

United States Educational historiography has been subjected to revision in the last decade. No longer narrowly institutional, it has extended into the broader cultural framework. New assumptions provide fresh insights and different interpretations. The following article looks at several revisionist assumptions and interpretations in an endeavour to analyse some of the writings which appear as much ideological as historical.

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From Pollyanna to Jeremiah— Recent Interpretations of American Educational History

You see when you're huntin' for glad things you
sort of forget the other kind . . . It's a lovely
game.

(Pollyanna).

. . . nothing which the State does for its
people contributes so much to the moral uplift,
to a higher civic virtue, and to increased
economic returns . . . as does a generous system
of free public schools.

(Ellwood P. Cubberley).

Let not your prophets and your diviners
deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams
which you cause to be dreamed . . . For they
prophesy falsely . . .

(Jeremiah 29: 8, 9)

. . . There is no precedent to comfort the belief
that there is hope for society through the
schools.

(Colin Greer).

Education was "something the better part of the community did to the others to make them orderly, moral, and tractable," and the logical consequences of such conscious coercion was an educational system which in turn reflected and confirmed the social structure in a process which fitted children "into slots roughly congruent with the status of their parents."¹ Thus claims Michael Katz in *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools* (1971).

In the 1960's many educational historians wedded themselves, for better and for worse, to revisionist interpretations of history. The marriage was precipitated shot-gun style by disaffection with public schooling generally, solemnized by American history particularly,² and for some, consummated by ideological passion,

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¹Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools—the Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. x.

²For a succinct account of the changes in American historiography see John Higham, *The Development of Historical Studies in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965). Also see Dwight W. Hoover, "Some Comments on Recent U.S. Historiography," *American Quarterly*, XVII, 2, Pt. 1 (Summer 1965) 299-318 and Irwin Unger, "The New Left and American History: Some Recent Trends in U.S. Historiography," *American Historical Review*, LXXXI, 4 (July 1967) 1237-1263.

unfortunately. The better part of the marriage has produced some fine scholarship and refreshingly long-awaited approaches from historians such as Stanley Schultz, Marvin Lazerson, Carl Kaestle, David B. Tyack, Albert Fishlow, Edward A. Krug, Theodore Sizer, and Raymond Callahan.³ The worst part of the marriage has produced some pertinent and much needed social criticism, some credible recommendations for social policy, some largely unsubstantiated conspiracy theories and alas, some polemical posturing and ideological swaggering. The worse part, while opening the hallowed halls of in-house history to spring cleaning, give us little more than a justification for particular social policies and although this is legitimate in a legal brief, one may only conclude it is nevertheless ahistorical.⁴ Happily for history, divorce from reinterpretation is not imminent. Therefore we must take revisionism in the history of education, for better and for worse and attempt some sympathetic as well as critical analysis of its offspring, both spurious and legitimate.

The 1960's were a pressing decade for historians and educational historians alike—a decade of criticism and civil rights, retrospection and recrimination, confrontation and contemporaneity. Historical romance was abandoned and “the urban crisis” declared that history look to its roots. Black studies and bureaucratization of schools became the rage. Joel Spring, Michael Katz, C. Karier and Colin Greer will be used as representative of such contemporaneity and although the writer is critical of certain tenets presented by them this does not mean the writer rejects them totally.⁵ Many aspects of their particular reinterpretations of education are hardly objectionable but are challenging and cogent.

Throughout the paper the writer will refer to the Pollyanna interpretations of educational history and the Jeremiah interpretations. The Pollyannas, as represented by that much-maligned man Ellwood P. Cubberley, have a thesis which can be absurdly reduced to the following tenet. The development of democracy coincided with the rise of common schools; therefore, the continuation of common schooling perpetuates democracy.⁶ The Jeremiahs, it seems, have an equally reductionist thesis whose difference is essentially one of pessimism rather than optimism. They argue that the development of common schools coincided with the rise of

³Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Marvin Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban School* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971); Carl Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City 1750-1800* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973); David B. Tyack, “Bureaucracy and the Common School: The Example of Portland, Oregon 1851-1913,” *American Quarterly* XIX, 3 (1967) 475-499 and “City Schools: Centralization of Control at the Turn of the Century,” *Building the Organizational Society*, ed. Jerry Israel (New York: Free Press, 1972); Albert Fishlow “The American Common School Revival: Fact or Fancy?” *Industrialization in Two Systems*, ed. Henry Rosovsky (New York: John Wiley and Company, 1966); Edward A. Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964); Theodore Sizer, *Secondary Schools at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Yale University Press, 1964) and Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

⁴Higham states, “In its polemical function historiography has ratified many a rebellion. Unfortunately it usually loses thereby some of its historical integrity.” p. 89.

⁵Joel H. Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972); Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*, and *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968); C. Karier, Paul Violas, and Joel Spring, *Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1973); Colin Greer, *The Great School Legend—A Revisionist Interpretation of American Public Education* (New York: Random House, 1965).

