

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION  
ON THE SOCIAL STUDIES  
PART IX

THE SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS  
OF EDUCATION

BY

GEORGE S. COUNTS

*Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University*

AND OTHERS

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A

## PREFACE

This is the ninth volume of the Report of the American Historical Association Commission on the Social Studies in the Schools. As the title indicates, it deals with the social background of American education from the beginnings of national organization and activity.

The author has long been interested in American education and has become one of the recognized leaders in this field of study. He has concerned himself primarily with the relations of school and society, not only the actual operation of those relations as studied in educational sociology, but also the underlying thought and ideas involved in those relations as dealt with in educational philosophy. The Commission, of which he has been a member since its formation, has profited greatly from his knowledge and interest in both of these fields.

Recognizing the school as an instrument of society, perhaps its most important instrument for the perpetuation of its culture, his association with the work of the Commission led him to develop the collateral interest which this volume presents. He came to feel that contemporary activity and thought about education were insufficient to explain or even reveal the full purpose and function of the public school. Tradition, accepted ideals and ideas, social habit as well were playing a larger rôle in the operation of education than was apparent from any strictly contemporary survey or appraisal of its developments. He undertook, therefore, to examine the development of American society from the time of its definite organization to the present.

He had gradually become convinced of the necessity of making this study and was planning to work upon this task when the Commission asked him to assume a large part of the active

direction of its work as Director of Research in 1931. The systematic and intensive study of American society in its historical development was alone sufficient to engross his whole energy and attention even with such assistance as the Commission might render. Nevertheless he complied with the wishes of the Commission and undertook both tasks.

The plan for the present work was submitted to the executive committee of the Commission for criticism and suggestions. It was then approved by the Commission. The detailed account of assistance received appears in the author's foreword. An early draft was submitted for criticism to those members of the Commission most directly concerned with the problem involved. In light of the criticism and suggestions he undertook the preparation of a second draft. This draft, when completed, was submitted to all the members of the Commission as well as to several professors of American history not on the Commission. The suggestions and criticisms thus received served as the basis for the final revision.

Though profiting greatly from the suggestions and criticism of his colleagues on the Commission which he has generously acknowledged, the achievement is essentially his own. There was no convenient work in American history to furnish him the broad complex of society which lay behind present education. Nor was there any work on recent American education which recognized adequately the bearing of these social forces upon education. He had therefore to ransack a vast literature in both history and education, much of it original source material, to find the solution of his problem. It is in the effective linking of these two elements that the distinctive contribution of this volume lies. It is at the same time, therefore, a contribution to the literature of American education and American history.

A. C. KREY, *Chairman.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the preparation of the present volume I became deeply indebted to many persons. In fact I have served primarily as an instrument of the Commission for bringing to bear upon the problem at hand the knowledge and thought of numerous scholars. In seven of the seventeen chapters of the book the analysis and discussion are based upon and derived from manuscripts submitted to me by selected individuals. Such contributions were made to the chapter on natural endowment by Mr. William Hewitt, a special investigator; to the chapter on family by Mrs. Carl B. Swisher, a special investigator; to the chapter on economy by Dr. George S. Mitchell, instructor in economics in Columbia College; to the chapter on communication by Dr. Carl B. Swisher, instructor in government in Columbia College; to the chapter on health by Dr. Nels Anderson, instructor in sociology in Seth Low Junior College of Columbia University; to the chapter on recreation by Dr. LeRoy E. Bowman, director of extension activities for the summer play schools of the Child Study Association of America; and to the chapter on art by Dr. Houston Peterson, instructor in philosophy in Columbia College. Whatever of merit these chapters may have is due primarily to the work of these scholars. For much of the historical material in the volume I am indebted to Dr. Donald L. McMurry, formerly professor of history at LaFayette College. Drs. McMurry, Mitchell, and Peterson also read the entire manuscript and gave me many valuable suggestions.

Others, beside members of the Commission, who read the manuscript and gave me the benefit of their criticisms are Dr. Merle E. Curti, professor of American history in Smith College, Dr. Dixon Ryan Fox, professor of history in Columbia

University, Dr. Sidney Hook, assistant professor of philosophy in New York University, and Dr. Lester B. Shippee, professor of American history in the University of Minnesota. I would also mention three members of the Commission to whom I am greatly indebted—Dr. Charles A. Beard who helped me plan the book, furnished some actual manuscript for the chapters on technology and government, and left his imprint through criticism and suggestion on every page of the volume; Dr. A. C. Krey who read the manuscript with great care and discussed with me at length its underlying philosophy, making innumerable suggestions which have improved both the plan and the substance of the argument; and Dr. Jesse H. Newlon who gave uncounted hours to the discussion of every phase of the work.

