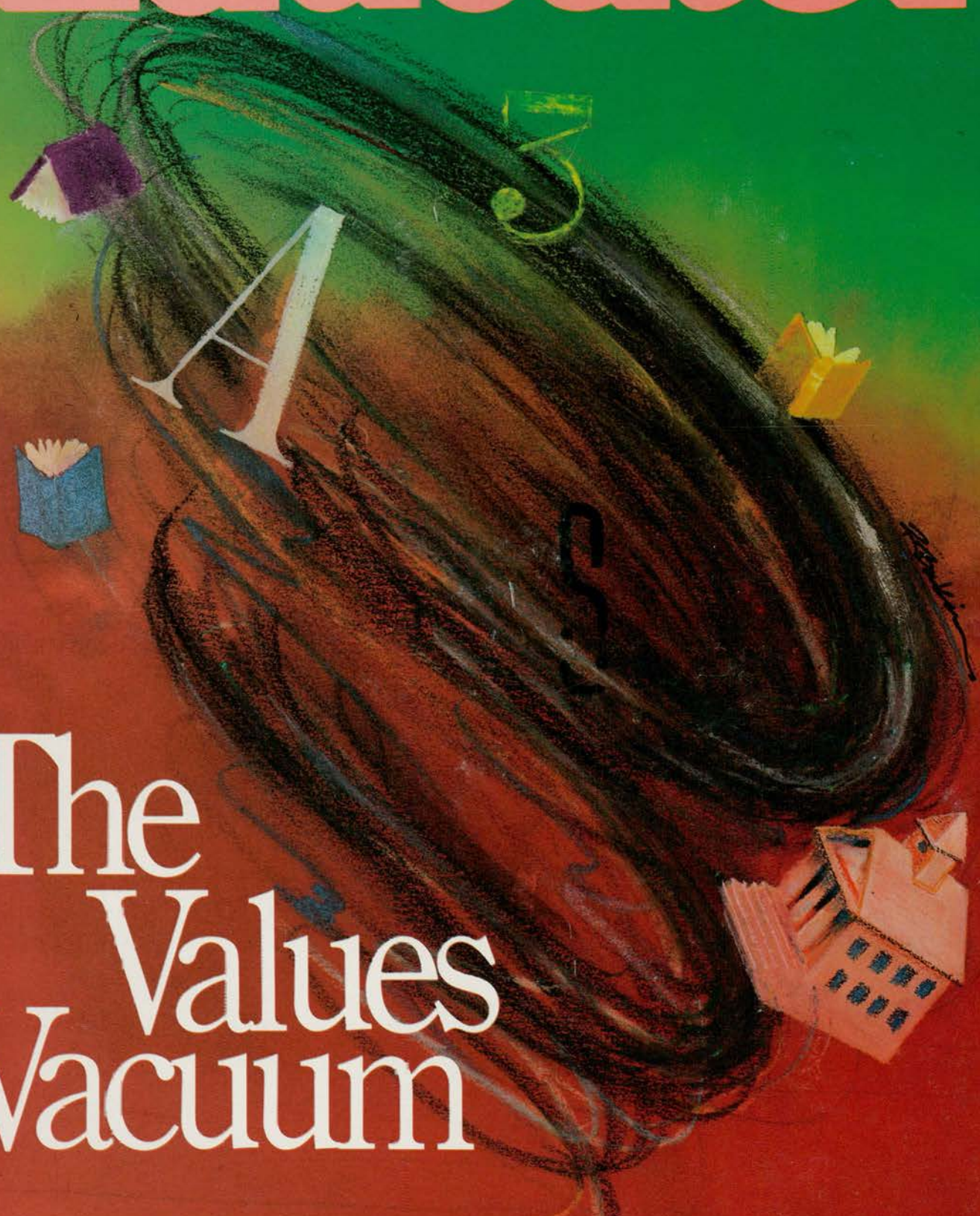


AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS  
FALL 1987

# AMERICAN **Educator**

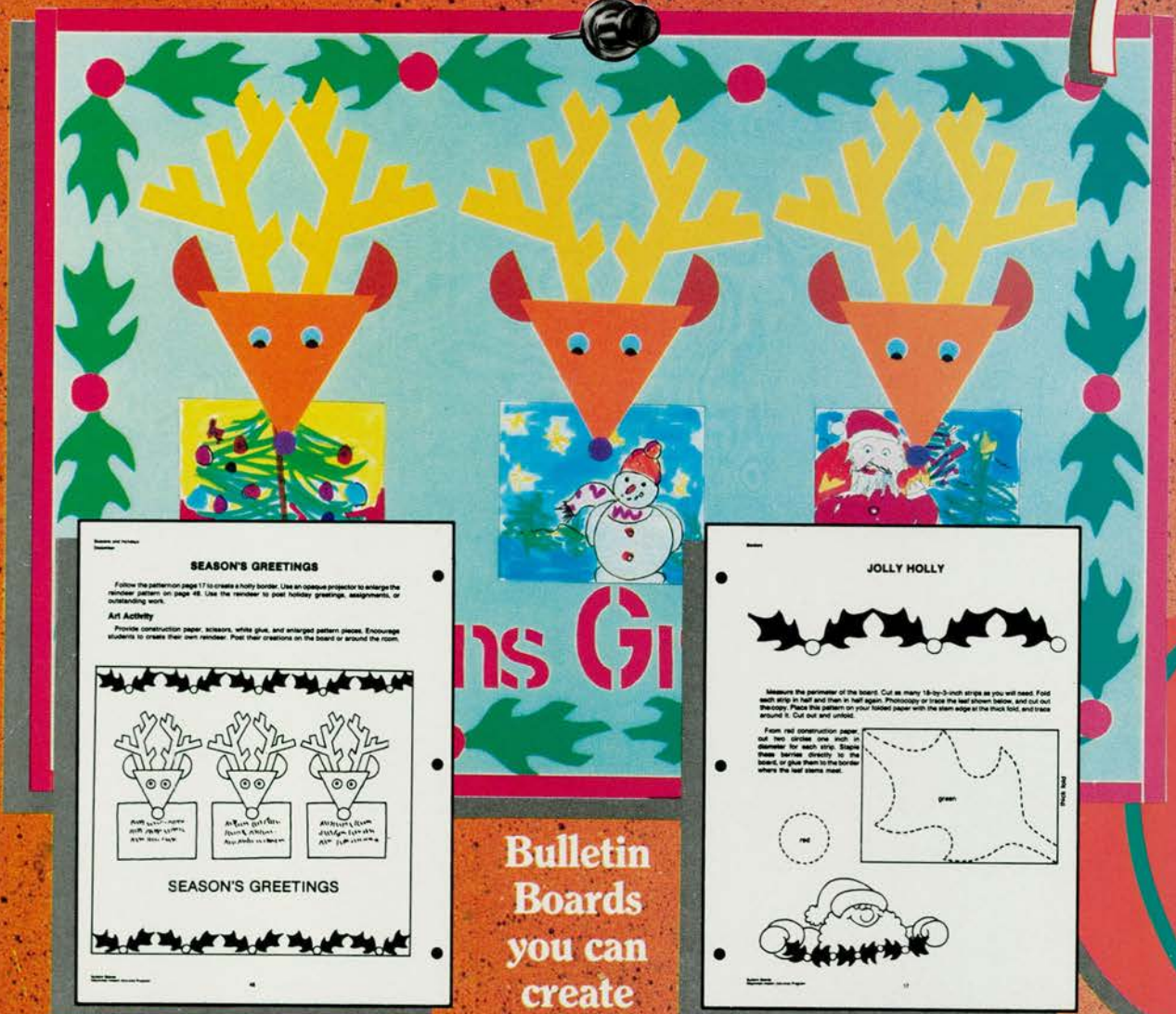
## The Values Vacuum





# Make your classroom a Showplace of Creative Teaching

...just follow the ideas and instructions in **BULLETIN BOARDS**



**SEASON'S GREETINGS**

Follow the pattern on page 17 to create a holly border. Use an opaque projector to enlarge the reindeer pattern on page 48. Use the remainder to post holiday greetings, assignments, or outstanding work.

**Art Activity**

Provide construction paper, scissors, white glue, and enlarged pattern pieces. Encourage students to create their own reindeer. Post their creations on the board or around the room.

**SEASON'S GREETINGS**

Idea Sheets

**JOLLY HOLLY**

Measure the perimeter of the board. Cut as many 18-by-3-inch strips as you will need. Fold each strip in half and then in half again. Photocopy or trace the leaf shown below, and cut out the copy. Place the pattern on your folded paper with the stem edge at the thick fold, and trace around it. Cut out and unfold.

From red construction paper, cut two circles one inch in diameter for each strip. Staple these circles directly to the board, or glue them to the border where the leaf stems meet.

**JOLLY HOLLY**

Border Patterns

Bulletin Boards you can create



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With a week full of different classes, homework assignments, projects and problems—who has time to think up unusual new bulletin boards, let alone make them? That's why we did it for you. With Bulletin Boards.

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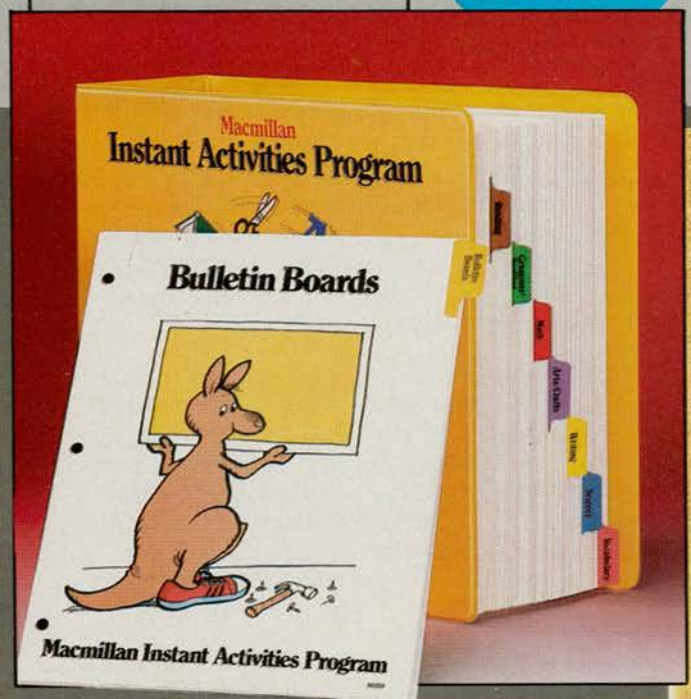
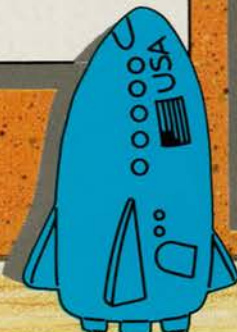
American Educator Fall '87

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## Transparencies and Stencils



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**SCIENCE**



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Photo by National Severe Storms Laboratory, NOAA

Photo by P3 America, California

DISCOVER: THE WORLD OF SCIENCE, a series of five one-hour PBS television specials, has given millions new insights on the latest scientific advances. And last year, 25,000 teachers received free teaching materials for use with the series, to help make science come alive for students in grades 6-12.

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*And once again, GTE is offering brand-new teaching materials, free of charge, to any interested science teacher.*

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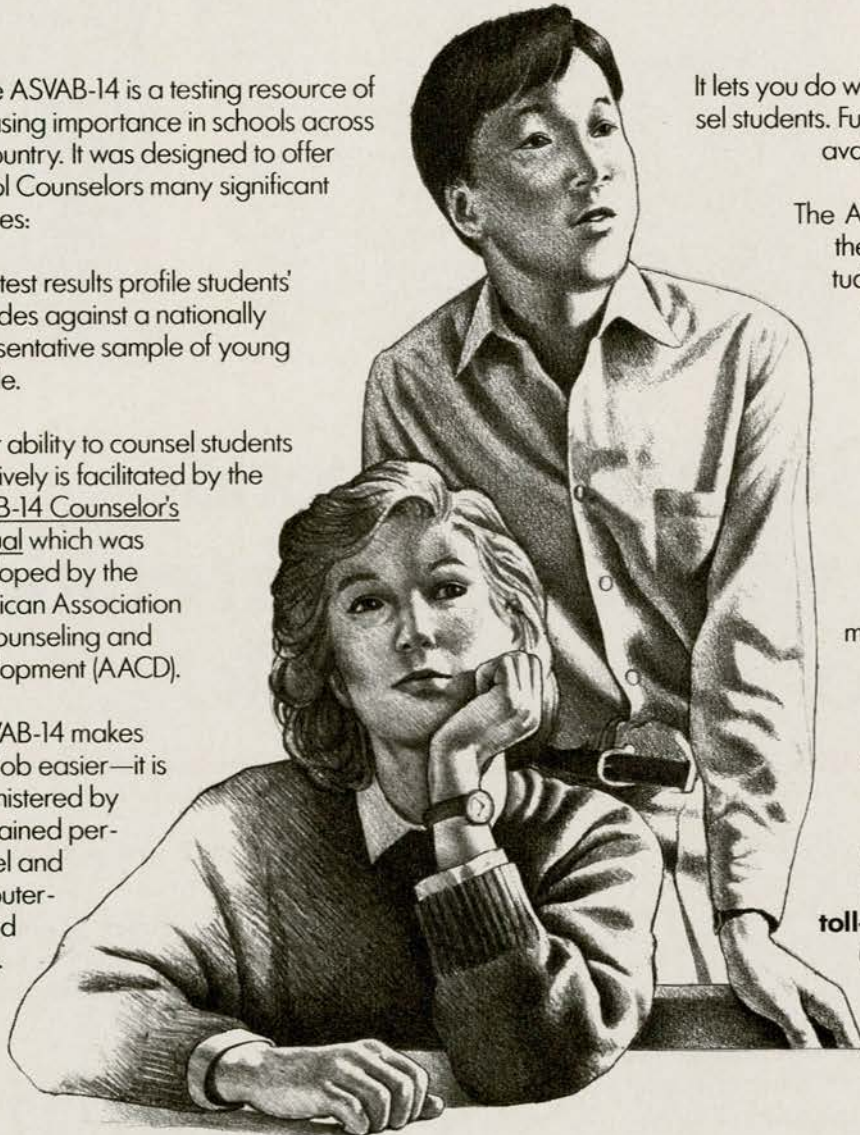
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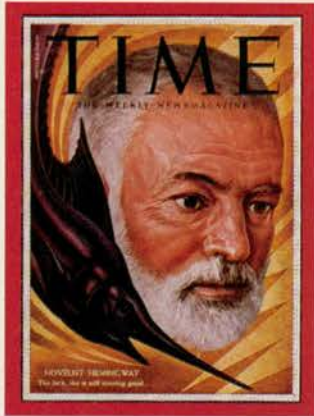
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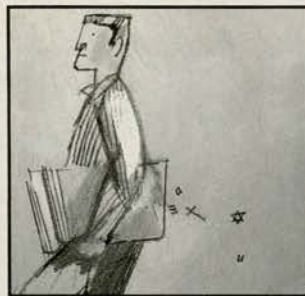
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# The Class of '88

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Get ready for tomorrow with the versatile Tandy 3000 HL. Like the Tandy 3000, the 3000 HL runs today's XT and AT single-user software, as well as next-generation OS/2 software. You get the best of both worlds in software in a highly expandable design (four XT and three AT slots) that you can custom tailor to your needs. The 8 MHz, 80286-based 3000 HL features a 5¼" disk drive, with room for two more internal drives—3½" or 5¼" floppy drives, a hard disk or disk cartridge system. The HL is also capable of networking with other MS-DOS® computers for maximum efficiency. (25-4071)

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**The Tandy 1000 TX** features the 80286 microprocessor, operating at 8 MHz for high performance using today's popular MS-DOS software. The 1000 TX includes 640K RAM, an RS-232 serial port, a headphone jack and a 720K 3½" disk drive, with room to expand with another drive. (25-1600)

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For more information or the name of the District Educational Marketing Manager in your area, call Radio Shack's Education Division toll-free at 800-433-5682. In Texas, call 800-772-8538.

