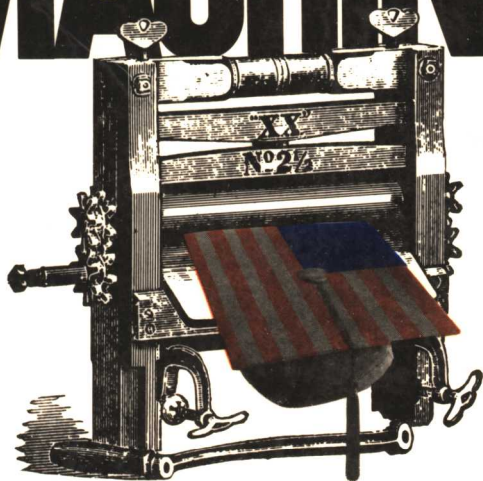


THE SORTING MACHINE



NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL
POLICY SINCE 1945

JOEL SPRING

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PREFACE

This book grew out of my interest in the relationship between American education and American foreign policy in the years that followed World War II. Originally I thought the use of educational institutions and programs during the cold war added a new dimension to the social uses of schooling in American society. As my research progressed, I began to realize that foreign policy and education could not be isolated from more general economic and social trends and that American foreign policy had a significant impact on educational development within the United States. This led to a closer look at the manpower discussions, military-training debates, and national school controversies in the early 1950s. From these events I began to understand more clearly the economic and social forces that produced the National Defense Education Act and the new mathematics and science curriculums of the latter part of the decade. All these events seemed to serve the needs of a foreign policy designed to contain communism and protect the interests of American corporate expansion into foreign markets.

The one outstanding contradiction to these trends during the 1950s was the civil rights movement with its concern about inequality in schooling and its potential for organizing the poor and creating social-class conflict. I wanted to understand how the potential revolutionary nature of this movement was contained. I found this in a theory of poverty which denied class conflict and used education as an instrument for maintaining social order. This theory of poverty found expression in the Economic Opportunity Act and Elementary and Secondary Education Act of the 1960s. This led to an interest in discussions about career education and equality of opportunity during the Nixon administration and how they fit into the general trends of educational development since World War II.

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CONTENTS

- 1 The National Battle of the Schools 1
 - 2 The Channeling of Manpower in
a Democratic Society 52
 - 3 The Development of
a National Curriculum 93
 - 4 The Civil Rights Movement 140
 - 5 The War on Poverty 186
 - 6 Career Education and Equality
of Educational Opportunity 230
 - 7 Conclusion 259
- Notes 267
- Index 301

THE NATIONAL BATTLE OF THE SCHOOLS

1 Since 1945, the federal government of the United States has played an increasing role in the conduct and policies of educational institutions. Fears caused by the cold war with the Soviet Union and the demands of the civil rights movement have resulted in direct federal involvement in defining educational priorities and in regulating American schools. The government's major interest in schooling during this period has been in terms of meeting national objectives in the areas of foreign policy and social and economic development; consequently, federal intervention in education has been directed toward achieving specific purposes in terms of national policy.

The basic argument of this book is that federal involvement in education since the end of World War II has reinforced one specific tradition in American education. American public schooling expanded in the nineteenth century for a variety of social and political reasons: as a means of maintaining a political community through the education of a democratic citizen,

as a way to increase morality and reduce crime, as a method of Americanizing immigrant populations and preparing the population as a whole for an industrial society.¹ A single volume would be hard pressed to explore all the different shades of meaning and purposes for supporting public schooling in the last century. What is important to this volume is one argument for public schooling that developed in the early part of the twentieth century: public education can increase the efficiency of industrial society by the proper selection and channeling of national manpower resources. This argument supported the rise of vocational guidance, the grouping of students according to ability, the separation of students in high school into different academic programs according to future occupations, and the importance of intelligence testing.² This argument gave schools the responsibility for determining student abilities and interests and channeling students through an educational program that would lead them to a specific social slot in the national labor force.

It was this argument that federal involvement in education after 1945 emphasized and made the central feature of American schooling. This was a direct result of national concern about meeting manpower needs in the cold war and the demands of the civil rights movement. It included a concern about the discovery of talented youth in the 1950s and special programs for disadvantaged children in the 1960s. This tradition was swept up in the rhetoric of equality of opportunity in the 1960s, and emerged in the form of career education in the 1970s.