⁶Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1947). For a criticism of this approach see Lawrence Cremin, *The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965).

bureaucratization; therefore, the continuation of common schooling perpetuates bureaucratization. Both Pollyannas and Jeremiahs assume inordinate power in common schooling; the one, that according to the gradations of common schooling the amount of democracy; the other, that according to the gradations of common schooling the amount of bureaucratization, which is essentially undemocratic. Both these imply simplistic determinisms and causal antecedents which are dubious at best. Both are guilty of the besetting sin of "presentism." Therefore it is deemed necessary to discuss the problems of historical interpretation to understand the dangers inherent in writing history as "the present writ small."

It is said that history tells us as much about the historian and his time as about the history he is recording. A historian brings his assumptions with him as he faces his sources and evidence and as he selects and interprets. Evaluation of his efforts dare not exclude a tacit recognition of these assumptions which are, as Katz observes often "implicit and submerged." Few historians assert with Katz's brash confidence that all his assumptions will be made "explicit and manifest."⁷ Katz rushes in where angels fear to, and confesses ideological concerns and impatience with reformist histories. Historical writing must be informed by social theory because:

History can serve reform partly by emancipating it from depending on an idealized past; it can help develop the strength of will and clear judgement that comes from an ability to confront both past and present as they actually exist.⁸

And here is the rub of history! Is the world of what-is ("as they actually exist") as clear-cut as Katz infers? We can interpret; we can assume; we can isolate objective conditions; we can muster our data; we can argue a case with internal consistency. We cannot, (Collingwood's recreation of the past notwithstanding) really KNOW. The best we can do as historians is approximate.⁹

Historiography has passed through various identifiable epochs. Biographical history, in which Lytton Strachey might be an exemplar, provided the reading audience with vivid portraiture and subjective experience rather than arid events. Strachey's *Queen Victoria* (1921) and his biographical essays were "precious" histories and the non-professional ghouls picked the carcass of Cardinal Manning or snickered at the sublime foibles of Florence Nightingale. With the replacement of the "cultivated layman" by the academic professionals, historians began to expand into contiguous fringes by examining institutions, economics, politics, society, ideas, psycho-history and anthropology. Dilettante history was replaced by pragmatic history. In other words history was revised; past evidence was re-examined. Historians began too to borrow from other disciplines and to use the techniques and methods of the social sciences as well as literature.¹⁰ The term "revisionism" is not as intimidating as it sounds. It describes what history is

⁷Katz, *Class Bureaucracy and Schools*, particularly his Introduction which lays his philosophy "on the line" so to speak.

⁸The concern for using social science theory and concepts is not unique to the "Educational" revisionists. There is an increasing number of American historians who have sought to bring to bear on historical problems the methodologies of the social sciences; however in many instances, they seek testable hypotheses and "hard data" not prescriptions for reform.

⁹See E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961). Bernard Bailyn, *Education and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960) warns against the exploitation of facts by "educational missionaries" and one might add, by educational "non-missionaries" also. He states the past is not incidentally but essentially different from the present. See also Paul Nash, "History of Education—Historiography and Research—Function of the Educational Historian," *Review of Educational Research*, XXXIV (February, 1964), 5-21.

¹⁰See Maxine Greene, *The Public School and the Private Vision* (New York: Random House, 1965).

after all essentially about—"the seeking to re-analyze and re-present historical data in light of subsequent knowledge."¹¹

Nevertheless, the term revisionism does have peculiar and identifiable connotations in the history of United States education. Early in the sixties the accusation was levelled that house historians were merely writing histories for their colleagues; histories that glowed with pride and faith in education as a social panacea, optimism in its future, ideological consensus and evolving institutions.¹² Cubberley, a man of his time and thus quite comfortably received by his contemporaries, would turn in his grave at the unrelieved criticisms given his educational history today. He was guilty it seems of all despicable crimes against Clio. His history was linear, dully institutional, evolutionary, chronological and a narrative on retention, supervision, teacher institutions and curriculum. He limited the meaning of education to schooling and evangelized the "cause" of education. For these and many other faults he was duly chastised. Bernard Bailyn subsequently urged educational historians to regain a sense of surprise and take into account non-institutional education including the family, economic developments, the church and questions of racial tension.¹³

Educational history may never be the same again for the revisionists took Bailyn's advice to heart. Educational history is no longer narrowly institutional but is being channelled into the mainstream of American history drawing upon a variety of historical sources. New questions are being asked. Did educational growth precede economic growth? Did education contribute in any way to economic growth? Did schooling make people more politically aware? Did schooling facilitate social mobility? Who moved from what class and into which class? Did schooling influence political stability? Was the school child successfully Americanized? How important was education in relation to assimilation? The new sources being scoured come from church documents, census offices, records of child rearing practices, guides for etiquette, requirements for college entry, qualifications of teachers, wage returns, sermons, children's literature, fashions, population movements, economic investigations into production, and taxes, personal journals and diaries and even aesthetics, architecture and art.

It has been frequently observed that America had tended to produce an excess of prophets of gloom and doom. In some ways the Revisionists under criticism fit this description dolefully well. Charles Burgess states that in their search for the causes of moral disintegration apparent to them in American experience they have recreated a study in tragedy, even a cry of despair! Objective historical conditions and rational disagreements have been turned into internal psychic conflicts (insidious motivations).¹⁴ John Higham suggests that Manichean histories have previously reflected belief in rational man and faith in "progress" whereby good strove valiantly and triumphantly against evil. Such conflict historians were

¹¹*Websters Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam Company, 1966), p. 1944.

