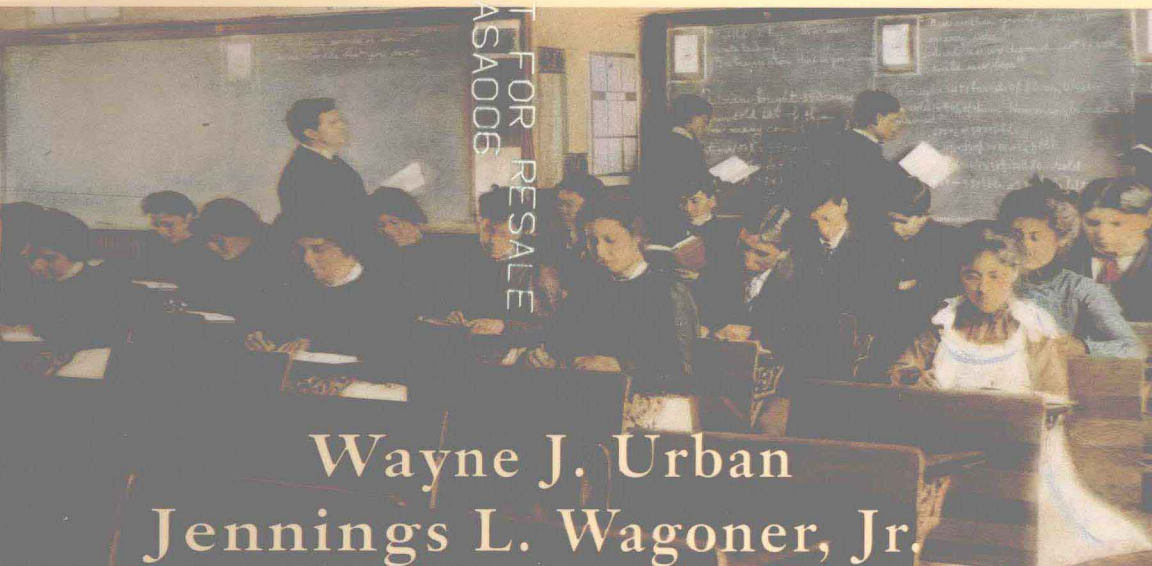




THIRD EDITION

AMERICAN EDUCATION

A HISTORY



Wayne J. Urban
Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr.

American Education

A History

THIRD EDITION

Wayne J. Urban

Georgia State University

Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr.

University of Virginia



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*For Judy and Shirley
who shared the journey with us*

Preface

In a very real sense, this book had its beginning in the late 1960s. As fellow graduate students at Ohio State University, we were part of a group of passionate if not always enlightened graduate students caught up in the turmoil of that era. Questions forced on us by scholarly debate and social and political events of the day challenged us to question long-held values and beliefs while trying to make sense of a world caught up in ideological and generational whirlwinds. Personal and professional contact through the years enabled us to pursue that dialogue as the tides of change have continued to ebb and flow.

This book is a continuation of the dialogue. In it, we invite you, our readers, to join in the conversation. Running throughout our conversation is a question: What is the point of studying the history of American education (or any other history)? Does it really make any difference if we understand what has happened in the past? For that matter, can we with our postmodern consciousness really *know* what happened in the past and *why* things happened as they did?

Some people are prone to agree with Voltaire that "history is a pack of tricks the living play on the dead," or with Henry Ford that "history is bunk." Still others find merit in Harry Truman's observation that "the only thing that is new is the history that we don't know" or resonate to George Santayana's aphorism that "those who do not know the past are doomed to repeat it."

It occurs to us, however, that history's most ardent detractors and defenders are *both* wrong. The critics appear to expect too little from history and the proponents too much. As historians, we must confess to occasional ambivalence and to finding ourselves sometimes caught in tangled webs of disagreement regarding matters of interpretation. Making sense of the past is difficult. In our continuing dialogue, we try to confront each other and our sources in as direct a manner as possible in an effort to wrestle with the demands of historical explanation.