Federal educational policy is the result of complex interactions between a variety of individuals and social forces in and out of government and education. The story of this development begins with the national debate about schooling that occurred in the tense atmosphere of the cold war. From there it moves through

the manpower channeling policies of the federal government in the 1950s, the federal influence on the development of national school curriculums, the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty of the 1960s, and the arguments for equality of educational opportunity in the 1960s and '70s.

Public Criticism of the Schools

In 1951 the executive secretary of the National Education Association's National Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education reported in a slightly hysterical tone that the number of "attacks" upon public schooling had increased rapidly since the closing days of World War II. According to their survey, the pace of "attack" was so swift that more than twice as many attacks occurred in the three-year period since 1948 as in the period before 1948. The phraseology and reaction of educators often made them appear as warriors doing battle with an enemy that was storming the walls of the public schools. Words like *attack*, *counter-attack*, and *siege* were hurled around to describe the plight of the professional educator. The executive secretary of the National Commission for the Defense of Democracy through Education, reporting the increasing criticism of the schools, exemplified the battle mentality. He stressed that the "attacking groups are not as dangerous as they seem . . . but we all need to be alarmed as were the Minute Men by Paul Revere in 1775." He went on to call the educational troops together with this plea: "If, like the Minute Men, we are ready to carry out individual responsibilities of intelligent group planning, professional unity, organized action, and friendly contact with our allies, we will be as successful in defending our cause as were the gallant men at Concord."³

Criticism of the public schools came from many sectors of American life. One group was a natural product of a society that saw itself in a life-and-death struggle with the Soviet Union and communism. With national leaders wandering throughout the country warning of communist subversion and conspiracy, the dangers of an imminent nuclear war, and the need for planned national defense and security, citizens became gripped by a paranoiac reaction that saw left-wing subversives hiding behind every door. The public schools seemed like a perfect target for communist subversion to win "the hearts and minds" of the American people and erode the foundations of democracy. During the late 1940s and into the 1960s citizen's groups sprang up around the country to get communism and communists out of the schools. These groups found anti-American material lurking on school library shelves and in textbooks. Citizen vigilante groups stormed school board meetings to demand that the schools purge themselves of material that smacked of un-Americanism and socialist and communist subversion. Added to the complaints of these groups was a belief that the school curriculum was too soft and needed to emphasize basic skills and academic training. At times, criticism of the public school curriculum as it had evolved in the twentieth century almost reached the point of claiming that it was the product of a communist plot.

Another group of critics emerged from the university world. They saw antiintellectualism in American life as their enemy. To a large extent their fears originated from the right-wing's hysteria about subversion. The 1950s saw a steadily increasing concern among the academic community about the growing antiintellectual temper of American society. During the 1930s and early 1940s the academic community had experienced a long honeymoon of respect and access to centers of

power. Academics were frequently called to Washington in the 1930s to be consulted as part of President Roosevelt's brain trust; during World War II, their services were often engaged in the war effort. But after the war the intellectuals felt they were losing power and respect. This feeling was chronicled by one American historian, Richard Hofstadter, in a book that was very much a product of the period and bore the descriptive title *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*.

Hofstadter argued that during the 1950s the term antiintellectualism, a term heard only rarely before, became a familiar part of the national vocabulary. In part, he argued, this was the result of right-wing attacks that saw the critical mind of the intellectual as subverting American ideals and traditions. This thinking was exemplified by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the early 1950s with his attacks on subversion in government and in the universities. Antiintellectualism rose to a national issue during the presidential elections of 1952, which pitted the intellectual Adlai Stevenson against the western-novel-reading Dwight D. Eisenhower. In Hofstadter's words, Adlai Stevenson was "a politician of uncommon mind and style, whose appeal to intellectuals overshadowed anything in recent history." The election contest was pictured as one between the "eggheads" and the people of common sense. When Stevenson lost in 1952, *Time* magazine claimed that it disclosed "an alarming fact long suspected: there is a wide and unhealthy gap between the American intellectuals and the people." Hofstadter went on to document antiintellectualism in the 1950s with such facts as these: the growth of the use of "egghead" as an invidious term; President Eisenhower defining an intellectual in a public speech as "a man who takes more words than are necessary to tell more than he knows"; the Eisenhower-appointed ambassador to Ceylon not knowing

the name of the prime minister of Ceylon and being unable to pronounce the name of the prime minister of India; and the heated right-wing rhetoric of the 1950s that referred to Harvard professors as "twisted thinking intellectuals" who, while "burdened with Phi Beta Kappa keys," were not "equally loaded with honesty and common sense."⁴