¹²The Report of the *Committee on the Role of Education in American History*, 1965, noted educational historiography had not kept pace with revisionist trends in American historiography generally. Educational historians smarted sufficiently for a transformation to occur.

¹³Bailyn, p. 9. Both he and Cremin, in some sort of poetic justice have been similarly chastised by the "revisionists" who responded to their "call". Colin Greer in particular is discomfiting in his chastisement. At times it seems more of a personal vendetta against Cremin than an intellectual disagreement. It seemed to this reader that Greer confused ideological conviction with bad manners.

¹⁴See Charles Burgess, "History of Education," *Review of Educational Research*, XXXVII (February 1967), 21-33.

replaced by the "cult of the American consensus" in the fifties.¹⁵ However, the revisionists are neither strictly consensus¹⁶ nor conflict historians but rather, they tend to view education as an *imposition* without consensus by a dominant group with the conflicts of the subordinate group remaining largely unresolved. Certain sections of society, such as corporatists, industrialists, the middle classes and White Anglo-Saxon Protestants have, in their opinion, a monopoly of power which has enabled them to force their particular values onto others. The imposers are also the beneficiaries of this state of affairs. Joel Spring insists that

the school is and has been an instrument of social, economic and political control. It is an institution which consciously plans to turn people into something . . . It is an instrument of power.¹⁷

The imposed-upon are normally identified as those who do not partake of middle class advantages and are especially belonging to minority groups, the blacks and the poor. Such people had education *done to them* by the better part of the community to make them "orderly, moral and tractable."

In claiming that common schooling has failed to equalize educational opportunity, the revisionists use history to present values that should be disdained and no longer followed. In doing this they have become strange bedfellows with Cubberley before them; however, instead of presenting schools as institutions of promise, they have made them assume Kafkaesque proportions of depersonalization, standardization and efficiency.¹⁸ Nevertheless they did not learn from Cubberley's errors and like him have leapt into the ought domain instead of remaining in the is/was domain which is usually viewed as the arena in which historians work.

Joel Spring evidences the progressive entrenchment of the corporate state which compounded bureaucratization of the schools, adopted business models and scientific management in education and perpetuated the "American dilemma" by doing so. In a ruthless march toward complete control of teachers, curricula and administration these vested interests of the powerful in society became entrenched as part and parcel of the whole system of education. The "others" were coerced into submission and educational leaders acquiesced in that they did not strive for things to be otherwise. Spring claims they ought to have opposed the "cult of efficiency" for in the long run this same cult destroyed individualism and fostered an undemocratic conformity.

This is a puzzling contention. Given that popular schooling was a new phenomenon and educational leaders did not have the advantages of Spring's hindsight, it seemed reasonable for them to want to meet the urban problems with what

¹⁵John Higham, "The Cult of the American Consensus," *Commentary*, XXXII(February, 1959), 93-100. Consensus historians examine the historical antecedents to public schooling and decide what are apparently opposing sides to a controversy really represent only variations of a consensus on fundamental principles.

¹⁶Except they do tend to view corporate structures, and those with power, such as the "middle class" as monolithic.

¹⁷Spring, p. 144. One cannot disagree that governments have and do use schooling for social control. However there seems some misunderstanding at this point between authority and power. It seems that the subordinate groups (those being schooled) in U.S. society have more or less accepted this imposition in some form of tacit agreement. One is reminded of the saying reputed to Tallyrand, "A government can do anything with bayonets except sit on them!" Undermining the "authority" of an institution is more difficult than rebelling against power. A critique of "social-control history" is found in Lois W. Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History*, LX, 1 (June, 1973), 23-41.

¹⁸Mark Beach, "History of Education," *Review of Educational Research*, XXXIX, 5 (December, 1969), 561-576.

appeared more efficient means. To many people in nineteenth-century American society the expansion of schooling was in fact egalitarian and democratic. Those who argued then on matters of individuality and costs and who feared bureaucratic symptoms were seen as conservatives and most undemocratic!¹⁹ Carl Kaestle, a revisionist who successfully remains free to cant while investigating the same problem, attributes the development of hierarchical, standardized and coordinated public schooling “not just to class and cultural bias on the part of the educational leaders” but also to “commonsense.” Commonsense required “the consolidation of schools for economy and efficiency” in an urban centre.²⁰ A dilemma Spring might grapple with, it seems, is that he must eventually assert that he is willing to forego mass schooling to get rid of bureaucracy, a contention Ivan Illich might agree with, but it is doubtful that the “better part of the community” will. They are, after all, according to Spring’s own logic so entrenched and so conscious of their monopoly of schooling, that it seems unlikely they will willingly forsake their position of power.

Revisionists who are concerned with the “urban crisis” of today express anxiety about dehumanization and alienation. Bureaucracy is viewed as the villain in the piece. Ethnic minorities and the blacks are clamouring for social justice. White Anglo-Saxon protestantism is also a villain. The disturbing reality of increasing crime and wretched poverty, the existence of the ghetto and the hardships endured in the low income areas seem to indicate that public schooling was not the panacea after all. The hewers of wood are still with us which seems to suggest social mobility through schooling has been abortive. The hewers of wood and drawers of water were the black and ethnic groups in the past. They are the blacks and ethnic groups today. These disturbing facts have resulted in three particular problems which all revisionist historians examine.

