

PAUL GOODMAN

Compulsory Mis-education and The Community of Scholars

A challenging critique of the present structure of American education; by the author of *Growing Up Absurd*.

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*Compulsory
Mis-education*

AND

*The Community
of Scholars*

by

PAUL GOODMAN



VINTAGE BOOKS

A Division of Random House • New York

VINTAGE BOOKS

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 66-13013

Acknowledgments are made to the publications in which some chapter of *Compulsory Mis-education* appeared in an earlier form: *The American Child* (National Committee on the Employment of Youth); *Harvard Educational Review*; *The School Dropout*, Daniel Schreiber, ed. (NEA Project: School Dropouts); *Channels* (Western Michigan University); *Commonweal*; *Orientation/1964*, a subsidiary of *motive* magazine (The Division of Higher Education of The Methodist Church, © 1964); *Playboy*.

Compulsory Mis-education is reprinted by arrangement with Horizon Press.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PAUL GOODMAN, a native New Yorker, was born in 1911. After graduating from City College in New York, he received his Ph.D. in humanities from the University of Chicago. Mr. Goodman has taught at the University of Chicago, New York University, Black Mountain College, Sarah Lawrence, the University of Wisconsin, and has lectured widely at various universities throughout the country. He is associated with the New York and Cleveland institutes for Gestalt Therapy and the University Seminar at Columbia. He is also a Fellow of the City Institute for Policy-Studies in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Goodman has written for *Commentary*, *Politics*, *Kenyon Review*, *Resistance*, *Liberation*, *Partisan Review*, etc. His fiction includes *The Facts of Life*, *The Break-Up of Our Camp*, *Parents' Day*, *The Empire City*, and *Making Do*, and he has also published a volume of verse, *The Lordly Hudson*. *Kafka's Prayer* and *The Structure of Literature* are books of criticism. In the area of social studies, in addition to being the co-author of *Communitas* and *Gestalt Therapy*, he has written *Art and Social Nature*, *Growing Up Absurd*, *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*, *Drawing the Line* (a pamphlet), and *People or Personnel*.

Mr. Goodman is married and has three children.

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*Compulsory
Mis-education*

For Mabel

CONTENTS

for Compulsory Mis-education

<i>Preface</i>	7
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Part One Primary Grades

1	The universal trap	15
2	Visiting a school	35
3	The present moment in progressive education	40

Part Two High School

4	A proposal to extend compulsory schooling	51
5	The universe of discourse in which they grow up	64
6	Programmed	80
7	Teaching science	92

Part Three College

8	"I don't want to work—why should I?"	105
9	An unteachable generation	113
10	Two simple proposals	122
11	A usual case—nothing fancy	131

"One had to cram all this stuff into one's mind, whether one liked it or not. This coercion had such a deterring effect that, after I had passed the final examination, I found the consideration of any scientific problems distasteful to me for an entire year. . . . It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty. To the contrary, I believe that it would be possible to rob even a healthy beast of prey of its voraciousness, if it were possible, with the aid of a whip, to force the beast to devour continuously, even when not hungry—especially if the food, handed out under such coercion, were to be selected accordingly."

—Albert Einstein

(quoted in *Examining in Harvard College*)

PREFACE

i

In these remarks on the schools, I do not try to be generous or fair, but I have seen what I am talking about and I hope I am rational. This case is that we have been swept on a flood-tide of public policy and popular sentiment into an expansion of schooling and an aggrandizement of school-people that is grossly wasteful of wealth and effort and does positive damage to the young. Yet I do not hear any fundamental opposition in principle, nor even prudent people (rather than stingy people) saying, go warily. The dominance of the present school auspices prevents any new thinking about education, although we face unprecedented conditions.

It is uncanny. When, at a meeting, I offer that perhaps we already have too much formal schooling and that, under present conditions, the more we get the less education we will get, the others look at me oddly and proceed to discuss how to get more money for schools and how to upgrade the schools. I realize suddenly that I am confronting a mass superstition.

In this little book, I keep resorting to the metaphor school-monks: the administrators, professors, academic sociologists, and licensees with diplomas who have proliferated into an invested intellectual class worse than

anything since the time of Henry the Eighth. Yet I am convinced—as they get their grants and buildings and State laws that give them sole competence—that the monks are sincere in their bland faith in the school. The schools provide the best preparation for everybody for a complicated world, are the logical haven for unemployed youth, can equalize opportunity for the underprivileged, administer research in all fields, and be the indispensable mentor for creativity, business-practice, social work, mental hygiene, genuine literacy—name it, and there are credits for it leading to a degree. The schools offer very little evidence of their unique ability to perform any of these things—there is plenty of evidence to the contrary—but they do not need to offer evidence, since nobody opposes them or proposes alternatives.

A major pressing problem of our society is the defective structure of the economy that advantages the upper middle-class and excludes the lower class. The school-people and Ph.D. sociologists loyally take over also this problem, in the war on poverty, the war against delinquency, retraining those made jobless, training the Peace Corps, and so forth. But as it turns out, just by taking over the problem, they themselves gobble up the budgets and confirm the defective structure of the economy.

And inevitably, expanding and aggrandizing, becoming the universal trainer, baby-sitter, and fix-it, the schools are losing the beautiful academic and community functions that by nature they do have.

ii

The ideas in this book were called up for specific busy occasions. The remarks on the drop-outs were the substance of a contribution to a national conference on