One of the root causes of antiintellectualism, so university people including Hofstadter believed, was the American public school. The schools, it was argued, bred a disrespect for the life of the mind by spoon-feeding a curriculum that consisted of intellectual pabulum. Both right-wing communist hunters and status-seeking academicians agreed that a major problem with the schools was the "softness" of the curriculum and lack of academic training. But both groups had different goals and different enemies. Right-wingers wanted more disciplined and academically oriented schools to train loyal and patriotic Americans who would fight communism. Academics wanted a disciplined and academically oriented school to produce a respect for the role of the intellectual. Right-wing groups defined communists, left-wing subversives, and intellectuals as their enemies. Academics defined as their enemy the professional educator.

The picture of the professional educator as enemy of American life was born amid the school controversies of the 1950s. A whole group of critics emerged; along with the academics, they linked the major problems of schooling to the professional educator, who controlled the teacher-training institutions, the curriculum, and the school bureaucracy. As school controversies raged into the 1960s and '70s, this argument would continue—with racism now added to the charges. What occurred during the 1950s was an apparent awakening to the fact that accompanying the expansion of public schooling

in the United States was an increasing growth of professional means of governing and controlling public education. The vast number of schools, and the requirements of teacher training and curriculum development, had led to the development of a large corps of educational experts who exercised considerable influence over public schooling. When academics wanted to know why education was in such a sorry condition, it was easy to point to the professional educator as the enemy. After all, this was the group responsible for the introduction of new curriculums and materials. When critics of the school tried to change schooling, they found themselves running head-on into professional control and school bureaucracy. The critics began to argue that meaningful local control of the schools no longer existed and that it had been replaced by a mindless group of professionals.

In addition to the groups fighting communists, anti-intellectualism, and professional educators were those who wanted the schools to win the manpower race with the Soviet Union. This group combined all the elements of the other critics with a hysterical fear that the Soviet Union would destroy the United States by educating more engineers and scientists than we did. Although not accepting the right-wing concern of subversion, they maintained a sense of fear about communism by arguing that the American way of life could be preserved only by increasing the academic training in our public schools and emphasizing science and mathematics.

The Anticommunist Crusade

The incident that gave right-wing attacks on the school a national press, and must have left other school administrators in a state of apprehension, was the forced resignation in 1950 of Superintendent Willard

Goslin of Pasadena, California. Goslin was a national figure in professional educational circles. In 1948, the same year he accepted the superintendent's position in Pasadena, he was installed as president of the American Association of School Administrators. School administrators around the country watched with unhappy feelings while the president of their organization was dragged through the wringer of an anticommunist crusade to save the school from subversion. The school controversy in Pasadena was also interesting because it followed a pattern that began to occur in other communities: groups formed around some important local issue and eventually expanded their concerns to the general educational philosophy of the school.⁵

In Pasadena the issue that sparked the school crusade was a request by Superintendent Goslin for an increase in local taxes to support the schools. The year the tax proposal was made, 1949, a local School Development Council had been formed. It set as its first goal the defeat of two socialists running for the school board. When the tax issue was raised, the council wanted to know exactly how much the schools were spending and for what purposes. This launched a crusade against increased taxes and provided a community forum for discussion of educational policies. The council's leadership began to base their attacks on the schools on information and ideas supplied in pamphlets issued by the National Council for American Education headed by Allen Zoll.