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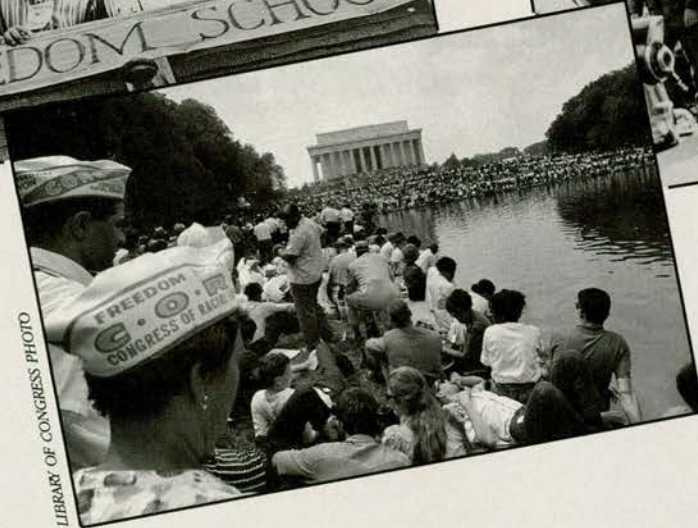
# NOTEBOOK



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"I know one thing  
we did right  
was the day we  
started to fight.  
Keep your  
eyes on the prize  
hold on,  
hold on."

*From a traditional civil rights song*

## BRING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

A majority of American high school seniors can't explain the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, says the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

What better way to remedy this ignorance than by showing students the videotapes from this spring's blockbuster PBS series, "Eyes on the Prize."

From the murder of Emmett Till and the first bus boycotts to the desegregation of Central High School, the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, the march from Selma, and, finally, the historic signing of the Voting Rights Act, this six-part television series brings the history of the American civil rights movement to life in film footage and interviews.

Along with the videotapes, a booklet of readings for 6th to 10th graders, an anthology of readings for older readers, and a viewers guide are available. The viewers guide, which can easily double as

a teachers' guide, provides background material, a program summary, discussion questions, and recommended readings for each of the six programs. It includes a timeline of major events in the civil rights movement from 1954 to 1965 and a brief, but excellent, section on how to conduct oral histories about the civil rights movement.

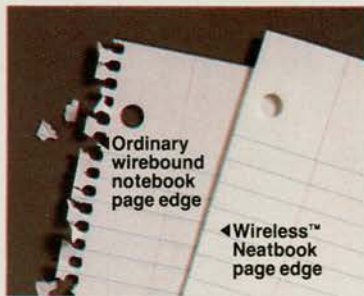
Tapes can be purchased individually (\$59.95 for VHS, \$79.95 for 3/4 inch tape) or as a set (\$295 for six VHS tapes, \$450 for six 3/4 inch tapes) from PBS Video, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314; (800) 344-3337. The anthology (\$10.95) is available from Viking Press, 40 W. 23rd Street, New York, NY 10010. Guides (\$1.50 for single copies; bulk rates available) and the booklet of readings (\$3.95 or \$2.50 bulk) are available from Blackside Inc., 486 Shawmut Avenue, Boston, MA 02118.





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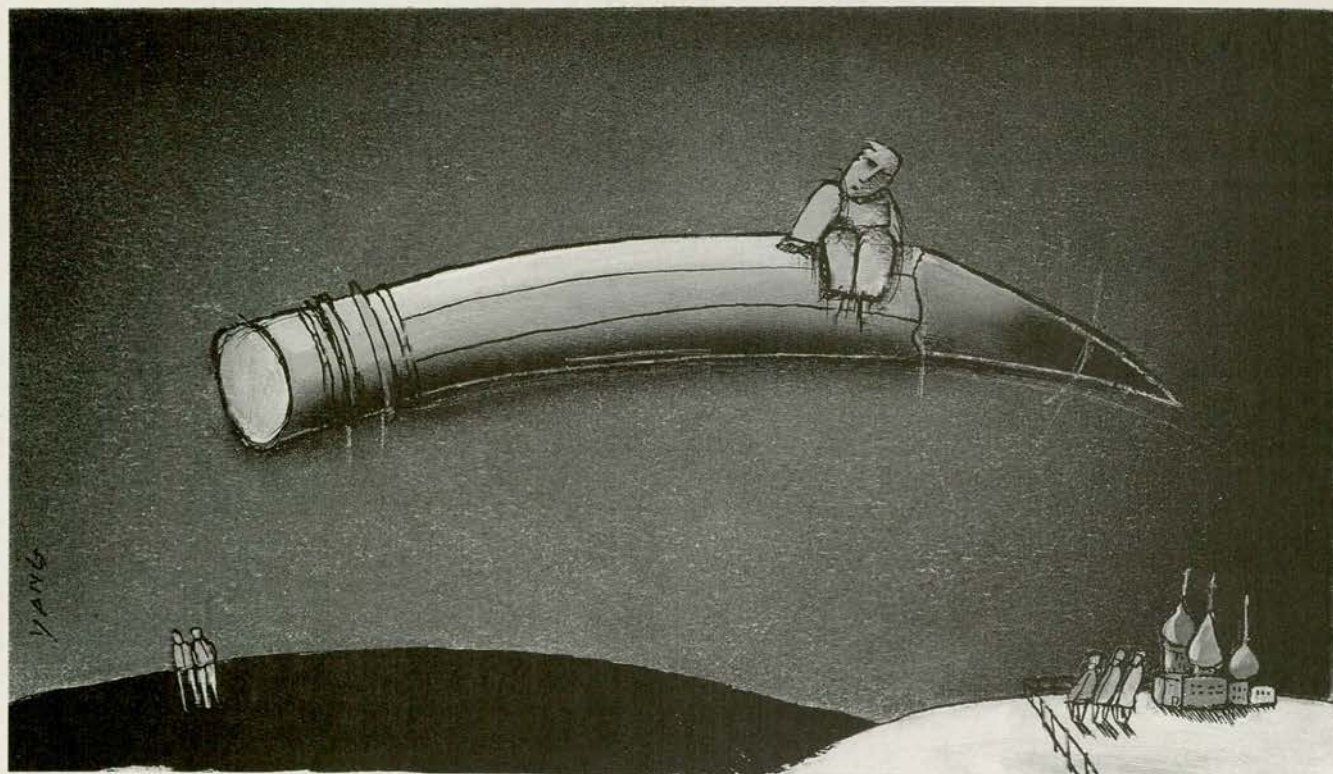
If you're having a problem with students who turn in raggedy-edge papers, this could be a very neat solution.

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ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES YANG

## ESSAY CONTEST ON PEACE

The United States Institute of Peace, a national nonpartisan organization created by Congress, has launched its first annual National Peace Essay Contest and announced a top award of \$5,000. Endorsed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the contest is open to all high school students in the United States, its territories, or overseas dependent schools.

To enter, applicants must read an excerpt from the *Helsinki Accords*—a document ratified in 1975 in which the United States, the Soviet Union, and 33 other signatory countries pledge to observe universal standards of human rights. Students must then reflect on the excerpt (which will be provided by the Institute) and then write an essay of under 1,500 words that examines “the relationship between peace, on the one hand, and human rights, fundamental freedoms, and self-determination of peoples, on the other.” An essay can only be submitted after it has been published in an official school publication.

At the state level, first-place, second-place, and third-place winners will receive scholarship awards of \$250, \$150, and \$100, respectively. At the national level, winners will receive awards of \$5,000, \$2,500, and \$1,000, respectively. The first-place winner in each state will be invited to Washington, DC, on the weekend of June 18-19, 1988, for award cere-

monies and meetings with scholars, policy makers, and journalists.

Students and faculty interested in taking part in the contest should contact their high school principals in October. Contest materials will be mailed to all principals on or before October 1, 1987. Contest materials will also be available after that date from the National Peace Essay Contest, United States Institute of Peace, P.O. Box 27720, Washington, DC 20038-7720.

## 1,010 GOOD BOOKS FOR KIDS

Help is on the way to elementary- and middle-school teachers who have been bemoaning the shrinking amount of space basal readers have been devoting to literature.

To help teachers devise and supplement literature curricula, the California State Department of Education has published *Recommended Readings in Literature: Kindergarten through Grade Eight*. The “Recommended Reading” list includes 1,010 titles organized by such categories as picture books, science fiction, historical fiction, contemporary fiction, biography, foreign language, and poetry. The appropriate age level for each book is provided. The list also designates which of over 200 books reflect the experience and contributions of eight minority cultures, including black, Hispanic, Korean, Vietnamese, and American Indian.

To order the 78-page paperback, send a check for \$2.25 (plus 6% tax if you live in California) payable to the California State Department of Education to California State Department of Education, P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95802-0271. Ask for Order Number ISBN-0-8011-0311-8. Government agencies in California can send purchase orders without remittance; others must enclose remittance.



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**E** DUCATORS SHOULD view Constitution Day 1987 as the kick-off for the US Constitution celebration, not the end. The official celebration is slated to continue until 1991, when the bicentennial of the Bill of Rights will be commemorated. Organizations are still producing helpful classroom materials, and this column will periodically publish information on these resources.

■ *The Jefferson Meeting on the Constitution* has materials with which you can organize a Jefferson Meeting—that is, a simulation of a constitutional convention—in your classroom. By participating in the meeting, students can learn about the issues debated by the founders. As participants in “committee meetings” and debates, students select, research, and defend a point of view on a constitutional issue. For more information, write The Jefferson Foundation, 1529 18th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036.

■ Last spring, The Polaroid Corporation offered a free camera and a lesson plan on the Constitution to every elementary school in the country. To take advantage of the offer, your principal had only to return the response card to Polaroid. Has your principal sent in the card? If he or she has not received it, call Polaroid at 1-800-527-1771.

■ A special, union-made T-shirt has a salute to the Constitution and a space in which you can personalize the shirt with the name of your school or union. The shirts can be ordered in bulk from Goldstein Associates, P.O. Box 4420, 1050 Yuma, #306, Denver, CO

# THE CONSTITUTION IN THE CLASSROOM

*Ideas and Resources for Teaching and Learning about the U.S. Constitution*



80204; 303/572-8138.

■ “Constitutional Government in the American Setting” is a booklet that includes a pull-out copy of the U.S. Constitution and a useful “time-line” guide to the constitutional period (1783-1791). For ordering information, write to The Taft Institute for Two-Party Government, 420 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10170.

## MEDIA MATERIALS

■ The American Hellenic Alliance has produced an exciting 13-minute video-

tape explaining the impact of classical Greek culture on the Constitution. The videotape emphasizes the Greek contribution to our understanding of “public virtue.” How the framers of the Constitution tried to lay a foundation for government based on the virtues of firmness, courage, endurance, industry, strength, and devotion to the community is illustrated. The tape costs \$14.95. Specify tape size when ordering from the American Hellenic Alliance, 1700 North Moore St., Suite 927,

## SPECIAL OFFER

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Arlington, VA 22209; (703) 525-1717.

■ The story of the Constitutional Convention, unabridged from the popular book *Miracle at Philadelphia*, is now available on 12 audiocassettes. Considered to be the definitive story of the Convention for younger audiences, this book is a Book-of-the-Month-Club main selection for the second time. The cassettes, which cost \$49.95, may be purchased from Dercum Press, Inc., PO Box 1425, West Chester, PA 19380 (order # 1-55656-060-5).

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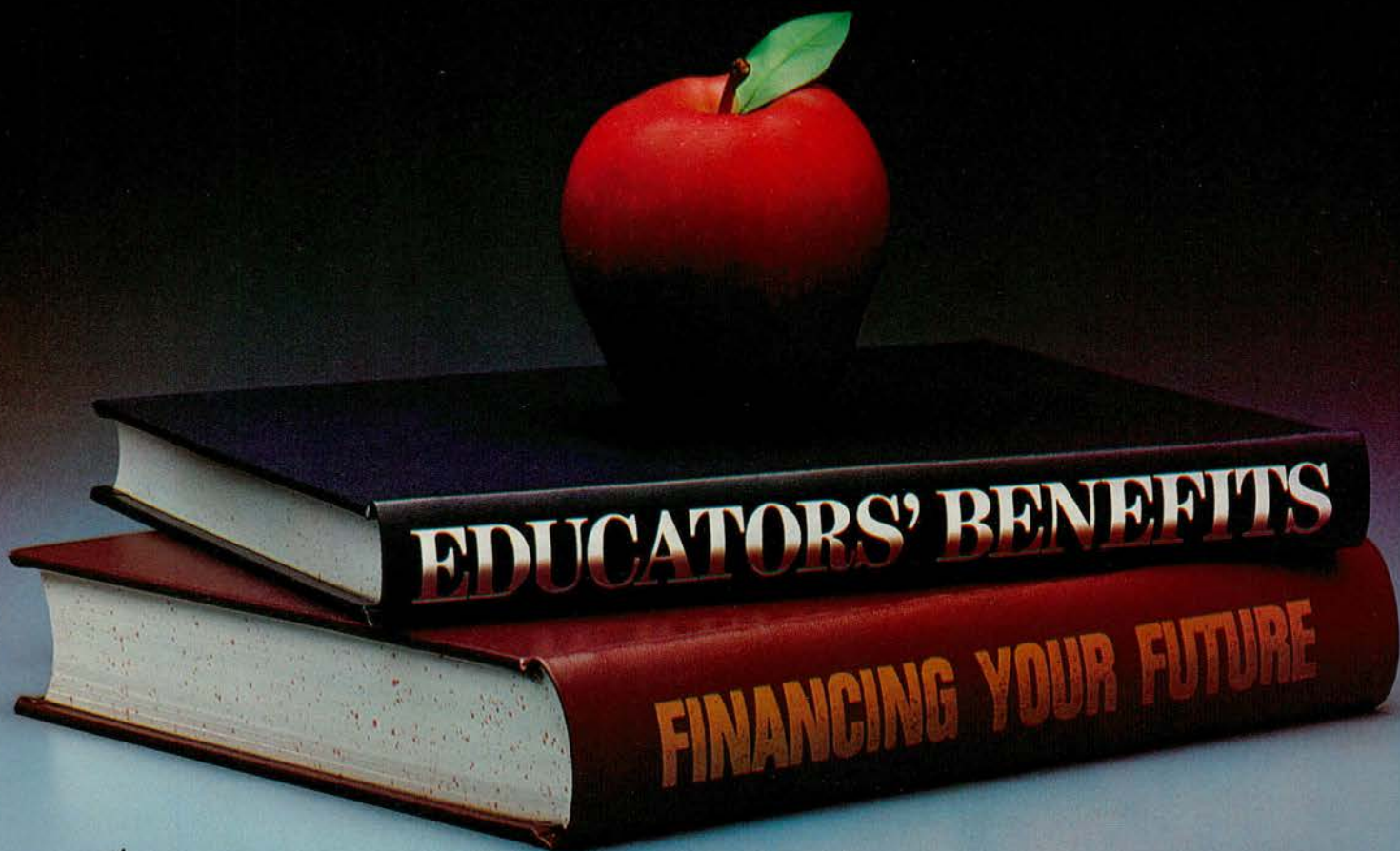
## WORKSHOPS

■ The Bicentennial Leadership Project will be running a new series of workshops across the country for teachers and other community leaders. For information about the project, write to the Bicentennial Leadership Project, 1724 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036. □

*Items in this list chosen and compiled by Paula O'Connor.*



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# THE VALUES VACUUM

*A Provocative Explanation  
for Parental Discontent*

BY HARRIET TYSON-BERNSTEIN

*"There are more things in heaven and earth  
than are dreamt of in your philosophy."*

— William Shakespeare, Hamlet

**M**ANY TEACHERS—and citizens—see the uproar over the content of the public schools' curriculum and textbooks as a two-sided battle between the forces of good and evil. On the one side are rational, conscientious educators who are trying to impart modern knowledge to students; and on the other side are intolerant fundamentalists, railing against "dirty words," trying to impose their version of Christianity on the scrupulously neutral public schools, and charging that the schools are deliberately conspiring to promote an anti-Christian religion called "secular humanism."