The first problem is the aspect of bureaucratization of the schools, previously alluded to. Subsumed under this are the adoption of factory models, scientific management, industrial training, vocational guidance, grading, sorting, testing and measuring. All of these are insinuated to be direct results of eventual control of schools by industrialists, big business and the rise of a corporate state which were all interested in producing efficient and sufficient manpower and skilled labour to fit the required categories of the workforce. In other words, these vested interests needed human robots to work the machines and to consume the output of the factories. The schools provided such workers and consumers. The schools were seen then as employment agencies as well as skill training institutions. “The assumption was that work and education are fundamentally linked.”²¹

The second problem is directly related to the first. Drawers of water and hewers of wood were traditionally “inferior” people and usually recruited from the “lower orders.” Such lower orders in American history were destined to be the minority groups who consisted primarily of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants, non-protestant foreigners and the blacks. These needed to be domesticated, that is, Americanized

¹⁹Joel Spring’s book is actually an exhortation to return to some form of classical liberalism and individualism. Certainly it is not a claim, as one might suspect, for increased co-operation or for a socialistic redistribution of wealth and power. He is sometimes saying much the same thing as the conservatives of yesterday who also saw state intervention as an infringement on their individuality.

²⁰As observed by William Cutler III’s Review of “The Evolution of an Urban School System by Carl F. Kaestle” *The Journal of American History*, LXI, 1 (June, 1974) 163. Tyack, “Bureaucracy and the Common School” inclines to this view also, p. 478.

²¹See Chapter I, “Business Values and the Educational State,” by Clarence J. Karier, in *Roots of Crisis*, p. 7.

by “the better part of the community” and education was seen as the means by which to do it. Americanization processes were necessary to civilize such “hordes of foreigners” and protect the republic from socialism, papism, atheism and pauperism. The schools were seen then as socializing agencies as well as educational establishments. “The State, through the schools, transformed the tyranny of the majority into an organized and effective mechanism for social discipline.”²²

The third problem is again inter-related with the previous two problems. Both of those problems dealt with matters of social control. Good work habits were inculcated, discipline enforced, restraint stressed and democracy elaborated. Middle class fears of lower class disorder, depravity and general viciousness insisted that education would make the society stable and the citizenry “orderly, moral and tractable.” Education would counteract harmfulness of a changing society and could teach good habits such as cheerfulness, truthfulness, sobriety, industry and thrift. Such social controls were impressed on the lower orders by the educational reformers, by the political elite, by the intellectual leaders and by the prominent in the business community. Common schools were seen as an economical form of policing the lower orders and the high schools were forced upon an otherwise “reluctant citizenry.”²³ The schools’ custodial functions were eventually expanded to include much of the child’s social life as well.

They taught not the old values but demanded allegiance to the new. Heeding industrial skills they accepted vocational training and modelled the school after the factory. Believing the social environment outside the school could not produce citizens they required Americanization and civics classes . . . they sought to isolate the child from his home.²⁴

Schools were instruments for a reformation of manners in a deliberate formation of personality and “caught up in a collective institutional process the individual (became) a means rather than an end to social order.”²⁵

These three problems may be conveniently summarized as the one major problem which begins this paper. Education “was something the better part of the community did to the others to make them orderly, moral and tractable.” Education became schooling and schooling’s functions included: (1) sorting out the specific vocations of members of the lower orders, (2) the Americanization of the lower orders and (3) the civilizing of the lower orders. It might be asked, what exactly did the “better part of the community” do “to the others”? Seemingly they imposed middle class values on them. They schooled them to serve and respect their betters. They impressed upon them the need to conform. They trained them to be a productive and efficient working class. The end products of this processing apparently mass-produced people to fit into the “system” neatly, thinking alike, acting alike, approving and disapproving alike—so many cogs into a well oiled industrial machine. Thus argue the Jeremiahs.

Several incongruities arise out of all of this. Many revisionists scoff at the educational reformers’ faith that public schooling might prevent depravity, crime, poverty and a various assortment of social ills. Yet these same revisionists often cannot resist using the urban crisis of today as some sort of counter evidence that the schools have actually failed to fulfill their mission. After clearly demonstrating the unreality of such a mission it is surely not surprising that the schools failed

²²Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*, p. 44.

²³Katz, p. 47.

²⁴Lazerson, p. 35.

²⁵“Liberal Ideology and the Quest for Orderly Change,” by Clarence J. Karier, *Roots of Crisis*, p. 86.

(although whether totally and in all areas is quite another matter). It seems the revisionists must be consistent. Either they believe schools could fulfill the mission or they believe the schools could not. As they appear to reject the promises and the panacea, then the schools can quite comfortably bow out as chief scapegoat in the urban crisis. In continuing to blame the schools for perpetuating social failures or even causing them, the revisionists are also putting excessive faith in the power of the schools to affect social change. The revisionists like *Cubberley* are examining too rigidly formal education without regard to informal agencies of education in the society at large. Schools only provide certain and specific aspects of the social burden. In no way can schooling fit into Goffman's picture of the "total institution." Therefore to accuse them of failing in their mission and by doing so perpetuating social problems is rather simplistic.