The National Council for American Education was one of many national organizations that focused attention after World War II on subversion in the public schools. Other organizations of this type included the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies, the American Council of Christian Laymen, the Anti-Communist League of America, the California Anti-Communist League, the Christian Nationalist Crusade, Defenders of

American Education, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Sons of the American Revolution.⁶ Allen Zoll organized the National Council for American Education in 1948, the same year Goslin arrived in Pasadena, after a varied career that had brought him into contact with other early right-wing crusaders including Gerald L. K. Smith and Father Coughlin. Zoll reportedly began his crusade with a "Michigan statement" that "we form hell-raising groups to find out what is being taught in the schools, and then we raise hell about it"⁷ Pasadena, of course, was not the only community that was influenced by Zoll's pamphlets. In 1951 the *Saturday Review of Literature* devoted a large section of its education issue to school controversies around the country. In Denver, Colorado, Zoll's pamphlets, including one titled *The Commies Are After Your Kids*, were said to have provided a good deal of ammunition for local citizen groups. In Englewood, New Jersey, and Port Washington, New York, there were reports of significant influences from Zoll's writings.⁸ In Pasadena the Zoll pamphlet that attracted interest was *Progressive Education Increases Juvenile Delinquency*, which stated that "so-called progressive education, shot through as it is with the blight of Pragmatism, has had a very deleterious effect upon the original character of American education."⁹

Unfortunately for Superintendent Goslin, when local groups began to direct their attention to the issue of progressive education, they found that Goslin had invited one of the more famous progressive educators, William Heard Kilpatrick, to a teacher-training workshop. The fact that Pasadena teachers had come into contact with Kilpatrick led the School Development Council to ask the Board of Education bluntly if the program was "part of a campaign to 'sell' our children on the collapse of our way of life and substitution of collectivism."¹⁰ Concern about progressive education

was not isolated to Pasadena but ran through school battles and writings about education during this period. Academics concerned about antiintellectualism attacked progressive education because it seemed to weaken the intellectual content of the curriculum. Rightwing groups attacked progressive education because it appeared antithetical to the American way of life.

What is important to realize about right-wing concern about progressive education is that it represented a widening gap between what some people thought was the ideology of America and the ideology that had transformed the public schools in the twentieth century. Most of the attacking right-wing groups seemed to share a faith that the American way of life depended on free marketplace capitalism where "rugged" individualists competed for economic gain. In the case of Pasadena, many members of the School Development Council were small businessmen and professionals who operated in an economic world that seemed to be defined in those terms. On the other hand, the American public school since the beginning of the twentieth century had organized around the principle that traditional free marketplace individualism was a thing of the past and that a modern urban industrial world depended not on economic individualism but on economic cooperation. This ideology did not imply socialism or communism but a form of cooperative democratic social organization. This ideology led to an emphasis on group activity and social development in the schools. The twentieth century had seen an expansion of these activities and goals in the form of group projects in the classroom, school clubs, sports, assemblies, student government, and other extracurricular activities. By World War II, American public schools had geared themselves to produce through school socialization a cooperative democratic character.¹¹

In the late 1940s the term progressive education had often been associated with these developments. Whether in fact those educators who called themselves progressive were responsible for these developments is debatable.¹² What is important in terms of postwar developments is that a group of educators who called themselves progressives launched during the depression years a campaign to bring about radical transformation of the economic system through the public schools. These educators were centered around Teachers College at Columbia University and had among their leaders George Counts and William Heard Kilpatrick. George Counts launched the campaign in 1932 with a speech titled "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?" Counts argued in terms of the ideology that had shaped the schools in the early part of the twentieth century, that competition and rugged individualism had been outmoded by science and technology. What Counts did was to take this argument to its next logical step. He declared that what the United States needed was a planned socialized economy. This was to be achieved through indoctrination, and educators should accept that fact and use it for the reconstruction of society. This group of progressive educators eventually issued a magazine, the *Social Frontier*, which became a focus of educational radicalism during the 1930s.¹³

Several effects of the radical progressive education campaign of the 1930s served to link progressive education, in the minds of many people, with an economic radicalism that smacked of socialism and communism and to create a distrust of the educational activities at Columbia's Teachers College. The campaign also tended to link anything new in the schools with the term progressive education, and, consequently, with some form of economic radicalism. For example, in Denver in the late 1940s, progressive education became a blanket term to cover anything in the schools that was not re-