The fundamentalist agenda is a hodgepodge of bizarre, naive, prudish, intolerant, unconstitutional—and reasonable — complaints. The bizarre and naive complaints tend to attract the most press coverage—for example, the belief that *The Wizard of Oz* "teaches"

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witchcraft. Fundamentalist attempts to censor contemporary novels with "dirty words" and explicit sex seem prudish to some Americans and dangerously unconstitutional to others. Their claim that "secular humanism" is a religion — and the judicial banning of a sizeable portion of Alabama's textbooks alleged to promote that "religion" — strike many people as either laughably naive or dangerously totalitarian. School prayer and "creation science" are flatly unconstitutional, and the fundamentalists' unremitting attempts to impose them on the public schools have sparked both anger and fear. The anger is toward a subculture that seems unwilling to admit that Protestantism is not the official religion of the United States. The fear is that the American tradition of religious tolerance—one of our nation's greatest achievements—will be ruptured.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that schools have dismissed the fundamentalists as kooks. I suggest, however, that in so doing we have also turned a deaf ear to their more reasonable complaints. While I do not believe the schools are wittingly antireligious, I do believe they are sometimes blinded by a world view that is biased in favor of that knowledge that is "objective," seeable, and provable and against that which is more subjective, abstract, or philosophic. Most importantly, I believe this bias—which is evident in school management practices and, most distressingly, in the curriculum—has contributed to a discontent with the schools that extends far beyond fundamentalist circles.

## **I. The Discontent**

Complaints about the "value-neutral" curriculum







have been mounting amid a growing sense that the schools are leaving students morally adrift. In search of a stronger moral compass for their children, a small but steady stream of parents have transferred their children to parochial schools. Public opinion polls repeatedly show that parents want "values" taught in the schools. Across the nation, states and school districts have appointed commissions to develop ways to convey moral and ethical values to children. Even Norman Lear, founder of People For The American Way (a group that has been battling the religious right at every turn) has said that "For all our alarm, it is clear that the religious right is responding to a real hunger in our society — the need for connection . . . a deep-seated yearning for stable values."<sup>1</sup> There also has been a growing recognition that the schools have neglected to teach *about* religion. Confronted with demands for values education or charges that they are antireligious, most educators offer a double-edged answer (and here I am discounting the relatively few educators who believe it is impossible to identify consensus values or who really believe there is such a thing as value neutrality). On the one hand, they concede that fear of controversy and lawsuits has led to a deemphasis of those values that might be construed as religious. On the other hand, they assure us confidently and sincerely that the schools already *do* teach values: honesty, truthfulness, respect for person and property, perseverance, and tolerance for others.

But the schools and their critics are talking past each other. This ill-fated dialogue of "Please reinforce the concept of right and wrong" followed by "We already do" is now moving into its second decade. The parent advocates for a stronger value stance seem unable to better articulate what they mean by "values," and the schools remain bewildered by the demand to do what they believe they are already doing.

Now, with a clearer signal from the public, the schools and publishers will undoubtedly try to restore teaching *about* religion and to explicitly uphold certain values heretofore left in limbo. But if the schools enter into this activity believing that the only thing that has held them back has been their fear of controversy, they will likely miss the deeper issues fueling the discontent of the fundamentalists and the parents in those polls. These deeper issues have to do with the world view of the public schools and the language in which that world view is conveyed to parents and the public.

## II. The Cult of Objectivity

The premise of this article is that the schools, in harmony with "polite" society and academic fashion, do in fact have a world view, unconscious though it may be. And it is this world view that is the source of the troublesome, ever-bubbling discontent.

Contrary to the claims of the religious right, this world view is not the "religion" of secular humanism. Rather, it is a mixture of philosophies, "isms," and "ologies": humanism, scientific materialism, behavioral psychology, a "pop" version of humanistic psychology, and the kind of "scientific management" that was faddish in American industry a generation ago. It is a world view that values objectivity over subjectivity, favors a behaviorist interpretation of reality over any other, and is more comfortable with scientific explanations than

with philosophic ones. It celebrates the new and up-to-date over the old or "irrelevant," which means the old books and the humanities — that part of the curriculum in which the broad questions of life were once dealt with — have lost time to the new "isms" and "ologies." In sum, it is a world view that is not consciously hostile to religion but is intrinsically antagonistic to it and to the values it holds dear.

I am not arguing that the schools are, therefore, especially strong in teaching the sciences. One might expect that to be a happy by-product of this world view. But, in fact, the educational system has instead assumed that slow and average students are unable to grasp the counter-intuitive truths about the physical world, and those students have been and continue to be taught science as if it were a series of astounding facts. Only a small handful of students walk away with an understanding of scientific method, and fewer still learn the distinction between the kinds of problems that can be solved with the tools of science, technology, and scientific management and those that cannot. Pseudo-science and scientism are evident in non-science courses, while the great insights and methods (and limitations) of the sciences are watered down in many science courses.

## III. School Management Practices

But if genuine science has not been embraced in the most obvious parts of the public school curriculum, the trappings of science are abundantly apparent in school management practices. In the decades since John Dewey and Edward Thorndike, the language, concepts, and methods of science have been borrowed once by the would-be science of education in the universities and then borrowed once again, in a very tattered condition, by the school bureaucracies across the land. The result is not science, but its bizarre misapplication. We can all point to numerous examples of how the schools try to reduce decisions that inevitably require judgment to matters of "objective," seeable, "provable" fact. Here are a few telling—and irritating—ones.

- Teacher evaluation, as currently practiced in virtually every district in the United States, rests on the behaviorist premise that the only things that can be known about a teacher's performance in the classroom are those that can be visually observed and counted. Are the bulletin boards neat, colorful, and up-to-date? As students work, does the teacher camp behind the desk or move around the room? Is the whole class instructed at once, or are students divided into small groups?

Most educators would admit that these are not necessarily the most important aspects of teaching. Some would even say that the present system (and evaluators) are incapable of registering the quality of the split-second decisions that teachers make in response to individuals and groups. But instead of struggling to create an evaluation system worthy of the term, the present system is upheld in the name of scientific management. Anything less "sure" would violate the Cult of Objectivity. Though the system is nearly worthless for meaningful personnel decisions or sensitive supervision, it is objective, legally defensible, and therefore good.

- A similar story can be told about standardized student testing. Most standardized testing, which is the



*This ill-fated dialogue of "Please reinforce the concept of right and wrong" followed by "We already do" is now moving into its second decade.*

tail that wags the dog of education, accepts the premise that human ability is always distributed along the classic lines of the bell-shaped curve. Although nearly everybody is expected to learn to walk, talk, and drive a car, it is expected that a fixed percentage of the population will not learn to read or figure, at least not very well. Test items are not constructed to find out whether students learned the most important things being taught, but to array the student population in the proper configuration. There are other kinds of tests that don't do that—norm-referenced tests, teacher-made tests, etc.—and the right kind of standardized tests have an important contribution to make. But the kind of tests the press feasts upon are the ones that pay more homage to a statistical abstraction than to the transmission of important knowledge.

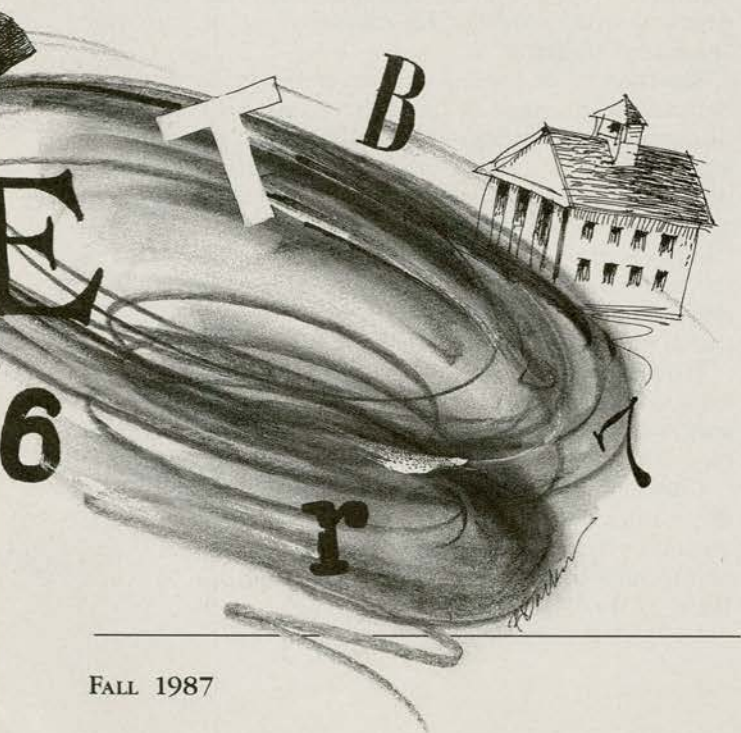
- A less obvious, but no less real, manifestation of the Cult of Objectivity is found in the preoccupation with "needs assessment." A ubiquitous ritual in scientific management, "needs assessment" is a tool that permits managers to gather support for their hopes, dreams, and budgets under the guise of objectivity. It is nearly always a covert form of policy assertion. When parents complain that the deck has been stacked, administrators are generally unable to see that a simple value conflict is occurring because they are so taken in by their belief in their own objectivity.

- Subjective choices are also clothed as "objective" choices when educators "identify" rather than "select," "prefer," or "choose." "We have identified six teachers to serve on the curriculum revision task force" or "We have identified three budget options for the coming year" means that somebody has just made a significant value choice but is keeping it a secret from others and himself. Middle-class parents are often fooled because they frequently practice the same self-deception, but the rabble is rarely fooled. They know that whatever has been "identified" was predetermined by the subjective desires of the identifier.

- A similar pattern can be found in the efforts to objectify (and sanitize) how children's feelings will be handled by the schools. Indeed, instead of talking about feelings, school administrators now talk about the "affective domain"—and gripe endlessly about the public's resistance to it. But I believe it is not the realm of feelings and values that most parents find objectionable; it is the educationist interpretation of it. Often, it turns out to be a presumptuous application of psychology to the problems of student behavior, or else some popular wisdom on the level of the Phil Donahue show. It is not surprising, then, that practices undertaken in the name of the "affective domain" have such a curious effect: They enrage the right, and therefore stimulate the assault on the barriers between church and state; at the same time, they seem to permanently maintain the barrier between thought and feeling. Fortunately for all of us, this artificial separation of reason from heart is usually reconciled by the teacher in the classroom.

#### **IV. The Denatured Curriculum**

But the Cult of Objectivity, with its misapplication of science, is not limited to bureaucratic practice. Far more consequential for students (and distressing to fundamentalists and other parents) is its effect on





school curriculum. For if the Cult of Objectivity is part of the warp of bureaucratic practice, it is also the woof of the curriculum.

In history and literature, the big ethical questions of life are less likely to be the focus of discussion than they once were. In home economics textbooks, where values *are* discussed, they are discussed only in psychological terms. Because philosophical ways of thinking are given little legitimacy elsewhere in the curriculum, biology—with its focus on scientific ways of thinking—has become a target for parental discontent. Many parents fear that the distinction between scientific knowledge and moral knowledge may be left unclear in their children's minds, and therefore result in their children's religious beliefs being undermined.

In examining textbooks and curricula, particularly with reference to their treatment of religious, metaphysical, spiritual, or cosmic matters, this is what I see:

**History.** Beginning with history textbooks, where one would hope the full richness of human experience would be set down, several recent studies have found the role of religion in history pared down to a minimum.<sup>2</sup> In my own reading of history textbooks, I find that the few discussions of religion tend to be dry-bones accounts of the observable behavior of various religious groups: whether a group believed in one God or more; whether a group was persecuted (they never say why); that a group had to leave one country and go to another; and what rules of social behavior applied. We learn that this group put people in the stock, that group did not allow dancing and drinking, and a third would not let men and women sit together.

There is an almost total absence of any inside view. Words such as *faith, love, heart, soul, sorrow, pain, pride, greed, or evil* are almost never used. Reading these textbooks, one gets the impression that religion is nothing more than a fun spoiler, like parents and teachers. There is not even a hint that there were compensations to believers who chose to subject their lives to a force outside themselves. Without even that hint, it would be difficult for any student to understand why young Puritans didn't just run away into the woods to live with the Indians.

There are a few notable exceptions. One world history book, for example, deals sensitively with the development of the Jewish concept of a loving God; with the quest of the Greek philosophers for inner peace, truth, and harmony with nature; with the Buddha's quest for the answer to human pain and sorrow. But even that exemplary book ceased all references to religion on about page 250 in a book of 750 pages. The Arab-Israeli war, for example, is treated as though it were purely a contest between nation states, not a war in which religion played a major role. In American history books, the civil rights movement is discussed either with no mention or with the barest mention of the role of the black churches in the movement. Avoidance of religion is so extreme that textbook publishers even shun photographs of American towns that show church spires. Reading these books, it would be possible to get through an entire education and not know "your lotus from your navel," as theologian Harvey Cox has said.<sup>3</sup>

**Literature.** Three years ago, I did a survey of what school districts were asking adolescents to read in

***Reading these textbooks, one gets the impression that religion is nothing more than a fun spoiler, like parents and teachers.***



English classes.<sup>4</sup> There appeared to be no clear trend. There were educators in both rich and poor districts who believed that students got benefit from the classics. But there were also educators from both rich and poor districts who believed the classics "out of date" for "modern" students.

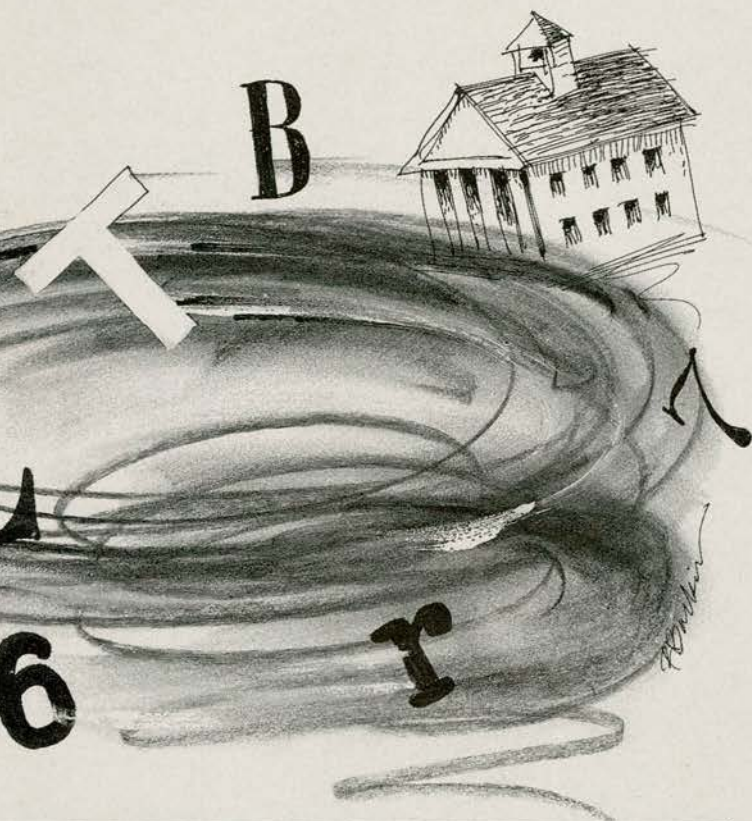
Supervisors of English reported that many teachers believe the purpose of literature study is to stimulate discussion of contemporary political and social problems, and they therefore favor 20th century novels. Still others believe that today's teenagers respond only to adolescent fiction that deals with issues such as pregnancy, divorce, and drugs. Depending on the beliefs of the teacher and the district, it is possible, even in literature classes, for a student to escape the old books that touch on the deeper issues of the human spirit.