Furthermore, it seems that the Jeremiahs confuse the issue of socialization altogether and stretch the understanding of the term to fit a foregone conclusion. Many of them see schooling as socialization. Although one cannot argue that education and schooling are the same, neither can one claim that schooling is not part of education. As education, both formal and informal, is *intentional*, and socialization is the culmination of all experiences, intentional or otherwise,²⁶ it seems that what they are arguing is not so much socialization as conditioning, training and indoctrination. It is odd to refer to a partial experience, that is, schooling, with a total term, that is, socialization.

Even if one accepts the premise that schools condition, train and indoctrinate their clients into docility by suppressing their humanity, their critical faculties and their creativity, this seems a problematic area.²⁷ The North American society does in fact turn out a variety of end-products with a myriad of acceptable public behaviours and a range of differing opinions and perceptions. Where is the evidence that all people go through the same factory and come out "processed" as the same package? If students are unhappy and rebellious does this suggest they have been successfully conditioned into conformity and docility? Is the process working?

It is perhaps ungentlemanly to argue *ad hominum*, but one cannot resist asking—how did people like Katz, Spring, Karier and Greer come out as they did,—given they too were processed or schooled? It seems their humanity is intact. Their social concern clearly demonstrates this is so. Certainly their creative and critical abilities have not been disarmed else they could not have contributed as much as they have to reinterpreting past history. Are they rare and exceptional, that is, an "especial" people with peculiarly special talents? Did they not transcend the system? If it is a system as total and as pernicious as they suggest, might we not enquire how? Although Joel Spring argues that the end product is likely to be the other-directed organization man, inflicted with "likemindedness", one cannot but recall Kaestle's sweet reasonableness when he gently chides the harshest critics of schooling. He says "no system could entirely standardize people's feelings any more than it could eliminate crime or erase a child's ethnic identity."²⁸ Again the revisionists are perhaps attributing too much power to schools.

And what of the child's "ethnic identity"? How was it to be Americanized and why was it to be Americanized? The Jeremiahs claim conformity was forced onto the clients; education was "done to them" because:

²⁶It is bewildering to imagine how one might escape from being "socialized".

²⁷Greer, p. 5.

²⁸Kaestle, p. 183.

It improves their moral condition, takes away incentives to vice; establishes habits of sobriety, industry and cheerful obedience to the laws; and enables them to acquire a knowledge of the salutary principles of our government.²⁹

Piety and patriotism—this was the pap fed to the “uprooted,” these strangers in the land. Schooling had “a good moral tendency” and “a good political tendency.” “The prosperity and probably the existence of our government depends upon the general diffusion of knowledge.”³⁰ Floods of “mongrel hordes” presented a frightening spectre to native Americans. Indigenoussness was decreasing. For example 35% of the population was foreign born in 1845. Five years later it was 50%. Aliens were synonymous with paupers.³¹ Foreigners were synonymous with anti-Catholicism and anti-foreign. Pauper and papist — aliens were often guilty on both accounts. Given the Protestant crusades of the nineteenth century, it is not surprising they were viewed with contempt and seen in need of domestication.³²

As Kaestle suggests Americans looked to schooling as a mechanism for conformity when cultural hegemony seemed threatened.³³ Protestant pressure for a monopoly of public schooling made it quite clear that hostilities would break out into violence as it did intermittently in stonings, beatings and convent burnings. Not only did nativist fury boil in Boston and New York but also in Oregon, where the problem of black, foreign or Catholic was not so pronounced.³⁴ Foreigners and Catholics (particularly those wild-eyed whiskey loving Celtic sort) were seen as inferior, dangerous and in great need of civilizing. In their romish rude state they might add to the poverty, crime, slumdwelling and social evils which pervaded an increasingly urbanized society. “The dangerous and perishing classes” were seen often as the cause of these ills and rarely the victims of a new society unable to generously accommodate its new immigrants or gracefully respond to rapidly changing conditions. “Schools reflected the attitude of the public who wanted to Americanize the habits not the status of the immigrant,” states Kaestle.³⁵ To accuse the businessmen and the industrialists and the influential middle class of forcing “Americanization” onto the immigrants through schooling just does not ring wholly true. Why would corporations or educators be any more

²⁹William Carrol, “Message to the Tennessee Legislature, 1827,” *American Writings on Popular Education—The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rush Welter (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), p. 31.

³⁰Josiah Holbrook, “Considerations 1827,” *American Writings*, p. 28.

³¹“Enumeration by foreign and native birth became a standard feature of prison and almshouse reports in the nineteenth century . . .,” Kaestle, p. 37.