One concern that we share after having taught history of education courses for three decades is that educators, like most people, tend to "use" history to prove their own particular point of view. Some history of education authors do this by pronouncing at the outset that their purpose essentially is to show either how wonderful or how terrible American schools and school people are and

have been down through the years. Some choose to see only successes and triumphs; others focus on the failures and mistakes.

We find such orientations to be reductionist and worrisome. They bring to mind H. L. Mencken's observation that "for every complex problem there is a simple answer—and it's wrong." We tend to have little sympathy for those who cling to neatly packaged answers in their history and close their minds to alternative explanations of the past. For us, the fabric and design of history, like the threads of experience in our own lives, are woven in intricate and complex patterns. Moreover, we regard history as an ongoing process. Not only does the past influence the present, but the concerns and issues of the present prompt historians to reform and rephrase questions about the past and to think in new ways about old problems. History is thus fluid, dynamic, and shifting. The past properly understood is far from being a simple story of linear events that led us to some inevitable present or that has determined in some fixed sense a single direction in which we must now go. All of us are very much in the stream of history and, like those who lived in earlier times, face decisions and make choices that define our present and shape the history that others will someday seek to understand. History, therefore, is socially constructed.

In this book, we have tried to set forth as honestly as we can our examination of the tremendously important and diverse phenomena of our nation's educational experiences. While striving to be conscientious in our research and adhering to the accepted conventions of scholarship, we recognize that our interpretation at times differs in detail and tone with some other histories of American education. As already noted, we hold that there is no single interpretation of facts, no single story, to which all need give assent. Every history represents an attempt to "make sense" of the past from the perspective of the present. And for every historian, the way one experiences the present affects to some degree the way one comprehends the past. Facts need not be in dispute in order for the story to vary in important particulars or in general viewpoint. The way the facts are sorted and arranged to form the structure of a story produces a mosaic that varies from historian to historian, and from reader to reader. Every reader, like every historian, has an individual past and a particular present that color perception.

Each of us sees the world through a different set of lenses—and with varying degrees of clarity. It is natural, when at times our vision seems fuzzy and out of focus, to strain to rid ourselves of the blur. However complex are life and history, each of us has a need to see clearly, to understand, to make sense of it all.

We share the conviction that clear vision and making sense are vitally important. We believe too that it matters greatly how each of us makes sense of ideas and events, past or present. One's own understanding in itself becomes part of history, part of the story. Each person's view of the past heavily influences his or her view of the present and the future; it shapes one's conception of what is desirable or undesirable, possible or impossible.

How people conceive of the reality of the past or see their own times thus takes on a dimension of validity. What people think, feel, and believe determines both their values and behavior patterns. Quantitative data of various kinds may demonstrate what is "real" in a measurable sense—and thus are important in

helping us to make sense of past and present—but belief patterns and myths are also a measure of reality. If we are told often enough that our system of education is the best in the world—or among the worst—or that, whatever our national problems, schools can—or cannot—help solve them, then our actions will tend to reinforce that conventional “wisdom.” It may matter little or not at all that evidence to the contrary can be readily found.

Our own approach has been to try to avoid one-sided judgments and to look at evidence that supports multiple views of particular events and individuals. Thus, we stress the narrative, the story of American educational history, as well as the interpretive, in our treatment.

Furthermore, we try to examine the interplay between *social* reality and *perceptions* of that reality as defined and described by participants. The lives lived in earlier times, like our own, reflect perceptions of reality that influenced choices, defined options, and both limited and expanded horizons. It is this more complicated, complex, and unsettled sense of reality that we have attempted to reconstruct and to interpret.

The history in the pages that follow adheres for the most part to a chronological ordering, but the reader will quickly discover that it is clearly not a rendering of straightforward linear development, a simple story of progress (or decline) from then to now. Rather, we have undertaken to present a narrative history of men and women who tried to understand and order and improve their lives and their world as best they could, given *their* perception of the facts and fears and hopes that characterized their world. We should be prepared to extend a bit of compassion and sympathy to those who in an earlier time made decisions whose outcomes even now can be understood only partially. We might hope for the same understanding from those who follow us.