**Home Economics.** If the role of religion and values—indeed, all the deeper issues of the human spirit—is given short shrift in the humanities curriculum, where, then, are these issues taken up?

Curiously enough, it is in home economics textbooks that values and the problems of living are most often considered. I recently reviewed four of the five home economics texts recently banned by Judge Brevard Hand in *Smith v. Mobile*.<sup>5</sup>

I believe that few Americans would quibble with most





of the advice offered in these texts. The consensus values of honesty, tolerance, perseverance, and accepting responsibility for one's actions are stressed. But the context and language in which these values are presented are exclusively confined to contemporary sociology and psychology. And, as often as not, both disciplines have been reduced in these texts to a pseudo-scientific "pop" variety. The result is not only a tepid and scientific view of values but a view that often collides with the values of religion.

The first chapters of the challenged textbooks are devoted to a values education course. The books all discuss values, goals, and standards—often using these terms interchangeably. They discuss how to develop personal maturity, how to get along with others, and how to be a success in the world. The kind of advice about dating, friendship, popularity, and grooming offered in teen magazines a generation ago is now proffered in schoolbooks as the fruit of inarguable scientific research.

Schema that classify human needs, personality types, developmental stages, and ego states are treated as though they were facts based in nature, not constructs of the human mind. For example, the four books I studied all presented Abraham Maslow's "hierarchy of needs"—with "self-actualization" at the pinnacle—as a

scientifically sanctioned prescription for living, rather than as his particular description of successful individuals. There is not even a suggestion that other psychological viewpoints exist, or that poets, playwrights, novelists, theologians, philosophers, sages, or saints have offered other clues to the problems of living. Even for a "gut" course in high school, the material is pat and simplistic; it is "pop" science, or scientism, at its worst.

In all these discussions about values and how to live one's life, such time-honored concepts as soul, spirit, character, good, evil, greed, and envy are conspicuously absent. One book discusses the value of religion, but its value is instrumental only: Religion promotes personal security and helps one weather the storms of life. There is no suggestion in these books that many Americans view life differently, that many people find fulfillment through the subordination of the self to higher goals, or that the source of authority for "values" may reside outside the individual. There are no positive examples of sacrifice on behalf of others.

Realizing one's full potential is seen as the highest good. Maturity appears to consist of departing from the values of one's parents, church, and peers, although nowhere is it suggested that it might also be necessary to depart from the values implicit in the textbook.

With few exceptions, the ultimate authority on morals and ethics is assumed to be the student's own opinion. Family and religion might "influence" one's values, but the books say each person must ultimately assemble his or her own lists of "values." The underlying message in these books is that "you" are the most important thing in the world.

Some examples:

"When you buy drugs illegally, you gamble on what you are getting and how they will affect you. It's your decision."<sup>6</sup>

"You need to form your own attitudes about alcohol. Your attitudes may differ from those of your friends. But the important thing is that you must make your own decisions."<sup>7</sup>

"What is right and wrong seems to depend more upon your own judgment than on what someone else tells you to do. Of course, laws must be obeyed. But beyond the law, you must decide on your actions."<sup>8</sup>

There is even a suggestion in one of the books that acting in accord with one's conscience might be neurotic:

"Remember that adolescence is a time of trial and error. Too strict a conscience may make you afraid to try new ventures and meet new people. It may make you feel different or unpopular. None of these feelings belongs to a healthy personality."<sup>9</sup>

Some Americans might endorse the view that "making up your own mind" is an important message; some might believe that preaching to the kids has no effect. I submit, though, that the vast majority of Americans would now think that these examples illustrate how the "do your own thing" ethic has gone too far. Even if authors and editors are reluctant to cite God, the church, or historical experience as guides to action, surely it would be permissible to follow the advice offered by Dr. Robert Coles,<sup>10</sup> a child psychiatrist deposed by the attorneys for the state board of education (against the religious right) in the Alabama secular humanism case: "Writers ought to share with children the hazards of appealing mindlessly to the self."



The Alabama parents who challenged these books not only disapproved of the values portrayed, but saw those values as another instance of the schools' secular humanist conspiracy against religion.

They are wrong about the conspiracy. After all, the ideas and techniques in these books have been appearing in popular magazines for decades; they are even being used by church counselors. But while few would share the view that a conspiracy is afoot, a growing number of Americans are taking exception to the values served up by these books.

**The Crucible of Biology.** Because the big questions about the meanings and purposes of human existence are not posed elsewhere in the curriculum, science—and especially instruction in evolution—has been left particularly vulnerable to attack. When no distinction is made in the science class or elsewhere in the curriculum between the realms of scientific belief and moral belief, between proximate, scientific origins and ultimate origins, between “nature” limited to the physical and “nature” including the transcendental, it is not unreasonable to assume that students may be led to believe that science and religion are irreconcilable or that scientific thinking is more legitimate and valuable than religious or philosophical thinking. It is therefore no surprise that some parents fear the schools are undermining their children's faith.

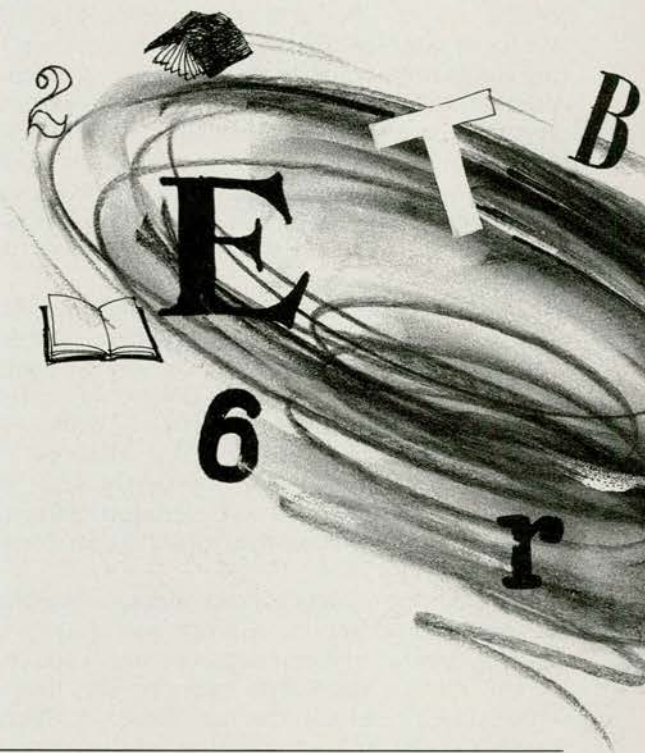
But Langdon Gilkey,<sup>11</sup> a theologian who has testified against teaching creation science for the American Civil Liberties Union, points out that such fear is unnecessary for most religious Americans. There has been, he says, an intellectual reconciliation between modern theology and modern science. Unfortunately, it is one of the best-kept secrets in America, rarely discussed in churches or schools. While the churches should bear their fair share of responsibility for remedying this widespread ignorance, the schools, if only as a matter of intellectual integrity, also need to address the issue.

How the issue should be addressed is of prime importance. Many on the religious right call for teaching “creation science.” But “creation science” is an unacceptable remedy. It is religion masquerading as science and as such has no place in the curriculum. Further, it promotes one particular religious viewpoint—that of biblical fundamentalists—in violation of the First Amendment. The Supreme Court's recent decision to ban “creation science” from the public school curriculum is therefore heartening. But it does not provide students with the knowledge that there are questions that science does not ask and cannot answer.

Nor is help in addressing this issue likely to come from scientific quarters. In an understandable effort to protect the integrity of their discipline from creation science, the National Science Teachers Association voted in 1985 to oppose the inclusion in “the body of science education, including textbooks,” any tenets that fail to meet their three-pronged list for a valid scientific theory.<sup>12</sup> This means that the tenets of scientific method can be fully explained, which is good; but additional ways of knowing the world—through philosophy, religion, or literature, for example—must not be mentioned in science class.

The result is an intellectual impasse in science education, particularly in biology: students learn neither evo-

***But “creation science” is an unacceptable remedy. It is religion masquerading as science and as such has no place in the curriculum.***





lutionary biology\* nor the boundaries of science. A full treatment of evolution isn't in the textbooks because the fundamentalists don't want it; a clarifying and explicit discussion of the parameters of scientific knowledge isn't there because the scientists, fearful of giving an inch that will become a mile, don't want it. The students are the losers. Students are taught the staccato facts of biology without the over-arching evolutionary theory that would make the facts meaningful and interesting. Also, they are given no help in sorting out the differences between science and religion. While no teaching solution would satisfy the minority of Americans who prefer a literal interpretation of the Bible, the vast majority of Americans could be satisfied by a science course that came to grips with what is in the province of science and what is not, thus dissolving the unnecessary conflict between science and religion.

## V. Responding to the Discontent

I believe that the many-sided agenda of the religious conservatives—tuition tax credits, vouchers, prayer in the schools, equal access, scientific creationism, the Hatch amendment, and the home schooling movement—began as an inchoate protest against the Cult of Objectivity and the denatured curriculum. The contemporary round of protests began in Kanawha County, West Virginia, 15 years ago as a plea for traditional values and a complaint about students' being emotionally manipulated by pop-psychology games. The schools could have backed away from the cultural imperialism inherent in many of the curriculum reforms of the 1970s. Instead they—or those who purport to speak for the schools—branded the parents as censors and dismissed them as reactionaries. The schools might have allocated an hour or two to tell students that there were mythic, religious, poetic, and metaphorical explanations for the origin of life and realms of knowing outside of science. Had they done so, "creation science" might never have attracted the support it did.

Aspects of the New Right/fundamentalist agenda are dark, bigoted, and anti-intellectual. But before dismissing their entire agenda out-of-hand, we need to remember that some of their causes—including their protests against positivism, behaviorism, scientism, and scientific management—have already won acceptance in less extreme segments of society. The barrenness and one-sidedness of much of the curriculum is now the subject of commentary across the political spectrum.

The ability to attend to the mysteries of life, to confess ignorance or partial understanding, is not part of the present system of education. To the contrary, the curriculum supposes that all problems are solvable, and that view undoubtedly contributes to despair and cynicism when students find out that it is not true. Ignorance of the world's religions and of the timeless human issues portrayed in the humanities not only predisposes young people to opt for the high-tech, me-first values being promoted today, but leaves them helpless to understand the powerful forces at work in the world—and in themselves.

\*Most recently, the State of California refused to adopt any K-8 science textbooks; among the reasons cited was the failure of the texts to adequately deal with evolution.

Cultivating the habits of reason and rational thinking are no doubt a prime responsibility of the schools. It is no exaggeration to say that modern society, and especially democratic society, rests on a citizenry that can think about issues logically and reasonably. But most people also agree there is more to life than what science and reason can explain. Cultivating in students the desire and the capacity to ponder life's ultimate questions, unamenable as they are to scientific inquiry, should be of equal priority to the schools.

A new push for values education that focuses on a narrowly drawn core of citizenship values will not be enough. We need to strengthen the humanities, because it is only there that students learn that an inner life exists. It is only there that students are exposed to the complexities of the human dilemma and to the language of heart and soul, right and wrong, good and evil. We need to learn how to teach *about* religion in ways that will pass constitutional muster and satisfy most parents. And we need to support efforts to raise the standard of science education—one effect of which will be that students will be more able to distinguish genuine science from "pop" science and scientism.

None of this will be easy, nor will it be accomplished quickly. Educators, in league with philosophers, scientists, and theologians, need to create better forums for serious and tolerant debates that can nurture a new consensus about how schools can portray the nature of human life and the range of human aspirations. □

## END NOTES

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<sup>6</sup>Ryder, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>8</sup>Kelly and Eubanks, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>10</sup>Coles, Robert: *Deposition, Smith v. Board of School Commissioners*, Civ. Nos. 82-Board of School Commissioners, Civ. Nos. 82-0544-BH and 82-0792-BH, S.D. Ala., March 4, 1987.

<sup>11</sup>Gilkey, Langdon: *Creationism on Trial: Evolution and God at Little Rock*. New York, Harper & Row, 1985.

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# DEMOCRACY'S JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ROOTS

## *What World History Textbooks Don't Tell You*

BY PAUL GAGNON

THE MORAL and ethical principles of Judaism and Christianity make up the core of the Western intellectual and literary tradition. They lie at the heart of most subsequent world ideologies, even those determinedly antireligious. The great debates over right and wrong, over justice and injustice, and over the place of the individual in society and history are rooted in what Greeks, Jews, and Christians believed to be true of human nature and human needs. Yet the basic ideas of Judaism and Christianity are all but ignored in some of these texts and only feebly suggested in the rest.

How is this lapse to be explained in books whose purpose is to acquaint students with the essence of each world culture? One possibility is that the authors take for granted that students have already absorbed from

family, church, or prior schooling the bases of Western religious tradition. This might explain their tendency to devote substantially more space and explanation to Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism. It might also explain the broad, demanding review questions they pose, asking students, in one example, to "compare the basic teachings of Christianity and Islam" from a text (Wallbank) that devotes one sentence to Christian teachings ("Like other Jews, Jesus condemned violence and selfishness and taught doctrines based on brotherhood") but nearly two pages to those of Mohammed.

Or are the authors overwary of possible accusations of religious indoctrination? But then again, why should they be? This is not a matter of presenting the main tenets of Judeo-Christian faith and dogma as true or untrue. That is not the business of historians. Their concern is with the history of ideas at work, their power to move people to action—and to other ideas. Students much younger than those of the 9th and 10th grade are well aware that the truth is very often less important than what people think is true. It is, after all, the very engine of TV soap opera. We examine ideologies such as Marxism and fascism with great care, not because we believe them or wish to convert our students, but because they are forces in history and they, in turn, have been shaped by historical events. There is no less reason to examine Judaism and Christianity. Textbooks should hardly eviscerate themselves just to avoid displeasing readers who cannot tell the difference between religious instruction and the history of ideas.

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ILLUSTRATED BY SALVADOR BRU

**F**OR WHATEVER reasons, these texts do fail. In Wallbank, referred to above, the Jews do not get so much as a boldface heading (as the Hittites do). We find four paragraphs summarizing their history from Canaan to the Diaspora and only one dealing with religious ideas. There is mention of monotheism and the Ten Commandments, from which “prophets developed some of the noblest rules of human behavior.” But the Ten Commandments are not listed, and we are given only one sentence of noble rules from Micah: “Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.” To accompany the single sentence on Christian teachings cited above are two pages of narrative on the lives of Jesus and Paul, the fate of Christians in Rome, and the organization of the early Church. Mentioned are the Nicene Creed, the New Testament, the letters of Paul, and Augustine’s *City of God*, which “provided much of the foundation of Christian theology.” But in all this, there is not a word of substance about Christian ideas.

Kownslar is much the same. The Ten Commandments are not listed, only described as governing “the actions of the Hebrews in their religious, family, and community life.” Ethical monotheism stirred “good behavior in individuals—both in their personal lives and toward others.” The single passage on Christian belief follows:

He taught that the Ten Commandments of the Hebrews were a guide to proper living. Jesus also taught that all people are equal in the eyes of God, that everyone should love God above all else, and that they should treat others the same way they would wish to be treated. The teachings of Jesus, together with those of the Hebrew religion, which

formed the foundation of much of his preaching, make up what is called the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Beers and Roselle, texts that are somewhat stronger on ideas throughout than are Kownslar and Wallbank, begin by listing the Ten Commandments (though not by number, a lost chance for a bit of cultural literacy). They also present more remarks on Hebrew respect for the individual and on concern for the poor and weak. Both also devote substantially greater space to Christian teachings, citing the message of the Sermon on the Mount and suggesting the emphasis of the “New Law” on love of all human beings and on the equality and dignity of all. Mazour, having promised readers in the Introduction that they would “learn about the power of ideas, such as the belief that every human being has worth and dignity that must be respected,” fails to say that the belief is at the heart of Judaism and Christianity! Although the text includes a box noting that reading Scripture is helpful to understanding faith, not even the Ten Commandments are listed, only mentioned. Ethical monotheism is described in two sentences, then proclaimed as “the most important contribution of the Jews to Western civilization.” Christian teachings are presented in 12 lines, all on love and forgiveness.