³²Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade: A Study in the Origins of American Nativism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks). This is by far the most rewarding book dealing with the history of U.S. Protestantism and the logic of anti-Catholicism. David B. Tyack, “The Perils of Pluralism: The Background of the Pierce Case,” *American Historical Review*, LXXIV, 1 (October, 1969), 74-98, makes more direct connections between nativism and the problems of Protestant monopoly of public schooling. In addition see Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory: Boston Public Schools, 1789-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy, New York City as a Test Case* (New York: Antheneum, 1964), especially Chapter VI, “Two Minor Parties”; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955); Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the U.S. 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1960), and John C. Crandall, “Patriotism and Humanitarian Reform in Children’s Literature 1825-1860,” *American Quarterly*, XXI, 1 (1969), 3-22, for excellent accounts of relationships between immigration, nativism, public and parochial schooling.

³³Kaestle, p. 18.

³⁴David B. Tyack, “The Perils of Pluralism: The Background of the Pierce Case,” *American Historical Review*, LXXIV, 1 (October, 1968), 74-98.

³⁵Kaestle, p. 124.

insistent on this matter than the general (native) public? What evidence is there that less influential people are any less ethnocentric, indeed downright racist, than more influential people? The Tammany party, the Free-Soilers, the Nativists, the American Republican party, the Locofocos, the Know Nothings, and the Ku Klux Klan consisted primarily of the ordinary public. Ethnocentricism and bigotry cannot be deemed the monopoly of conspirators and capitalists and no amount of revisionism can say otherwise.

A contradictory feature in anti-Catholics and anti-foreigners clamouring for public schooling was that although the immigrants were "innately inferior" public schooling was seen as the instrument by which to Americanize them. One would think they might have feared contamination for their own children. The Ku Klux *classic* "The Old Cedar Tree," by George Estes certainly considered this a risk. Public schooling was a volatile issue which not only succeeded in alienating the Catholic Americans but succeeded in undifferentiating Protestantism in the process. Baptists and Episcopalians, fundamentalists and latitudinarians could form a united front against their common enemy, that scarlet woman of Babylon!³⁶

Catholic resistance to public schooling is a fact of history. Their objections were as understandable as nativist fears. Their objections consisted of textual, catechetical, and cultural problems.³⁷ "The Catholic cause", then and now, "must rest on the rights of conscience and equity—on the rights of individuals and not masses—of minorities and not majorities."³⁸ However, an interesting and often overlooked area is that even with imposition, and rejection of it, the seduction of public schooling was often too great. They were free after all and parochial schooling not only costly for the poor (and Catholics were mostly poor) but also inferior in instruction and physical accommodation. Many Catholic immigrants did not resist native and Protestant measures. To natives, public schooling was the surest and safest way to Americanization. Private schools were generally suspect as un-American activities. Indeed it is only with fairly recent research that parochial education has been demonstrated to have produced as 100% Americans as public education!³⁹ Generally the revisionists have given a refreshingly new approach to the problem of Catholic-immigrant Americanization. However it still remains that such Americanization needs further examination.

Nearly all the books cited work on the assumption that conformity was imposed upon the immigrant, that the melting pot was actually some sort of waspish cauldron, which cannibalistically devoured the immigrant's past and his ethnic identity. Presumably the immigrant left Europe not wanting to become American, not wanting to be educated if education was available to him. Given the motivations for leaving one's homeland and settling into what must have been an

³⁶Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 107-108 and Robert H. Wiebe, "The Social Functions of Education," *American Quarterly*, XXI, 2, Pt. 1 (Summer, 1969), 147-164.

³⁷Kaestle, 150-158.

³⁸Kaestle quoting a *New York Tribune* editorial on the Maclay Bill and the Bishop Hughes controversy (1840-45), p. 150.

³⁹Revisionism in American educational history on parochial schooling remains in need of further serious analysis. The following books deal with the matter of Catholic Americanization and other related matters on non-public schooling. Gerhard Lenski, *The Religious Factor: A Sociological Study of Religious Impact on Politics, Economics and Family Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965); Harold A. Buetow, *Of Singular Benefit: The Story of U.S. Catholic Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); Andrew M. Greeley and Peter H. Rossi, *The Education of Catholic Americans* (Chicago: Aldine, 1966), and "The Impact of the Roman Catholic Denominational School," *The School Review*, LXXII, (1964), 34-51.

excrutiatingly lonely and threatening new land, one might suppose that all new Americans would not be as reluctant to become Americanized and even schooled as has been suggested. If schools *appeared* to offer some form of opportunity for social mobility, if immigrants respected education as a means of gaining such mobility, why would they have been "hostile"? Do not the poor or the immigrants want to "get on in the world"? Is getting on in the world only a middle class aspiration? If the citizenry was "reluctant" this does not necessarily demonstrate they were hostile to schooling. Their dropout rates or their resistance to schooling may not have been as Katz suggests because they reacted to the middle class admonition of "your children shall be educated as we see fit."⁴⁰ Their reluctance was as likely due to economic circumstance, that is, necessity for the immigrant and his family to be members of the labour force, than hostility to either schooling or Americanization, or the refusal to sacrifice his cultural identity. Whether or not this is the case, it seems an avenue worth pursuing. "Assimilation is as reasonable a perspective as alienation," Timothy Smith thoughtfully reflects in an article which suggests this assumption might well seek out new evidences and reach different conclusions.⁴¹ Most studies, he observes, deal with economic exploitation, cultural abuse, conformity and Americanization and Protestant engineering to conformity. Perhaps Americanization and assimilation were not perceived always as impositions, something the better part of the community did to others. Perhaps they were largely a success and also desired. Was Americanization exclusively an Anglo-Saxon nativist crusade? He further suggests that immigrant histories tended to be in-house (as did educational histories) and retarded historical expansion.

