especially perverse consequences for the groups in which they belong. In a study I conducted several years ago of people at work, I discovered that the fear of asking for help was a fairly reliable sign of a dysfunctional organization. Employees feared appearing needy for good reason; their employers understandably didn’t like being asked to sort out messes. They wanted employees they didn’t have to “mother.” But the fear of asking for help and so appearing needy meant that information-flows in the organization dried up; problems became evident only after they had become real messes.

We might in this regard want to reconsider Thomas Jefferson’s invocation of the independent yeoman farmer as the ideal citizen. It perhaps suited an agrarian society (though his was also a society that embraced the involuntary depen-

dency of slaves). But this Jeffersonian ideal can have little resonance in the context of modern capitalism. The yeoman's virtue becomes perverse and disempowering for anyone who is ashamed to ask for help – whether at work or through a social worker.

This is why, ultimately, we need to rethink the attack on adult dependency that informs the liberal tradition, from Locke and Kant to Moynihan and Blair. I don't doubt the good intentions of the welfare reformers; I do question their psychological insight. Adult dependency is a condition to be managed, not avoided. Properly appreciated, it will foster in the public sphere, as it does in private life, an enriching sense of mutual trust.

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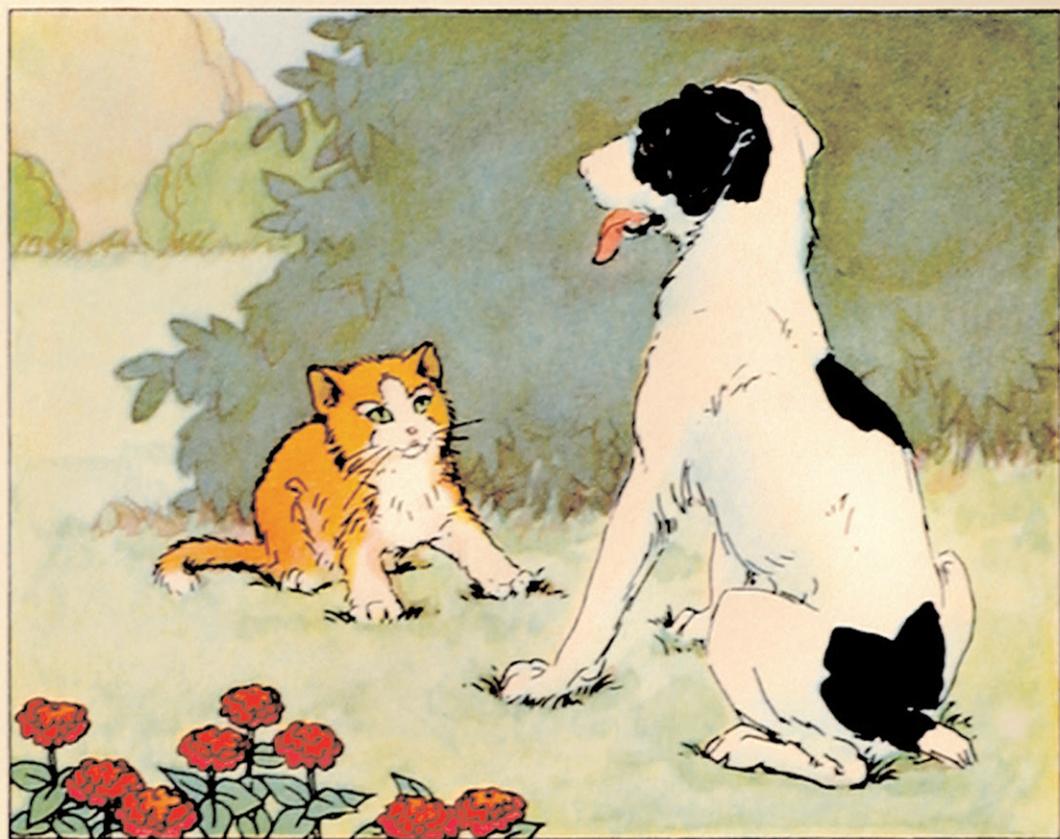
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Spot can run.

Little Mew can run.

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