This Third Edition

We are extremely grateful for the reception given to the first two editions of this book and look forward to what our readers have to say about this edition. In this edition, several significant changes have been made:

- Annotations have been added to the “For Further Reading” listings.
- Chapter 12 has been substantially updated, revised, and reworked.
- Editorial cartoons have been added where they are relevant to the text.
- Additions or corrections have been made in every chapter, and substantial new material has been added to Chapters 6, 7, and 11.
- The *McGraw-Hill Foundations of Education Timeline*, which highlights significant events that shaped the history of education, is packaged free with every new copy of this third edition.
- The *Only a Teacher* video series is available to professors who have adopted this text (please see a sales representative for more details on obtaining the series), and we have created an online instructor’s guide to using the videos with this third edition. Visit McGraw-Hill’s Education website at www.mhhe.com/education for a link to this guide.

All these changes have been undertaken in the hope of making this a more effective text for the instructors who teach with it and the students who read it.

We are especially grateful, as we were in the earlier editions, for the thoughtful comments of colleagues who read the manuscript and suggested changes. This third edition has benefited from critiques by the following:

Russell Bradshaw, Lehman College, City University of New York

David Gamson, Penn State University

Marcel Graham, Temple University

James Horn, University of Alabama–Huntsville

Daniel J. Higgins, St. Mary's University

Thomas A. Kessinger, Xavier University

Christopher J. Lucas, University of Arkansas

Don T. Martin, University of Pittsburgh

Kathleen Murphey, Indiana University–Purdue University, Fort Wayne

Sam Stack, West Virginia University

Alexander Urbiel, Ramapo College of New Jersey

While we have not made every change suggested by our reviewers, we have given serious consideration to their suggestions and responded as thoughtfully as we could to them.

We believe that two issues raised in the reviews are important enough for us to respond to them here. The first is the suggestion that we stress the similarities between present circumstances and many of the historical episodes we discuss. The second is that we be more historiographical, that is, more consciously interpretive ourselves and more deliberate in directly acknowledging the interpretations of other historians and how they relate to our own. We have demurred somewhat on both of these suggestions and we would like to explain our reasons for doing so.

There are certainly many similarities between the past and the present that could be highlighted in a treatment of American educational history. For example, Horace Mann's debate with the Boston Grammar School Masters over issues such as the role of religion, corporal punishment, and reading instruction has distinct similarities to educational debates occurring in schools today. While on occasion we point in the direction of historical cycles and similarities, we choose not to highlight all such parallels because we want our readers to engage with and reflect on the events of educational history in as direct a fashion as possible. Moreover, we believe that our readers, students and instructors alike, will be more inclined to discover similarities and gain insights themselves if they are not repeatedly led to conclusions formed for them by others. Our effort has been to avoid an unnecessarily didactic tone.

Another equally, or perhaps even more, important reason for our muted pronouncements regarding "presentist" interpretations of the past is that we

think history is as valuable for what it reveals about the differences between the past and the present as for what it teaches about similarities. If we stressed similarities to the point of ignoring, or deemphasizing, differences, we believe that it would rob our analysis of its most important qualities: the complexity of events and actors that comes properly with full historical study, and the time dimension that characterizes history and is most obvious in considering the differences between past and present. Thus, though we are conscious of similarities between the past and the present, we prefer to suggest them and, more important, to let our readers consider the possibility of both similarity and difference as they encounter the nation's educational history in these pages.

The historiographical, or interpretive, aspect of our work is also one that has received our thoughtful attention. Here again, we have consciously chosen not to use the pages of this text as a battleground for pushing to the fore our own, or other historians', partisan interpretations of the events and characters we discuss. In many sections our approach and language doubtlessly reveal our basic orientations, and while we often mention the work of other historians, as well as their interpretations, we have found educational history to be a highly ideological field of study; so ideological, in fact, that we have attempted to present our materials as fairly as we can, emphasizing the complexity of the events and actors and letting our readers draw their own conclusions.

Although we are in no sense absolutely certain that our choices are the correct ones, or ones that all textbook authors should make, they are the ones with which we are most comfortable. Having made them, we invite our readers to identify the connections between the past and present that they see, and the interpretations of this history that they deem appropriate, and to share both with others.

Wayne J. Urban

Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr.

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