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- McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends; and *Problems of Education in the United States*, by Charles H. Judd.
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GEORGE S. COUNTS.

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## INTRODUCTION

### EDUCATION AS STATESMANSHIP

The historical record shows that education is always a function of time, place, and circumstance. In its basic philosophy, its social objective, and its program of instruction, it inevitably reflects in varying proportion the experiences, the condition, and the hopes, fears, and aspirations of a particular people or cultural group at a particular point in history. In actuality it is never organized and conducted with sole reference to absolute and universal terms. While the biological inheritance of the race presumably remains practically unchanged from age to age and thus gives a certain stability to the learning process, education as a whole is always relative, at least in fundamental parts, to some concrete and evolving social situation. It possesses no inner logic or empirical structure of its own that dictates either its method or its content. In both its theoretical and practical aspects it expresses the ideals of some given society at some given period in time, either consciously with clear design or half-consciously with hidden and confused purpose. There can be no all-embracing educational philosophy, policy, or program suited to all cultures and all ages.

Hence the problem of education assumes one form in ancient Athens in the time of Pericles, another in China during the Tang dynasty, another in Mediæval Saxony, another in modern Japan, still another in Russia under the Communists, and yet another in twentieth-century America. It is clear therefore that any group, charged with the task of shaping educational theory or practice for any people, should begin with an examination of the society to be served—its natural surroundings, its major trends and tensions, its controlling ideals, values, and interests. And when that group is composed of social scientists, such a

procedure is peculiarly imperative, since the contribution of the social sciences to education is by no means confined to providing valuable materials of instruction. A far more fundamental contribution is the discharge of the responsibility here suggested. Along with the psychological disciplines they provide the primary data out of which educational philosophies, policies, and programs should be fashioned.

In the United States periodic recurrence to fundamental study and analysis is especially necessary because of the highly dynamic character of American life and institutions in the age of industrialism. In a comparatively static society an educational program, if once adjusted to definite and acknowledged conceptions of social need, may remain unchanged for generations and even for centuries, and yet perform its functions effectively. As long as the balance of ideas and interests, which such a program reflects, remains essentially undisturbed, it is likely at least to be deemed satisfactory and adequate. But by common consent, confirmed by the comprehensive survey just completed by President Hoover's Research Committee on Social Trends and by countless other inquiries, American society has been and is changing rapidly in its basic institutions and relationships. The nature and extent of many of these changes have been expressed in some measure in indisputable mathematical terms.

The impression should not be given, however, that the task of formulating educational policies and programs is merely a matter of gathering social data. Facts must be selected, interpreted, and woven into patterns of utility and purpose. Also this task should not be confused with scientific neutrality, on the one hand, or with unfettered speculation, on the other. Always and everywhere genuine education is a form of practical endeavor—a form of social action. This means that the educator fails in his line of duty if he refuses to step out of academic cloisters, even leave the research laboratory, reject the rôle of disinterested spectator, take an active part in shaping events,

make selections among social values, and adopt, however tentatively and broadly, some conception of social welfare and policy. No inquiry into American society, profound and comprehensive though it may be, can remove from his shoulders the responsibility of embodying in his theories and programs some interpretation of history in the making, some general outlook upon the world, some frame of reference with respect to society, some conception of things deemed necessary, of things deemed possible, of things deemed desirable in the proximate future. This responsibility he may discharge openly, deliberately, and intelligently, or furtively, impulsively, and ignorantly; but discharge it he must. He may rightly inquire what choices of purpose and direction are practicable and feasible; but being compelled to act he inevitably makes such choices, even though he may conceal his decisions from himself as well as from others.

The limitations of the social sciences in the sphere of action, when divorced from all value-judgments, have been fully demonstrated.<sup>1</sup> These disciplines provide neither the American people nor American statesmen with positive and definitive guidance in the realm of practical affairs. They give no direction; they make no ethical or æsthetic choices. In the presence of the perpetual battle of conflicting interests and values, they cultivate neutrality, striving to report the social situation in terms of objective truth. The task of making use of these findings is left to men of action, although the two functions of discovery and of application may occasionally be combined in the same individual. The fact should be observed, however, that when viewed in appropriate perspective the development of the social sciences in their entirety or in their special divisions must itself rest upon choices and judgments of value and express some broad social policy.