Ethnic groups were the "poor" in the nineteenth century. Ethnic groups are the poor in 1970 as Colin Greer rightfully observes. The poor are still with us but the composition of the poor has altered. The Irish immigrants were the lower orders of the last century along with the Poles, Slovaks, Finns and the Germans. The blacks, the Mexican Americans and the Puerto Ricans are the "lower orders" today. Greer argues that the schools with their tendencies for self-fulfilling prophecies,⁴² their testing, their emphasis on middle class values⁴³ and their depersonalization and bureaucratization have been historically to blame for the failure of the poor to become socially mobile.

For his own reasons, likely ideological ones, Greer prefers to regard their failure as essentially

⁴⁰Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform*, p. 47.

⁴¹Timothy Smith, "New Approaches to the History of Immigration in Twentieth Century America," *American Historical Review*, LXXI, 4 (July, 1966), 1275. An interesting sideline in his study is that there is evidence of the Irish-Catholic hierarchy taking over other ethnic Catholic groups in a domination that consolidated into the distinctively American Catholic church which effectively discouraged ethnic particularisms and by use of indoctrination in the pulpit and the schools may well tell an urge to Americanization. This was hardly a WASP imposition!

⁴²Spring, *op. cit.*, agrees. "Few children ever cross tracks. Once the child has been objectified or tracked, a self-fulfilling prophecy seemed to follow." p. 131. In the last one hundred years many people did cross tracks and move from one social class to another and one cannot dismiss this so unequivocally.

⁴³The suggestion that "middle class values" are found in the necessity to read, write and compute in contemporary society seems at times to do a disservice to the people (the poor, the minorities) whom writers such as Reimer-Bereiter-Illich and the Jeremiahs are defending. The image of the working classes being "hostile" to these values because they have different ones and the culture of poverty preventing them from wanting to acquire them, or worse, being unable to acquire them, seems as offensive to the poor as Henry E. Garrett's *Kallikak Family* ever was. His was a genetic argument; this a cultural one. Are such values only middle class then? Are they not general western values? It seems to argue that the poor reject these skills and are happy without them is to wax lyrical about the poor being really happy. That the middle classes have monopolised these skills is another matter.

a consequence of the intentions of public schools. Here especially, Greer fails to see the implications of his own evidence—that 1972 is not so different from 1912 in that ethnic groups achieve or do not achieve in *some* relation to their cultural resources.⁴⁴

Can the schools be blamed for all the failures of social and economic mobility? The relationship between ethnicity and social class and social mobility must be more carefully analyzed. Did not some cultural groups bring traditions that may have contributed to this “failure” of the schools? An examination of success between immigrant groups is as pertinent as comparing success between immigrant and non-immigrant groups as Diane Ravitch suggests.⁴⁵ How and why did some ethnic groups, e.g. the Jewish population or the Japanese Americans, find social mobility when others did not?⁴⁶

All the sources agree however on one point, and that is, that schooling became bureaucratized and that this was a situation which corroded the spirit of education. Kaestle, Schultz and Tyack elaborate how factory models for efficiency and the organization of education were easily adapted and remained. However, unlike Greer and Spring they insist that given the facts of urban growth and the development of industrialization it would have been more surprising had they not! As educational curriculum usually reflects changing society and rarely precedes it then it was to be expected that educational reformers would imitate their changing society by bureaucratizing the system, introducing vocational training, creating hierarchical management and generally modelling schools on factory procedures. The temptation was too great especially with the unprecedented population growth of American society and cities fairly bursting at the seams. The Taylor System and Harrington Emerson’s “Twelve Principles of Efficiency” were but pale shades of Jeremy Bentham and seen as eminently practical. Ichabod Crane’s Sleepy Hollow and the little red schoolhouse were no longer romanticised. “Describe. Subdivide. Measure. Count. Weigh. Manipulate. Regiment,” represented “the best quality in the shortest time at the smallest expense.”⁴⁷

Standardization was thought to be the only viable means of creating a unified school system under trying circumstances and we cannot forget that the early educators had no precepts of public education in America to guide them. They planned often blindly and certainly optimistically. “Increases in the mere numbers of schools and children have qualitative effects on the process of schooling irrespective of social concerns.” Tyack observes somewhat sadly.⁴⁸ Raymond Callahan refers to standardization and bureaucratizing of education as the “American tragedy of education” but attributes it not to a conspiracy of business men and time and motion experts but to a sequence of events including the vulnerability of schoolmen to public opinion, muck-raking journalism, the anti-intellectual anti-elitist climate of the country, the abysmal mismanagement of other public institutions such as the railroads, and finally the urge to teacher professionalism. Was there “any alternative to the development of this business and managerial conception of educational administration?” And he deterministically replies,

⁴⁴Quoted with permission from an unpublished paper by John Long titled “Revisionism in American Educational History,” (1973).

⁴⁵Dianne Ravitch, “Schools and Society,” *Commentary*, CIV (October, 1972), 78-82.