**A**BSENT FROM all of these accounts is the fundamental Judeo-Christian notion of human nature as a complicated mixture of worthy and unworthy elements, active impulses toward both good and evil. Also  
*(Continued on page 40)*



# WHY "BACK TO BASICS" ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

*Sidney Hook Reflects on His  
Teacher John Dewey and The  
Philosophy of Progressive Education*

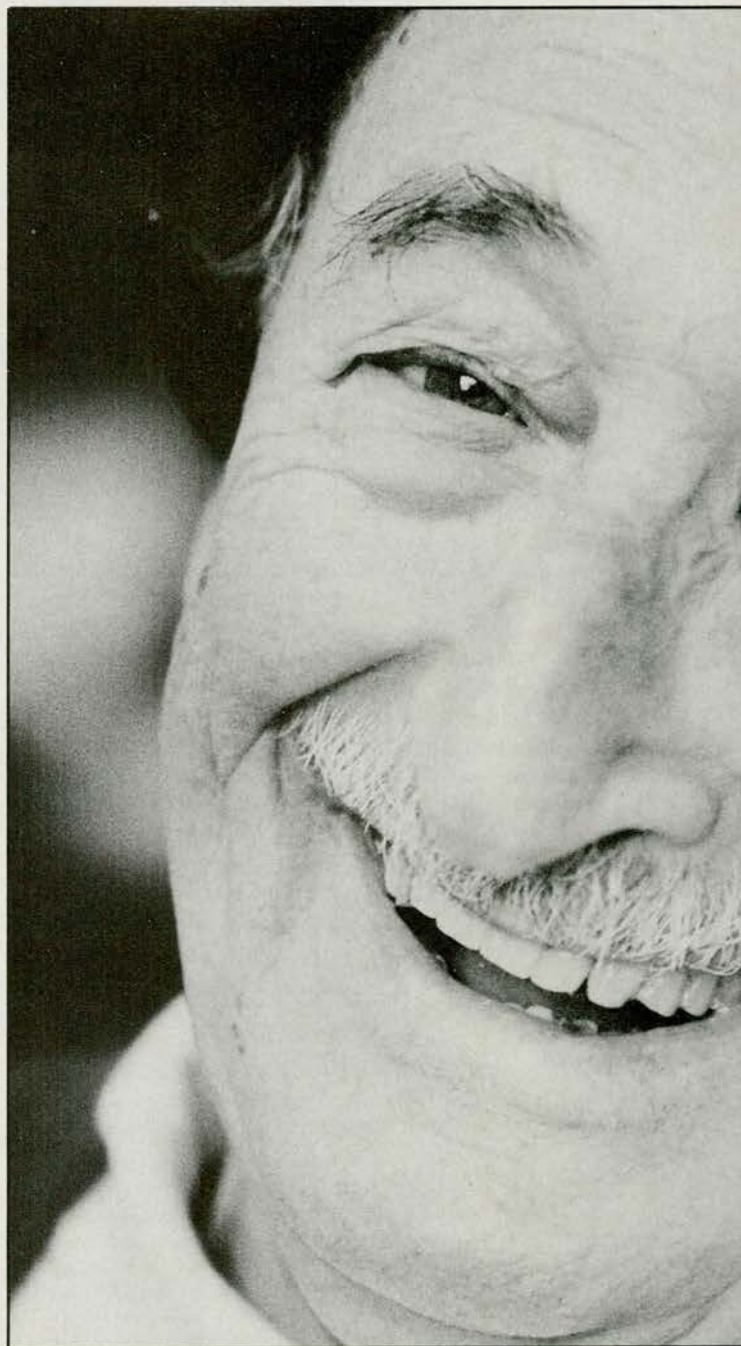
**S**IDNEY HOOK is one of the 20th century's most influential writers on American public affairs and education. Born of immigrant parents in 1902, Hook completed his elementary and secondary education in the schools of the Brooklyn ghetto. In 1924 he began studying philosophy at Columbia University, where he became a star pupil of John Dewey, then America's foremost philosopher and educational theorist. Hook went on to have a distinguished academic career, first as professor of philosophy at New York University, then as a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

Hook is, however, perhaps best known for his writings on public affairs, undertaken at a time when most professional philosophers regarded the field as unscholarly. Hook debated the great issues of the 20th century—war and peace, democracy and totalitarianism, capitalism and socialism—with many of the most significant minds of his generation, including Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, Noam Chomsky, and John Kenneth Galbraith. In 1984 he received the Jefferson Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities for his distinguished achievement in the humanities.

Like his mentor John Dewey, Hook became an important educational theorist as well as a philosopher. Called "one of the most influential classroom teachers of his generation" by Stephen Cabn, Dean of City University of New York's Graduate School, Hook is perhaps one of the very few major intellectuals who has taught at the elementary, high school, college, and graduate levels.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY VICTORIA ROJNE

*Ever since his experience as a public school student in the early 1900s convinced him of the backwardness of old-fashioned education, Hook has fought for education reform. Today Hook is known as the foremost exponent of the philosophy of progressive education as developed by John Dewey in Education and Democracy.*

*In his newly published autobiography, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century*,<sup>1</sup> Hook describes his experiences as a student and teacher in New York City's school system before the era of progressive education. In this interview, conducted by Thomas Main, Hook summarizes those experiences and reflects on the contributions and failings of progressive education.*

**Main:** *Would you describe what it was like to be a student in New York City's elementary schools in the days before progressive education?*

**Hook:** Remember, my elementary school experience took place before World War I. In those days, before Dewey's theory of progressive education had any vogue, the students were regarded as empty pitchers into which teachers would try to pour some knowledge. Teachers were expected to act like martinets in their classrooms. Students were expected to rise and sit — even breathe — on command: Open the windows; breathe in; breathe out.

There was corporal punishment as a matter of course. In the public school system, where there was no coeducation, if the boys got out of hand, they were slapped and sometimes whacked with a ferrule. But more serious than punishment by the teachers was the punishment meted out by parents if a teacher complained to the parents. In the slum in which I lived, there

<sup>1</sup> *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century*, New York, Harper & Row, 1987.



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were Italian boys, Irish boys, German boys, Jewish boys. They all lived in holy terror of their parents.

There was quite rigorous control over attendance. If a kid was on the street between nine and three any adult could, and would, question him with "What are you doing out of school?" Only an emergency could serve as an excuse.

Teaching was mechanical and done mostly by rote. Those of us who had discovered reading on our own found our educational experience a trial. We were bored—utterly bored. An attempt was made to differentiate among certain students, and occasionally there were classes for bright students, or students would be permitted to skip a grade. But my own memory of school was that it was a perpetual bore to such a degree that on occasion I would hope it would burn down so we could be relieved of the monotony of attendance.

My problems with teachers resulted from my lack of attention to drill. The teachers would normally aim their instruction at the most backward student. Consequently, the repetition became quite a trial to the ordinary student and a torture to the advanced student. That was the predominant quality of my educational experience, which began maybe in 1907. There was little joy or adventure in learning.

**Main:** *Did the students learn anything? Perhaps someone would say, in defense of those days, "There was strict discipline, but the kids learned because we cracked down."*

**Hook:** Well, the kids learned despite the system. I have a very vivid memory of reading "Chicken Little" without turning a page of the book. I had heard it so often that I knew it by heart. Maybe my brother or sister taught me. But I don't remember that we were ever taught how to read in the classroom. We were taught how to spell with flashcards. There were periodic tests. A great deal of emphasis was placed on handwriting and on being legible. Punishment often consisted of being required to write 100 times or 500 times, "I shall not talk to my neighbor" or "I will try to be punctual in the future." Those were the kinds of peripheral annoyances we endured. Our central impression was that schooling was a disciplinary experience we had to survive to become properly grown up.

Recess was enjoyable. The best of times took place

when the teacher left the room. Then bedlam broke loose. But as soon as the teacher re-entered, we all scurried to our seats and were very well behaved little gentlemen. I think the students learned, but they learned only the minimal things necessary to get promoted to the next grade.

I recall when I went to elementary school that we discussed whether the earth was round or not. We were given reasons to believe that the earth was round. One of the reasons was that you could circumnavigate the world—when you went in one direction you came back to your starting point. Well, I recalled watching an ant crawl around a cube of sugar; it too returned to its starting point. So I pointed out to the teacher that if the world had any shape, you could still get around it.

My question was not received in a very positive spirit nor used as a vehicle to greater understanding. The teacher made me feel I was a smart aleck.

**Main:** *What do you make of today's "back to basics" movement?*

**Hook:** I welcome the so-called "back to basics" movement if it draws attention to the importance of basic subject matter, which has been neglected recently. But if the back-to-basics supporters imagine that our important educational and social problems will be solved if only we emphasize the mechanics of reading, writing, and arithmetic—as these were taught in the "good old times"—I believe they are mistaken.

There must be attention to the subject matter, but there must also be recognition of the key role of the teacher. At no time can we lose sight of the fact that we are teaching not only subjects but children. Our primary end in education is to stimulate the intellectual and emotional growth of our students so they acquire the power to learn and grow from the experiences they will encounter after their formal schooling has ended.

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***Those who want to return to the educational system of the 19th century . . . overlook the complexity of our society and the diversity of today's students.***

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Those who want to return to the educational system of the 19th century—which consisted mostly of rote drill—overlook the complexity of our society and the diversity of today's students. It's largely through the school system that these students must absorb a sense of community and a democratic ethos.

**Main:** *Tell us very briefly, what were Dewey's principles of progressive education?*



**Hook:** Dewey's principles of progressive education can be summarized very simply in four propositions. The first is a concern for the educational development of every child in the class—not merely the bright ones who have their hands up even before the question is asked. It is always easy for the teacher to call on the quick ones and ignore the rest. But Dewey said you should treat every child as if he were your own.

Secondly, Dewey maintained that learning was a psychological process and that it was possible to determine on scientific grounds which methods were most effective in conveying what had to be learned and in instilling the intellectual habits helpful to recognizing and solving problems.

Thirdly, Dewey maintained that successful learning depends upon arousing the interest of the child in the subject matter. That's why, from Dewey's point of view, the function of the teacher was so important: He could present the material in a way that would engage the interest of the student. The student would then become self-motivated, creating a point of departure for developing other areas of interest.

Fourth, Dewey felt teachers should organize the classroom in a way that promoted a sense of democratic citizenship and not just mere competition among students—although he had no objection to competition in its proper place, such as in spelling bees or athletics.

**Main:** *When you began teaching, did you apply Dewey's methodology?*

**Hook:** I began to teach imbued with the ideas of progressive education and I tried to apply them in the Williamsburg slums in which I first taught.

**Main:** *Did those ideas work in the classroom?*

**Hook:** Well, yes, within narrow limits. I'm not sure that my experience can be taken as a guide.

**Main:** *Tell us about your experiences as a teacher.*

**Hook:** My first class was in Public School 43, in the spring of 1923. I still recall the principal, Mary McQuirk, saying to me when she assigned a special class of students to me, "We don't care very much what you teach them, so long as you keep them quiet."

**Main:** *She didn't even say: "As long as you teach them something"—the goal was just to keep them quiet?*

**Hook:** Yes, that's right. The students had been considered disciplinary problems. They were in something called the school Opportunity Class—a name devised to disguise the fact that they were regarded as somewhat retarded. But I think they were just slow and uninterested, just waiting for their working papers so they could leave school for the world of work. They were tough and burly compared to the other students. For those days they were a tough lot, but they had only cigarettes and knives, no drugs or guns. My challenge was to motivate them to acquire knowledge even though they could not at first see its importance.

**Main:** *How did you do that?*

**Hook:** I must confess that I used my judgment and disregarded the syllabus that instructed me to teach them certain things at a certain time in a certain way. I introduced every topic by imaginatively tapping into their experience, often using stories.

It is amazing how you can get the interest of students if you use color and imagination. For example, they were all crazy about baseball. I taught them how to calculate batting averages, and they learned percentages. I taught them American geography by showing them where their favorite teams came from and teaching them some history of the regions. They learned fast. I was supposed to teach them about South America, but I am afraid I really didn't.

I still remember that they didn't understand what latitude and longitude were. I said, "Suppose you were to take a boat and go far past the city's harbor. How would you know where you were? If you were lost, how would you find yourself with no streets and no avenues?" Then they understood that latitude and longitude were extensions of the idea of streets and avenues, and we would go on from there.

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But you can't make everything fun. Learning arithmetic requires drill, and that's not always fun. Then you had to somehow make the students feel that their sweat was for a worthwhile ultimate goal. With baseball or basketball, they could see that practice and sweat were necessary to become first rate. Some drill is unavoidable; the trick is to get the student to recognize its necessity.

**Main:** *You said that sometimes you disregarded the required curriculum—whether it was about South America or something else. If you thought the class was interested in something else, you taught them about that. Does this imply that teachers need greater autonomy in their teaching?*

**Hook:** There are limits, of course. We don't want teachers to choose their subject matter based on their own interests—or we could have teachers teaching all about, say, cathedrals in Europe, and not about anything else. There has to be a skeleton, a structure, a body of knowledge that you expect students to know and teachers to cover. But there also has to be encouragement of, and room for, improvisation, especially in devising approaches that will engage student interest.

**Main:** *I've heard it said that Dewey believed teachers should be passive, that they should let nature take its course.*

**Hook:** By no means! Even when a teacher does not



intervene in the learning process, that is a result of a conscious decision. The teacher should be active all the time. Sometimes he will not do the talking but will encourage the students to talk. Or sometimes he won't answer a question; he'll reply with a different question—because he wants the student to figure out the answer. The idea that the teacher should not participate actively in the teaching process is a perversion of the legitimate position that the teacher should not *dominate* the educational process by lecturing to the students or dictating the answers.

I still recall the days when the alleged followers of Dewey said the teacher shouldn't interfere while a child was working, that the teacher should wait for the child to come to him—in effect, that the teacher had no role. That's nonsense, and it's a misinterpretation of Dewey. The teacher has to be aware all the time, and that's why teaching is a more trying process than most non-teachers realize. Many teachers are exhausted by the end of the week because of the drain on their nervous energy.

I think in the pre-progressive days the creative role of the teacher had been neglected. I understand Dewey to have said that creativity is terribly important because the teacher must empathize with not only the quick learner but with the slow one. This involves foresight and a superior type of person.

Further, it is important for the teacher to remember that in order to develop the personality of students he has to teach them *something*; he has to teach them subject matter. It is not enough, you see, to make things interesting. Some people have misguidedly interpreted Dewey as saying the educational process should be one in which students are enjoying themselves all the time. Dewey didn't mean that. What he meant was that students could find some enjoyment in learning, and it was the teacher's responsibility to find those methods and approaches that would make that possible.

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There have also been simple and vulgar misinterpretations of Dewey's dictum that we learn by doing. He meant that if you want to have factual knowledge, then at some point you have to perform something like an experiment to test your belief. But some people interpreted this to mean that all doing is a form of learning, which is absurd. You can do busy work and learn nothing at all.

**Main:** *Now that we are talking about the role of the teacher, let me ask about teacher preparation. According to the principles of progressive education, how ought a teacher be prepared to teach? What does he or she have to learn?*

**Hook:** That's a subject on which there are differences among educators who profess to follow Dewey. I can only speak for myself here, not with the authority of Dewey.