Among men of action the educators of the country occupy an important position. Consequently, in the light of the data provided by the social sciences and within the limits imposed by

<sup>1</sup> Charles A. Beard, *The Nature of the Social Sciences*, *passim*.

necessity, as revealed by the data, educational leaders are obliged to make an interpretation of contemporary history and with full recognition of all the hazards involved, submit their interpretation in educational program to the judgment of time. Since, being denied the privilege of neutrality, they must act, no other rational course is open to them. But it should never be forgotten that in acting they, in proportion to the power of organized education, mold the minds of the coming generation and thus share in shaping the future of the nation and even of world society.

This problem may be illuminated through a consideration of the relation of social science to statecraft. While the social scientist, pursuing the tested methods of research, cannot determine the destination and chart the course of the ship of state, he can place his findings at the disposal of the statesman. The latter, as distinguished from the politician, will take these findings and thus make his action informed and intelligent. In the light of the dominant and emergent ethical and æsthetic values of the age and on the basis of the potentialities of the natural endowment, the technological resources, the cultural heritage, and the great social trends of the time, he must make his choices and frame his policies. Also, sensing and defining the problems occasioned by tensions arising in the never-ending movement of ideas and interests, he must decide on positive lines of action. His greatness depends on his success in gauging necessity and possibility, in divining the coming event, and in achieving the ideal in the long-time judgment of mankind. That this task is hazardous in the extreme cannot be denied. Yet it is a task that must be discharged in every society.

Education is one of the highest forms of statesmanship. The educator working in the public schools is a servant of the state. As distinguished from the educational jobholder, he is under obligation to foster the most complete development of the capacities of the citizens, upon whose powers the state depends for its existence, its security, and the fulfillment of its

ideals. And since the American state, at least in theory, is not the government or some independent authority standing above the masses of the people, but rather the whole body of citizens functioning in their collective capacity, the educator, besides discharging mandatory obligations, is required to provide educational leadership for the nation and to assume general responsibility for the formulation of educational philosophies, policies, and programs. In the performance of these heavy duties he must, like the statesman, make the fullest use of the empirical findings of the social sciences. In the light of the dominant and emergent ethical and æsthetic values of the age and on the basis of the potentialities of the natural endowment, the technological resources, the cultural heritage, and the great social trends of the time, he must define problems, make choices, and decide upon courses of action. This is the supreme task which the educational profession faces today in America.

That the educator should conceive his task in terms of broadest statesmanship is peculiarly imperative in the present epoch. During the past century life has become extremely complex. Not only does the burden of education in general increase with the growth in complexity of society, but the rôle of organized education in particular advances *pari passu*. In America in recent generations therefore the school has expanded with unprecedented rapidity, assumed the form of a major social institution, been saddled with correspondingly heavy responsibilities, and become a significant factor in shaping the future of the nation. Moreover, it is a matter of common knowledge that both American and world society are passing through a critical period in history. Consequently, the educational leader, entrusted with the function of shaping the policies of the public school, must prepare himself for enlightened action and must take his place in the front rank of statesmanship. The primary object of the present volume is to bring the findings of social science to bear upon this difficult problem.

In an effort to chart the way for education in contemporary

society, the volume is organized into three parts. In Part One attention is directed to three basic forces or factors which strongly condition the development of American civilization, giving direction to the evolutionary process and providing the instrumentalities of achievement—the democratic ideal, the natural endowment, and the methods and products of science. In Part Two are set down the great social trends and tensions of the age and the major movements of ideas and interests in the several departments of life since the founding of the nation—family, economy, communication, health, education, recreation, research, art, justice, government, and world relations. Thereafter, in Part Three, these findings are related to the task of formulating an educational philosophy suited to the needs of industrial America.

It is perhaps needless to point out that no new data are presented here. On the contrary, the intention has been to utilize, in establishing points of reference and in framing broad educational policies, facts that were already at hand. Indeed much of what appears in Parts One and Two is the common knowledge of the informed citizen, or even of the intelligent high school pupil, while all of it is the stock in trade of the student of the social sciences. The materials employed, however, are selected, organized, and integrated in the light of a definitely conceived purpose. Everything has been subordinated to the single practical aim of illuminating the educational problem in its larger social relationships. For refusing to prosecute new investigations no apology is offered. The need everywhere to-day, as former Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once remarked, is "less inquiry into the abstruse and more thought about the obvious." Certainly in the field of education this is the counsel of wisdom. The shelves of the libraries are groaning under the weight of volumes of undigested and meaningless data. The time for the utilization of this vast store of knowledge in the formulation of social policies and programs is over-ripe.

*PART ONE*

BASIC FORCES