⁴⁶Timothy Smith elaborates this point and in relation to Irish mobility see Edward Cuddy “Irish Americans and the 1916 Elections,” *American Quarterly*, XXI, 2, Pt. 1 (Summer, 1969), 228-243. Cuddy discusses the coming of age of Irish-Americans, “Anglomania” and the loosening of the Catholic hierarchy’s siege mentality.

⁴⁷Schultz, pp. 104-116 and Callahan, pp. 104-116.

⁴⁸Tyack, “Bureaucracy and the Common School,” viii.

“I think not.”⁴⁹

There were alternatives of course as Katz makes quite clear. However a model was available and it worked. It seemed reasonable it might also be applicable to education. The English Monitorial system seemed to show evidence of it working even if it was an efficient method of mass misinformation. Meanwhile the immigrants seemed to be pouring into the country and the poor becoming unpleasantly conspicuous. Overcrowded classrooms, too few buildings, churlish taxpayers—it does not seem too inconceivable that the advocates of “efficiency” *sincerely* believed the choices they made were the best ones for their clients and for their country. School reform will always be paved with intentions and patriotism. It seems to make as much sense to argue that the choices were rational ones as to argue they were the result of ulterior motives.

Michael Katz seems to believe that one viable alternative was in choosing democratic localism rather than incipient bureaucracy.⁵⁰ This model consisted of a redistribution of power to the community itself. The assumption here seems to be the smaller the unit the greater the democracy. This seems an odd assumption. Cannot small units oppress a minority within itself? Cannot small local communities be quite often as oppressive as larger communities? Cannot the social demands to conform be greater? Is not standardization even more imperative or not necessarily less? It seems the impersonalization of bureaucracies have functional advantages as well as disadvantages. The rules and clearly defined procedures of a bureaucracy may be a safety valve a small community lacks.⁵¹

The literature under discussion has brought out one startling point of agreement. The histories cited all appear to view education as something DONE TO OTHERS, rather than something SOUGHT AFTER AND GAINED by people.⁵² Education was something the better part of the community did to others to make them “orderly, moral and tractable.” Public schooling according to the Jeremiahs was a series of “who done its” to whom. The middle class did it to others to make them as respectable as themselves. The businessmen did it to others to create a productive work force. The political saviours of the republic did it to others to protect free enterprise. The white Anglo-Saxons did it to others to protestantize and protect the race. The professional educators did it to others to safeguard their own positions. The teachers did it to others to discipline and rarely to teach.

If it is true, and there seems no reason to doubt it, that the assumptions one brings to writing history gives life to the interpretations that follow, then an assumption that looks at education as being sought after and gained will yield quite different results.⁵³ The evidences would be concentrated from the client’s point of view and could attempt to tap the actual responses, motivations and feelings about education of those who attended public schools rather than how we suppose they might have felt or should have felt because we would have felt like it! We can empathize with our actors as much as the limitations of history allow, but we cannot actually KNOW. We are after all people of our time. The events, the

⁴⁹Callahan, p. 246.

⁵⁰Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools*.

⁵¹Kaestle, p. 150 and Myron Lieberman, *The Future of Public Education* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968), especially Chapter 3 “Social Control of Education,” pp. 34-55.

⁵²Mark Beach discusses the implications of this in relation to adult education, 572.

⁵³English educational history has shown the way to this approach in J.F.C. Harrison, *Learning and Living—A Study in the History of the English Adult Educational Movement* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1961) and Harold Silver, *The Concept of Popular Education* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1965).

environment, the material conditions and the social perceptions that make us are not the same as anyone who has lived in a different world. Those who lived through the birthpangs of public schooling held great hope for the future and our present cynicism or disillusionment should not be blind to the fact that education was new and seen as a challenge to those who lived then—and by workingmen and professional educators as a positive good. Rarely was the principle of education rejected. Usually the arguments resounded over the kind. We dare not forget this for fear of distorting history with presentism.

Neither can we ignore David Tyack's sensible advice, "The consequences of the crusade for conformity were no joke, however comical the actors."⁵⁴ It behooves us then to take seriously the ideas and ideals of the reformers, the fears of the nativists, the bungling of Bishop Hughes, the immigrant student in his civics class, the aspirations of a slumdweller, the solemnity of William George⁵⁵ and even the Ku Klux Klansman. No matter how distasteful we personally hold some of the actors' views, how bizarre we see their behaviour, how saddened we feel at their choices or outraged at their policies—these are the people who made the history we are writing. Historians must sort myth from truth which means attempting as far as possible to recognize our own myths and ruthlessly casting aside our own preferences and prejudices. No matter how tempting, it is not up to historians to reconstruct history to fit the picture we would have of it nor is it up to us to be judgemental and self-righteous by implying that had we lived then, we would have chosen and acted differently.

⁵⁴Tyack, "The Perils of Pluralism," 75.

⁵⁵Spring discusses the William George Junior Republic with no little irony. Although we might well be repelled at such self-help principles or appalled at their practice, they were "reasonable" to men of the nineteenth century. Samuel Smiles was nothing if not respected. For a biography, free of presentism, on William George see Jack M. Holl, *Juvenile Reform in the Progressive Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).