In preparing teachers for any subject, practice cannot be emphasized too much. I have met people who have gone from a teacher's college into a classroom and yet don't know how to get the attention of a class, don't know how to treat the potential trouble maker in the class, don't even know how to prepare a lesson plan. Most people who teach in universities, for example, have never taken a course in teaching. Some of the worst teaching takes place on the university level, because the assumption there is that anybody who knows something can teach it. This is a profound error.

Teaching is an art but one that can be learned and improved. Therefore, I would stress the practical aspects of teaching and have student teachers train under the supervision of experienced teachers.

It doesn't follow that if you studied psychological theories of learning that you will know how to improve the learning capacity of a child. To do that you must observe a master teacher in operation and you must take over a class yourself and have your teaching subjected to evaluation by sympathetic people who are there not merely to point out your errors but to help you succeed in your educational mission. Also, the rewards of teaching are not commensurate with rewards in other fields. Dedication is not enough to get people to give up a rewarding post elsewhere for a triumph in a difficult ghetto school. But it may not be feasible to pay enough to recruit the required number of people of high caliber. If I were to set out to reform the educational system today, I would try to recruit a core of highly qualified and dedicated people who otherwise would go into professions more prestigious than teaching.

**Main:** *Progressive education is sometimes blamed for some of the problems our public schools have had. What do you make of that charge?*

**Hook:** Dewey's ideas of progressive education were never implemented in the public school system, but they were implemented in certain private experimental schools. Some of those schools fell under the influence of extremists who interpreted Dewey's philosophy of education as if it were completely child centered and encouraged the child to express himself in sort of a Rousseauistic way. Whatever the child was interested in was legitimate, and there were no "bad" interests.

Further, these schools were hyper-individualistic, even though the teachers preached a lot about social responsibility. To be fair, the schools tried to organize themselves democratically, so at least the student's individual desires were subject to some outside force—mainly the opinion of their classmates. But still, the teacher was not regarded as having more authority than the students. Further, they overlooked the obvious fact that in some disciplines you have to have drill, for example in foreign language and with multiplication tables.

*(Continued on page 42)*



# HOW FIVE (PARTLY TRUE) MYTHS CAN HELP TEACHERS TEACH ABOUT THE CONSTITUTION



ILLUSTRATED BY PETER ALSBERG

BY DAVID NICHOLS

**D**URING A casual conversation with a student who had taken several of my undergraduate courses in American politics, the student asked, to my dismay—which came first, the Declaration of Independence or “that other one.” The other one she was referring to was, of course, the U.S. Constitution. Most Americans know of the Constitution’s existence (and on good days they can even remember its name), but beyond that, not a lot is generally known. As we approach the 200th anniversary of that “other document,” it’s worth thinking again

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about how we can help our students better understand it.

One way to teach about the Constitution is to begin with the popular mythology that has grown up around the document. In referring to these popular beliefs as “myths,” I do not mean they are totally false; myths have always pointed to at least a partial truth. For example, one would be hard pressed to find an actual wound from Cupid’s arrow, and one would not want to rely solely on the myth of Cupid as a guide to love and marriage. But the story of the blind archer may provide a better beginning point for the study of love than more scientifically rigorous approaches.

If we assume that myths provide explanations or answers, we will be disappointed; but if we can use myths as a beginning point, to provide questions that provoke debate, we may be able to lead students down



the road to a deeper understanding of the subject at hand. Below are five myths I've been able to put to good use.

**B**EFORE TURNING to the Constitution, however, we must first confront the most pervasive myth about American government: that its foundation is found in the Declaration of Independence.

Americans remember the Declaration because it proclaims their independence and freedom and rejects tyrannical government. Virtually every American, regardless of party or ideology, accepts this notion that freedom—understood in the terms of rights—is the legitimate end of our government. While the definition of freedom may differ from one part of the ideological spectrum to another, the language of freedom and rights remains constant. The Declaration is popular because it declares our freedom. The problem is: The Declaration does not establish a government. In fact, the Declaration's emphasis on the abuse of political power reflects a certain suspicion of government. From liberal fears of the military-industrial complex and invasions of the right to privacy to conservative fears of a large national government's interference in the economy and in local politics, there remains, among most Americans, a common distrust of political power.

On one level we know that government is necessary to protect our freedom. On another, we fear that government inevitably conflicts with our freedom. It is this fear, I believe, that leads to the neglect and distortion of the Constitution—and to the contemporary mythology surrounding it.

### **Myth 1: The heart of the Constitution is the Bill of Rights.**

Ask the man on the street or the student in the classroom to tell you something about the Constitution, and you will likely hear about freedom of speech, freedom of religion, or even the right to bear arms. Insofar as the Constitution is present on the surface of the American consciousness, it is there as a statement of the limits of government power as expressed in the first 10 amendments. Usually forgotten, if ever it was known, is that the Bill of Rights was not a part of the original Constitution. It was added after ratification in order to address criticisms made by the anti-Federalists who opposed ratification.

The original Constitution established the structure of government and went no further; most of the framers thought the proper structuring of government would render a Bill of Rights superfluous. Since then, the Bill of Rights has come to play an important role in American political life, but students should know that it was, at least in some sense, for some people, an afterthought.

The contemporary emphasis on the Bill of Rights exemplifies our skepticism toward the Constitution. The Bill of Rights is meant to restrain government, while the body of the Constitution empowers it. Let's not forget that while the Constitution may in fact limit government power, the driving force behind its creation was the need for *greater* government power. The *Articles of Confederation* had failed because enforcement of Congressional decisions depended on the good will

of the states. Such a system was truly consistent with the fear of government power, but it proved unworkable. The Articles provided no protection against foreign enemies, disputes among the states, or the factions that arose across state lines. Under the *Articles of Confederation*, America had "that government that governs least." But it became increasingly obvious that under such a government no one's rights would long be secure.

How much government, how it should be structured, what kind of limits should be placed on its powers—these questions were all debated at the Constitutional Convention. And they still need to be debated today; students need to consider the tension between needing a government to preserve liberty and wanting to preserve liberty by limiting government.

### **Myth 2: The Constitution was created by reactionary commercial interests in order to maintain the status quo.**

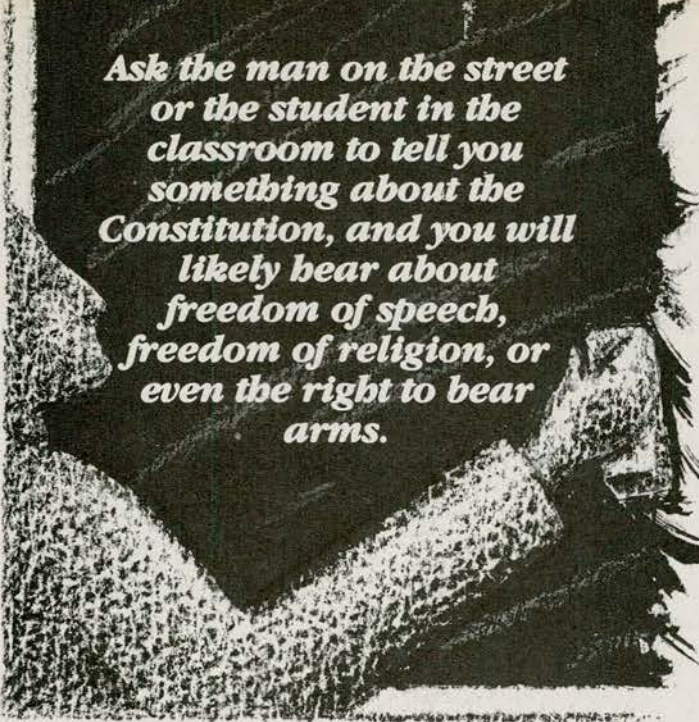
Some have understood the Constitution as an empowering document, but they have questioned the motives of the men who created a powerful constitutional government. Since the turn of the century, progressive historians such as Charles Beard have cast the founders as wealthy merchants who feared the democratic attitudes unleashed by the Revolution. According to this view, the Constitution rejected the principles of democracy that animated the revolution.

This myth persists even though later historians have undermined its central thesis. Although the major supporters of the Constitution were wealthier and of higher social status than the average American, the same was true of the Constitution's leading opponents. Neither support for, nor opposition to, the Constitution can be explained strictly in terms of economic interests. As is true today, opinion leaders at both ends of the political spectrum were drawn from the wealthier members of society.

Why has this myth persisted in the face of such contrary evidence? Because it seems logical that society's wealthier members have a greater stake in political stability than do its poorer ones. Wealthier citizens simply have more to lose from instability. But missing from this argument is the equally compelling logic that, without strong government, the power of wealth to oppress the poor goes unchecked.

Government can become a tool of wealthy interests, but students should recognize that, for at least two reasons, the interests of the wealthy may not be homogeneous. First, economic interests alone do not determine political opinions: The film careers of Ronald Reagan and Jane Fonda have led to vastly different political opinions. Second, in determining economic or political interests, different kinds of wealth may be as important, or more important, than different amounts of wealth. The framers believed that a nation stretching across such diverse regions, and enfranchising such a socially and economically diverse group of citizens, would create a variety of opinions and interests so great that no permanent tyrannical majority could form. As James Madison explained during the ratification debates, coalitions would be constantly forming and constantly





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changing, depending upon the particular issue at hand. No single majority of individuals would be able to agree on everything over the long term. The diversity of interests was presumed to provide an important support for freedom.

The question that legitimately arises out of Myth 2 is the extent to which the Constitution does protect the established interests of the wealthy and the extent to which it protects the exercise of individual rights by the rich, the poor, and the middle class.

### **Myth 3: The structure of the Constitution is antidemocratic.**

According to this view, the Revolution and the Declaration of Independence supported true democracy; the Constitution pulled the nation away from it. Many of the governmental structures, it is said, were designed to thwart rather than express the will of the people. The House of Representatives, the most democratic branch, would now be checked by the Senate, which would be elected not by the people but by the state legislatures. Both houses were to be checked by the president, who was to be elected by a special electoral college. Finally there was the Supreme Court, chosen for life by the president and subject to no form of electoral accountability.

Were these qualifications of direct democracy really designed to thwart majority will? Let us take the most frequently cited example, the electoral college. Why do we have an electoral college? Every student and every teacher knows the standard answer: the framers of the Constitution thought the people too stupid or ill informed to make a wise presidential choice. To support this claim, we are often treated to quotations from Convention delegates such as George Mason, who said: "It would be as unnatural to refer the choice of a proper character for chief Magistrate to the people, as it would be to refer a trial of colours to a blind man."

It is true that some Convention delegates echoed Mason's distrust of popular selection. But what most

commentators neglect to mention is that the four delegates (and there were only four) who expressed such distrust *did not* support the electoral college. Roger Sherman, George Mason, and Charles Pinckney believed the president should be elected by the legislature, and Elbridge Gerry and Mason rejected the Constitution entirely. The electoral college was the brain child of those who spoke *in favor* of popular selection. But if they favored popular choice, why didn't they favor a direct popular election? Answer: Because there were practical and political problems. First, the electoral college allowed for compromise between the small states and large states. With the electoral college, the grand compromise that allocated House seats on the basis of population and Senate seats equally to all states could be carried over to the presidency. Second, as Madison (an ardent supporter of both popular election and the electoral college) explained, the different election laws in the different states made a simple direct election difficult; to have tried to reconcile those differences at the Constitutional Convention would have proved fruitless. Finally, some delegates probably did support the electoral college in the belief that it would prevent direct popular election. But history has proven them wrong; as Gouverneur Morris accurately prophesied, the electoral college has given rise to an essentially popular national election.

**A**LL OF this may be of mild historical interest, but why should students, or any one else for that matter, be interested in this issue today? Much of the impetus for 20th century political reform—for example, the move toward primaries and away from caucuses in nominating a president—grows out of a desire to overcome the impediments institutional structures place in the way of pure democracy. To argue that the founders sought to create a democratic selection system or that it has proved to be democratic in operation does not settle the question of how direct or how simple our democratic methods of selection should be today. But by recovering these arguments, students can see that creating a democratic government may be more complicated than they originally thought it to be; the goals of democratic participation and majority rule do not, unfortunately, translate automatically into workable institutional arrangements.

### **Myth 4: The Constitution sanctioned the worst kind of tyranny—slavery.**

According to no less a Constitutional expert than Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, the Constitution was a racist document that condoned slavery. Marshall questions whether Americans, particularly black Americans, should be willing to celebrate such a document.

Marshall is of course referring to the fact that the Constitution supported the fugitive slave laws, allowed the importation of slaves for 20 years after ratification, and counted each slave as three fifths of a person. Marshall follows in the tradition of another great American, the young abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass, who complained that "I had rather that my right hand should wither by my side than cast a ballot under



the Constitution of the United States." The Constitution, he claimed, was a "most foul and bloody conspiracy" against the rights of slaves.

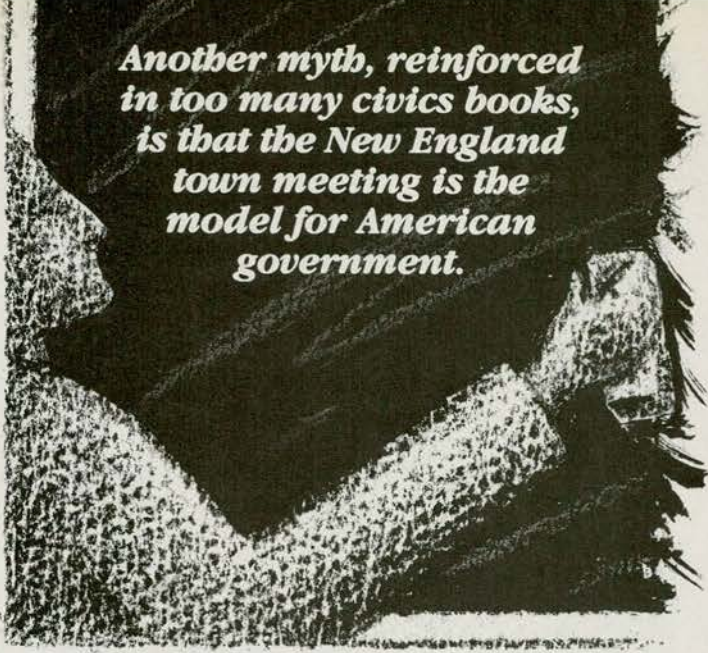
Unlike Marshall, though, Douglass changed his mind and in later years referred to the Constitution as that document in which slaves would learn their rights. What accounted for his change of heart? Perhaps it was recognition that the Constitution's support of slavery is anything but clear-cut. In the most thorough treatment of the subject to date, political scientist Herbert Storing demonstrates just how ambiguous the Constitutional supports for slavery are.<sup>1</sup> He explains that the three-fifths compromise did not have the same pejorative connotations in the mind of the framers as it has today. The three-fifths compromise did not express the delegates' common belief that slaves possessed only three-fifths of the humanity of whites. (In fact, neither here nor anywhere else in the Constitution is the word "slave" ever used.) It was, ironically, the slave holders who wanted slaves counted as whole persons; if slaves were counted as full persons, the population and therefore the political power of their states in the House of Representatives and the electoral college would be increased. It was leaders of the free states who argued that slaves should not be counted for purposes of representation; after all, their Southern owners refused to extend them the privileges of citizenship. The three-fifths compromise—far from being an endorsement of slavery—was a compromise on the issue of Southern representation.

**T**HE NONIMPORTATION clause of the Constitution should be understood in similar terms. Article 1 section 9 says that the importation of slaves into the United States "shall not be prohibited by Congress prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight." This provision permitted slave holders to import slaves until the designated date, but, in not using the word "slave," it did not defend the legitimacy of the practice. The non-importation clause was included in the Constitution in order to gain the support of Southerners for a government that all—Northerners and Southerners alike—knew would prohibit the importation of slaves at the earliest possible date.

The final provision supporting the fugitive slave laws is not so easily defended. Its purpose was without question to aid slaveholders. Nevertheless, two points should be noted. First, the clause neither uses the word "slave" nor suggests the legitimacy or justice of the slave holders' claim; by all accounts, both omissions were by Northern design. Second, and more important, this provision, like the others, should be understood as a compromise, a compromise that allowed the Constitution to be ratified. Frederick Douglass said it best:

I hold that the Federal Government was never, in its essence, anything but an anti-slavery government. Abolish slavery tomorrow, and not a sentence or a syllable of the Constitution need be altered. It was purposely so framed as to give no claim, no sanction to the claim, of property in

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Storing: *Slavery and the Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, in Robert H. Horowitz (ed.), *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*, Charlottesville, VA, University of Virginia Press, 1977.



**Another myth, reinforced in too many civics books, is that the New England town meeting is the model for American government.**

man. If in its origin slavery had any relation to the government, it was only as the scaffolding to the magnificent structure, to be removed as soon as the building was completed.

Douglass clearly thought the scaffolding should be removed, but he had come to see the need for the scaffolding if the Constitution that was later to protect blacks was ever to be erected.

Would it have been better not to have compromised with slavery and prevented the union from being constituted? Did the Constitution as a whole do more to undermine slavery, as Douglass suggests, or are its supports for slavery more significant, as Marshall seemed to suggest? When is compromise legitimate and when is it immoral? Simple answers only obscure the complexity of the important questions that Douglass and Marshall have put to us.

### **Myth 5: Under the Constitution, the legislature is supreme.**

Another myth, reinforced in too many civics books, is that the New England town meeting is the model for American government. Though we gave up the town meeting long ago — a necessary concession to our growing and spreading population — we tend, nonetheless, to understand our constitutional system in those terms. According to this town-meeting model, instead of holding a national town meeting, we send representatives to the legislature to pass laws in our name. The actions of government gain legitimacy through — and only through — the sanction of law; the president, other members of the executive branch, and the courts are mere servants of the law and of the legislature that creates it.

But our constitutional structure is not that simple. The Framers neither believed in, nor created a government structure reflecting, the idea that all government actions must be ordained by law (and therefore by the legislature). One of the chief criticisms of the *Articles of Confederation* had been that it failed to provide either an independent executive or an independent judiciary: without an independent executive, no clear line of



responsibility for government action was possible; without an independent judiciary, the rights of individuals could not adequately be protected. The lack of independent branches rendered the Confederation incompetent to the tasks of government.

There has been grudging recognition of the need for an independent executive and judiciary. From James Madison's Helvidius letters to the recent War Powers Act, even members of Congress have granted the president the right to respond to attacks without prior congressional authorization. And even some of the most vociferous critics of an active judiciary have been willing to admit the legitimacy of judicial review in some cases. But even the ordinary exercise of executive and judicial power requires a degree of discretion for which no law can provide. If the Congress tried to write legislation so specific that discretion was unnecessary, it would so constrain the executive and the judiciary that effective government would be impossible.

Yet, periodically, the Congress tries to do exactly this. Take, for example, what happened at the end of the Vietnam War. On July 1, 1973, Congress — intending to eliminate all executive discretion in the use of troops in Southeast Asia — adopted an amendment that denied the president funding for further combat activities in the area. But by April 1975, the legislation's restrictiveness was called into question.

With the fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia imminent, President Ford wanted to use U.S. troops to evacuate U.S. nationals and refugees. On April 10 he asked Congress to "clarify the 1975 restrictions." Congress did not act immediately. Two days later, with the Khmer Rouge on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, Ford directed the military to proceed with the evacuation of Cambodia — in apparent violation of congressional statute. On April 29, 1975, still awaiting congressional action, Ford ordered the evacuation of Saigon. Four soldiers were killed in the operation and later the same day South Vietnam surrendered.

Even after the fact, Congress refused to sanction Ford's actions, although virtually no one thought the actions inappropriate. Ford had been able to act only because he held a different view of presidential authority than that implied in the congressional legislation. Ford assumed that his office allowed him the discretion to act without congressional authorization, even — in extraordinary circumstances — in opposition to

existing legislation.

Ford's view was derived from the fact that the legislature does not establish the presidency or choose the president. The presidency is established by the Constitution and the president is chosen by the people. If the president were to have been a mere creature of the legislature, then Roger Sherman's arguments at the Constitutional Convention would have prevailed: Fearing excessive executive power, Sherman argued against establishing a unitary executive. He claimed the legislature should be free to establish however many executives it thought was necessary, because the executive was to serve merely as a tool of the legislature. But no other delegate agreed with Sherman's formulation. Rather, all agreed on the need for an executive who would be independent of the legislature (though one who would exercise his authority within the Constitution's parameters).

Americans are willing, in practice, to accept broad discretionary actions on the part of both the executive and judiciary. But they are not so comfortable with discretion in theory, being reluctant to admit that anyone has the right to exercise discretionary authority over their actions. Americans believe that only self-government is legitimate. But if self-government were possible, no government would be necessary.

The Constitution does establish a limited government, but it does not eliminate discretionary authority. We have a government of laws, but we also have a government of men. Legislatures do not merely convey popular opinion when they write the laws, the president does not mechanically follow the directions of the legislature when he executes his office, and the courts must interpret, as well as apply, the laws.

Clearly, the president and the courts do not have the right to ignore the law at their pleasure. Just as clearly, though, both branches must sometimes act without specific legal mandate, and in extraordinary cases — as in the example above — they may even act in opposition to a specific law. If students accept the town-meeting myth of self-government through legislature supremacy, they will never be able to grapple with the real question of just how much power and discretion the branches of government should exercise vis-à-vis one another or vis-à-vis the people.

**F**REEDOM IS the end of American constitutional government, but freedom is not possible without effective government. The tensions between these two ideas have always animated our political system. After the Revolution, Americans opted for the nongovernment of the *Articles of Confederation* and soon found their freedom endangered. The creation of the Constitution marked the recovery of a balance between empowering government and limiting its power, a balance that promotes the exercise of individual rights.

The bicentennial of the Constitution should mark the recovery of the dialogue in which both the virtues and the dangers of government power are recognized. Neither blind adoration nor untutored skepticism is a substitute for the critical study of the Constitution. It is the job of the high school teacher to help students understand the tensions that led to the creation of the American Constitution. □

#### RECOMMENDED READINGS FOR TEACHERS

*These books provide more background on the issues that were debated at the Constitutional Convention.*

Martin Diamond: *The Founding of the Democratic Republic*. Itasca, IL, Peacock Publishers, 1981.

Herbert Storing: *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Robert H. Horowitz (ed.): *The Moral Foundations of the American Republic*. Charlottesville, VA, University of Virginia Press, 1977.



# SUCCESS IN EAST HARLEM

## *How One Group of Teachers Built a School That Works*

BY DEBORAH MEIER

**I**N THE spring of 1991, Central Park East will graduate its first high school students. Some of them will have been with us since they were 4 years old. From age 4 to age 18, they will have attended a school—located in East Harlem in the midst of New York City's District 4—that many observers believe is as good as any school in the public or the private sector. A progressive school in the tradition of so many of New York's independent private schools, Central Park East is now firmly fixed within New York's school bureaucracy.

But it wasn't always so. We have had our share of luck, and we owe a great deal to many different people over the years. We know, too, that our success depended on the success of a districtwide effort to create a whole network of alternative schools. We are, in fact, just one of nearly 30 "options" that are available to families in District 4, aside from the regular neighborhood-zoned elementary schools.

In the fall of 1974 Anthony Alvarado, the new superintendent of District 4, initiated just two such alternatives: our elementary school and a middle school, the East Harlem School for the Performing Arts. Each year thereafter the district supported the launching of several more alternative schools—generally at the junior high level. These schools were rarely the result of a central plan from the district office, but rather tended to be the brainchildren of particular individuals or groups of teachers. They were initiated by the people who planned to teach in them.

It was the district's task to make such dreams come true. The details differed in each case. Most of these schools were designed around curricular themes—sci-

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*Deborah Meier is the principal and one of the founders of Central Park East School in New York City. She was recently awarded a "Genius Grant" from the MacArthur Foundation in honor of her work in education. This article was adapted with permission from the June 1987 issue of Phi Delta Kappan.*

ence, environmental studies, performing arts, marine biology. But they also reflected a style of pedagogy that suited their founders. They were always small, and, for the most part, staff members volunteered for duty in them. Finally, when the alternative schools outnumbered the "regulars," Alvarado announced that henceforth all junior high schools would be schools of "choice." By 1980 all sixth graders in the district chose where they would go for seventh grade. No junior high had a captive population.

On the elementary school level, neighborhood schools remain the norm, though the district handles zoning rather permissively. The only schools of choice on the elementary level are the Central Park East Schools, the East Harlem Block School (founded in the 1960s as a nonpublic, parent-run "free" school), and a network of bilingual elementary schools.

Today, Central Park East is, in fact, not one school but a network of four schools: Central Park East I, Central Park East II, and River East are elementary schools that feed into Central Park East Secondary School, which enrolls students from grades 7 through 12 and is affiliated with Theodore Sizer's\* Coalition of Essential Schools.

The Central Park East schools were founded in 1974, during a time of great educational grief in New York City—just before the schools were forced to lay off more than 15,000 teachers and close elementary school libraries and at a time when the spirit of hope was crushed out of the parent movement and out of the struggles for decentralization, for teacher power, and for structural change. Progressive educators suffered particularly, both because people began to claim that "openness" was "through" (and discredited) and because many of the young teachers and programs that had carried the progressive message were hardest hit by the layoffs.

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\*Theodore Sizer is the author of *Horace's Compromise* and the founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools.







**I**N THE spring of 1974, when Alvarado invited me to build a school in one wing of P.S. 171, it seemed a most unlikely offer. School District 4 served a dismal, bitterly torn, largely Hispanic community. Still, I accepted. Who could refuse such an offer? After struggling for years to make my beliefs "fit" into a system that was organized on quite different principles, after spending considerable energy looking for cracks, operating on the margins, "compromising" at every turn, the prospect that the district bureaucracy would organize itself to support alternative ideas and practices was irresistible. I was being offered a chance to focus not on bureaucratic red tape, but on the intractable issues of education—the ones that really excited me and many of the teachers I knew.

But this was not a time for having large visions, and I didn't want to be disappointed. I met with Alvarado, began to collect some experienced teachers to help launch our effort, and gradually began to believe that he meant what he said. He offered to let us build a school just the way we wanted. The total allocation of funds (per-pupil costs) would have to be comparable to what was spent on any other school, and our teachers would have to meet the usual requirements of the city, the state, and the union contract. Nor could we be exempt from any city or state regulations. Beyond that, however, the district would support us in doing things our own way.

We began very small and very carefully. First there was the question of "we." Creating a democratic community was both an operational and an inspirational goal. While we were in part the products of what was called "open" education, our roots went back to early progressive traditions, with their focus on the building of a democratic community, on education for full citizenship and for egalitarian ideals. We looked upon Dewey, perhaps more than Piaget, as our mentor.

Virtually all of us had been educated in part at City College's Workshop Center under Lillian Weber. We came out of a tradition that was increasingly uneasy about the strictly individualistic focus of much of what was being called "open."

We were also unhappy about the focus on skills rather than content in many of the "modern," innovative schools—even those that did not embrace the "back-to-basics" philosophy. Many "open" classrooms had themselves fallen prey to the contemporary mode of breaking everything down into discrete bits and pieces—skills—that children could acquire at their own pace and in their own style. In contrast, we were looking for a way to build a school that could offer youngsters a deep and rich curriculum that would inspire them with the desire to know; that would cause them to fall in love with books and with stories of the past; that would evoke in them a sense of wonder at how much there is to learn. Building such a school required strong and interesting adult models—at home and at school—who could exercise their own curiosity and judgment.

We also saw schools as models of the possibilities of democratic life. Although classroom life could certainly be made more democratic than traditional schools allowed, we saw it as equally important that the school life of *adults* be made more democratic. It seemed

*I was being offered a chance to focus not on bureaucratic red tape, but on the intractable issues of education — the ones that really excited me and many of the teachers I knew.*





unlikely that we could foster democratic values in our classrooms unless the adults in the school also had significant rights over their workplace.

We knew that we were tackling many difficult issues at once. Because of political considerations, planning time was insufficient, but the district tried to make up for this by being extra supportive. Looking back, we were so euphoric that we had the energy of twice our numbers.

We purposely started our school with fewer than a hundred students—in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade only. At the superintendent's request, we recruited outside of the usual district channels, in part so that we wouldn't threaten other schools in the district and in part because one of Alvarado's goals was to increase the pupil population of the district and thus guard against school closings.

ONE OF our primary reasons for starting the school—although we didn't often say it—was our personal desire for greater autonomy as teachers. We spoke a lot about democracy, but we were also just plain

sick and tired of having to negotiate with others, worry about rules and regulations, and so on. We all came together with our own visions—some collective and some individual—of what teaching could be like if only we had control. Ours was to be a teacher-run school. We believed that parents should have a voice in their children's schooling, and we thought that "choice" itself was a form of power. We also believed that we could be professionally responsive to parents and that, since the school would be open to parents at all times and the staff would be receptive, there would be plenty of opportunity to demonstrate our responsiveness.

Good early childhood education, we believed, required collaboration between the school and the family. This was a matter not only of political principle but also of educational principle, and it motivated us from the start to work hard to build a family-oriented school. We wanted a school in which children could feel safe. Intellectual risk-taking requires safety, and children who are suspicious of a school's agenda cannot work up to their potential. To create a safe school, we needed to

## WHAT THEY DO AND HOW THEY DO IT

AS TEACHERS at Central Park East overhauled and rebuilt the traditional school structure, they kept one key aim in mind: to give teachers time to get to know each student and time to tailor the instructional program for each individual. Here are some examples of what they've done:

### Time for Students

■ To get the student load way down, all professional staff—including the librarian and the director—teach. Aside from one director, there are no supervisors.

■ The high school is organized into Houses of 80 students, each with a faculty of four. The basic class is 20 students and the student load per teacher is never more than 80. If the teacher teaches two disciplines instead of one, the load is just 40.

■ To maximize the personal relationship between students and teachers, students stay with the same teacher (or teachers) two years in a row.

### Time for Teachers

■ Each fall the staff plans a series of semi-monthly faculty meetings. One year, every other faculty meeting considered various approaches to writing. Sometimes, at a teacher's request, one student's progress or

one teacher's curriculum is discussed.

■ Once a week, the staff of each House takes an 80-minute lunch and discusses the progress of individual students and the overall work of the House.

■ One morning a week, while students work in the community, teachers from each department can spend three uninterrupted hours designing, evaluating, and tinkering with the curriculum.

### The Curriculum

The curriculum is designed by those who teach it. Teachers can opt to hire consultants.

■ The seventh and eighth grade science sequence includes an interdisciplinary unit on "Light and Sight" that exposes students to both biology (optics) and physics (the properties of light).

■ The eighth grade humanities sequence focuses on "power"—who has it, who doesn't, and how different people have gotten it. The first semester focuses on the English, French, and American revolutions; the second, on nonrevolutionary change in America.

### Flexible Scheduling

Because the schedule is in the

hands of teachers, the time allotted the revolutions could be increased when it was discovered that at least one student still thought Boston was in London.

### Resources

Once a topic—such as the revolutions—has been chosen, all faculty haunt used-book shops to build a resource library on the subject. Teachers are thus not text-bound, but have access to a variety of materials—some of which will interest every student.

### Writing

Working in different settings with different "editors," students get plenty of practice with—and individual attention to—their writing. They write at least once a week in humanities and in a "writing workshop," plus four days a week in regularly reviewed journals.

### Parent Conferences

Twice a year, parents must come to the school, review a portfolio of their child's work, and meet with the teacher *and* the student to discuss the student's progress. With everybody in the same room together, parents won't hear one version of events from the student and another from the teacher.



have the confidence of parents, and children needed to know that their parents trusted us. It was that simple. Hard to create, perhaps, but essential.

**W**ESTUMBLED a lot in those early years. We fought among ourselves. We discovered that remaining committed to staff decision making was not easy. It was hard, too, to engage in arguments among ourselves without frightening parents and raising doubts about our professionalism. We were often exhausted—sometimes by things that mattered least to us.

By the end of the second year, I had made some crucial decisions regarding the organization and structure of Central Park East. These involved my leaving the classroom to become a somewhat more traditional principal. We have never entirely resolved the tensions over who makes which decisions and how. But the staff continues to play a central role in all decisions, big and small. Nothing is “undiscussable,” though we have learned not to discuss everything—at least not all the time. This has actually meant more time for discussing those issues that concern us most: how children learn, how our classes really work, what changes we ought to be making, and on what bases. We have also become better observers of our own practice, as well as more open and aware of alternative practices.

Today, we understand better the many, often trivial ways in which schools undermine family support systems, undercut children’s faith in their parents as educators, and erode parents’ willingness to assume their responsibilities as their children’s most important educators. We have become more supportive of parents whose “home instruction” differs from ours. We give less advice on such topics as how not to teach arithmetic or how to be a good parent.

**A**S WE became more secure with ourselves and our program, the district was expanding its network of alternative schools. In the fall of 1974 we were one of two. Within a half-dozen years there were about 15 “alternative concept” schools, mostly on the junior high level, where schooling had most glaringly broken down.

The district also dispensed with the assumption that one building equals one school. Instead, every building in the district was soon housing several distinct schools—each with its own leadership, parent body, curricular focus, organization, and philosophy. Most of the new junior highs were located in elementary school buildings. Former junior high buildings were gradually turned to multiple uses, as well. Sometimes three or more schools shared a single building. As a result, the schools were all small, and their staffs and parents were associated with them largely by choice.

By the late Seventies, Central Park East was so inundated with applicants that the district decided to start a small annex at P.S. 109, now known as Central Park East II. The district’s decision was probably also motivated by the availability of federal funds for the purpose of school integration. While Central Park East has always had a predominantly black (45%) and Hispanic (30%) student population, it is one of the few district schools that has also maintained a steady white population, as large as about 25%. (The population of District 4 is about 60% Hispanic, 35% black, and 5% white.)

In the beginning, this ratio came about largely by chance, but the 25% white population in the school has been maintained by choice. In general, the school has sought to maintain as much heterogeneity as possible, without having too many fixed rules and complex machinery. The school accepts all siblings, as part of its family orientation. After siblings, priority goes to neighborhood families. In other cases, the school tries to be nonselective, taking in most of its population at age five strictly on the basis of parental choice, with an eye to maintaining a balanced student body. Well over half of the students have always qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, and some 15% to 20% meet the state requirements for receiving special education funds.

The demand for spaces still far outstripped available seats, and, a few years later, the district decided to start a third elementary school. This one was named River East.

Thus by 1984 Central Park East had become three schools, each designed for about 250 students, each with its own individual style and character, yet united in basic ways. Then, in 1984, at the 10th anniversary celebration of our founding, Theodore Sizer congratulated the school for its impressive history and asked, “Why not a Central Park East secondary school?” Why not keep the good things going through the 12th grade?

We agreed. Our own study of our sixth-grade graduates persuaded us that starting a secondary school was a good idea. Some of our critics had said that a secure and supportive elementary school would not prepare students to cope with the “real world.” Our study of our graduates had proved them wrong. Regardless of race or social class, our graduates had handled the real world well. They had coped. The statistics we compiled amazed even us. Only one of our graduates, who were hardly an academic elite, had left school prior to earning a high school diploma. Furthermore, half of our graduates had gone on to college.

But our graduates had stories to tell. And their stories were not stories about being educated, but about survival. They told us stories that confirmed what Sizer had written about U.S. high schools in *Horace’s Compromise*. But the stories our graduates told us were generally far worse than those Sizer chronicled, since he was often describing wealthy or middle-class schools.

We began negotiations with the district and with the city. In the fall of 1985 we opened the doors to Central Park East Secondary School, which serves grades 7 through 12. We are now back where we began, starting something entirely new. However, the obstacles that block the path of reforming a high school are harder to budget than those that face elementary schools.

For instance, the idea that an “alternative” high school means a school for “difficult” kids is firmly entrenched in the tradition of New York City high schools, and the anxiety about preparing students for the “real world” is more pressing than in elementary schools. Moreover, the Regents exams, course requirements, college pressures, and the usual panic about dealing with adolescents and their problems combine to make the task even more complex—especially in light of New York’s recently adopted Regents Action Plan, which runs counter to everything we and the Coalition of Essential



***Like democratic societies,  
successful schools can't be  
guaranteed.***

Schools believe. With its increased number of required courses and standardized examinations and its greater specificity about course content, the Regents Action Plan leaves far less room for initiative and innovation at the school level. Another barrier is the dearth of experience with progressive education at the secondary school level. There is little for us to learn from and not much of a network of teachers or teacher education institutions that can provide us with support, ideas, and examples.

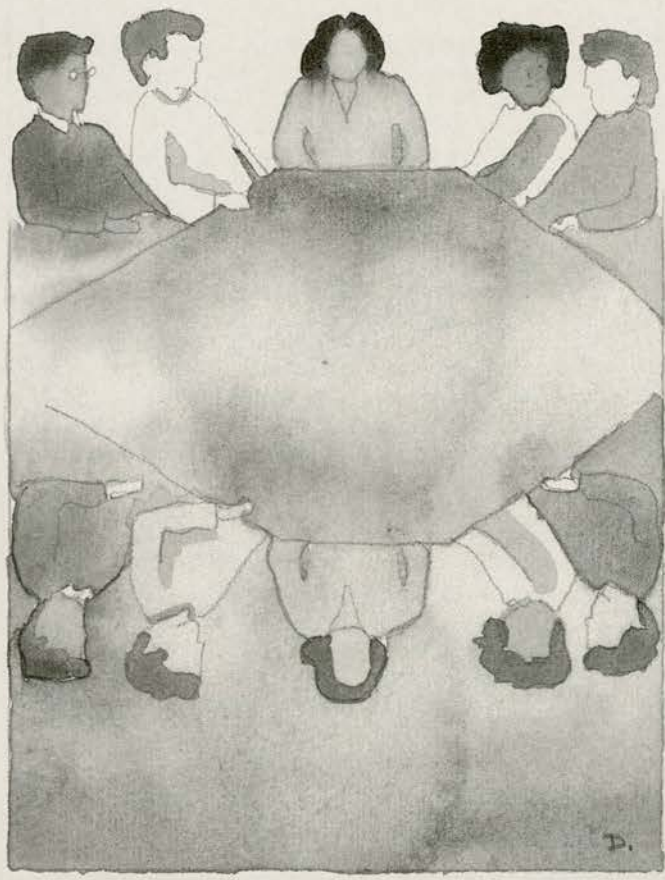
But we have a lot going for us, too. We have our three sister elementary schools to lean on and draw support from. We have the Coalition of Essential Schools and a growing national interest in doing something about the appalling quality of many public secondary schools. And, under its current superintendent, Carlos Medina, the district continues to support the idea of alternative "schools of choice" for all children, all parents, and all staff members. We have also been receiving invaluable support from the citywide high school division and the alternative high school superintendent, who oversees a disparate collection of small high schools throughout New York City.

And we are determined. New York City's high schools are clearly in a state of crisis. The dropout rate is appalling, the fate of many who do not drop out officially is equally devastating, and the decline in college attendance by black and Hispanic students is frightening. Perhaps the time has come for progressive education to tackle the high school again, to demonstrate that giving adolescents and their teachers greater responsibility for the development of educational models is the key ingredient.

The notion of respect, which lies at the heart of democratic practice, runs counter to almost everything in our current high schools. Today's urban high schools express disrespect for teachers and students in myriad ways—in the physical decay of the buildings, in their size, in the anonymity of their students, and in the lack of control over decisions by those who live and work in them.

Although the reasons for the recent national concern over high schools may have little to do with democracy, the current reform mood offers an important opening—if we can resist the desire for a new "one best way." We cannot achieve true reform by fiat. Giving wider choices and more power to those who are closest to the classroom are not the kinds of reforms that appeal to busy legislators, politicians, and central board officials. They cannot be mandated, only facilitated. Such reforms require fewer constraints, fewer rules—not more of them. They require watchfulness and continuous documenting and recording, not a whole slew of accountability schemes tied to a mandated list of measurable outcomes.

Do we have the collective will to take such risks? Only if we recognize that the other paths are actually far riskier and have long failed to lead us out of the woods. Like democratic societies, successful schools can't be guaranteed. The merits of letting schools try to be successful schools can't be guaranteed. The merits of letting schools try to be successful are significant. But allowing them to try requires boldness and patience—not a combination that is politically easy to sustain. □





## DEMOCRACY'S ROOTS

(Continued from page 23)

missing is the notion that God holds the individual responsible for the exercise of free will in moral choice. Jews and Christians both deny the fatalism common in the ancient world. Man the individual is responsible; he can act otherwise. His choice is not determined—or excused—by fate, mystery, environment, or collectivity. Absent from these texts, too, is the idea of individual creation of each soul in the spiritual image of God, which to believers is the compelling reason to accept the equality and dignity of every person on earth. Some of the texts touch upon the principle of equality but without reference to the religious source of its power.

In Judaism and Christianity, the fatalism of the ancient world is also defied by the doctrine of amelioration. The world is not to be accepted as it is. God imposes on Jew and Christian the duty to make it better, regardless of obstacles or excuses. Whatever the actual religious beliefs—and nonbeliefs, even antibeliefs—of Western peoples, they have ever since been marked by these ideas: the equality and dignity of all, the need for societies in which moral choice is freely possible, and the duty to struggle for just and decent communities. That religious leaders and believers in positions of power have, throughout history, often betrayed and suppressed such ideas may be regrettable (though, given the basic view of human nature, not surprising) but is beside the point. The egalitarian, individualistic, humanitarian, reformist, and striving ethic rooted in the Jewish and Christian faiths lives on. Coupled with the codes of personal behavior that the Judeo-Christian tradition shared with the pagan Greek and Roman philosophers—fortitude, self-restraint, self-examination, self-respect, and devotion to truth and reason—this ethic has sustained, and been sustained by, the best moments of liberal democracy in nations East and West.

If such commonplaces are absent from elementary texts, it is not surprising to find other important ideas missing as well. Among them is the peculiarly tense, restless nature of Western religion, which imposes countless, frequently competing charges on its followers. Jews and Christians, and those who have absorbed its moral imperatives without wholly retaining the faith, are enjoined to transform themselves but

### THE TEXTBOOKS REVIEWED

■ *Scott-Foresman's History and Life: The World and its People*, by Walter T. Wallbank, et al. (1982);

■ Holt, Rinehart & Winston's *People and Our World: A Study of World History*, by Allan O. Kownslar and Terry L. Smart (1981);

■ Prentice-Hall's *World History: Patterns of World Civilization*, by Burton F. Beers (1983);

■ Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich's *People and Nations: A World History*, by Anatole G. Mazour, John Peoples and Theodore K. Rabb (1983);

■ Ginn's *Our Common Heritage: A World History*, by Daniel Roselle (1984).

## Product Information Index

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also to transform society; to obey God's law always but also to render to Caesar all that is his; to suffer injustice but to defy unjust laws; to be humble but to show the light of righteousness; to seek truth through faith but also through reason; to aspire to the spiritual but also to use well the things of the earth and the flesh. The main stream of Western religion has not been otherworldly but, as Frost said, ever "risking spirit in substantiation." The results have not always been holy or edifying to look at. Religious warfare and persecution have been as cruel in the West as anywhere, in crusades, pogroms, inquisitions, massacres, and civil wars.

For textbooks to dwell a bit longer on Judaism and Christianity need not imply claims of superiority over

other world religions and need not suggest that others have not inspired admirable ideals of human conduct. Indeed, not a few Westerners have found spiritual comfort in other faiths less bound up with things of the earth. Moreover, the West has never been dominated by any single version of morality and values, except for a short time in the Middle Ages. Out of the legacy of ideas of Greece, Rome, Judaism, and Christianity, Westerners have grappled with multiple questions and questions—sometimes in turn, sometimes several at once. What is beautiful? What is true? What is just, orderly, or merely useful? What is holy? What will save me? What is the full human life? What is success, honor, love? Many historians, trying to account for the West's incessant change and dynamism—for better or worse—have fastened upon the restless, contradictory impulses rooted in its activist, eclectic religious heritage. In this sense, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (a good book for high school students) is a parable about the end of Western civilization: nobody is to ask any more questions or to seek anything but fun and comfort.

Admittedly, the history of ideas cannot bear close measurement. But in a world daily proving to us that ideas have power, textbook writers for high school students could well pay more attention to them—not only because they are important, but because they are more likely to engage students than any other sort of history. Not to explain the religious sources or moral ideas so critical to human rights and free societies is a major pedagogical and intellectual failure in these texts. □

## ORDERING INFORMATION

*Democracy's Untold Story: What World History Textbooks Neglect*, the full study from which this article was excerpted, is available in paperback from the AFT. *Democracy's Untold Story* includes chapters on "The Legacy of the Greeks," "The Middle Ages as a Source of Representative Government," "Ideas from the Enlightenment," "The American and French Revolutions," "World War I — Before and After," and "Totalitarianism, Left and Right." To order, send a check for \$4.98, payable to the AFT Educational Foundation, to Democracy's Untold Story, AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20001.

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## "BACK TO BASICS" ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH

(Continued from page 28)

Dewey recognized the need for drill, but he would try to make a game of it. To make the multiplication tables interesting in the lower grades, you could make them into a song. But if you don't learn the multiplication tables or the difference between left and right when you are very young, you will lose out. You can't postpone learning these things until you understand the rational basis of such knowledge. This is a matter of common sense, and common sense was abandoned by a great many so-called followers of John Dewey.

Word got around that the kind of education being purveyed in the public schools was being influenced by Dewey, but I saw no evidence of that at all.

**Main:** *But surely he must have had some impact on public schools. He was such an overwhelming intellectual presence in those years.*

**Hook:** People used his language. And when those people discussed social reforms in an uncritical way and then brought silly ideas into the classroom—sometimes even indoctrinating students for their favorite social reform—the public thought it sounded like Dewey. Dewey's name was often used for purposes of which he would not approve. Although he was prepared to admit that at the elementary school level indoctrination has to go on, he didn't like the term indoctrination.

And when some of his followers said that schools had to rebuild society, Dewey was unhappy. In the end, he said the schools can't rebuild society.

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***It's the old question of the relationship between school and society. The only answer is: You begin where you are, trying to improve things piecemeal.***

---

**Main:** *So social conditions limit the possibilities of even progressive education. What are those limits?*

**Hook:** The most important limit is the home life of a student from the slums. When I went to school and when I taught, the family was a very powerful institution and there was peer pressure to study. While I have no recent first-hand experience, I gather that in some areas you can no longer rely upon the existence of the family or on family interest in the education of the students.

On every level of the educational ladder I have found that once students are interested, excited, and motivated, they get carried forward by their own momentum and by their own group spirit. But generating that inter-

est with any ease does presuppose a social environment that no longer exists in some areas of the country.

You see, it's almost a vicious circle. The question is, do we try to improve society first and then the schools, or the schools and then society? It's the old question of the relationship between school and society. The only answer is: You begin where you are, trying to improve things piecemeal. Even where obstacles are very great, something can be done.

Again, in my experience, the magic key—if there is such a thing as a magic key—is motivation and developing ways of interesting the child without bribing him. But this requires a willingness on the part of the community to underwrite the costs of such an education, which will usually be higher than the cost of a conventional education.

**Main:** *You've mentioned that progressive education requires extra resources to succeed. What resources are necessary, and what does that imply for school reform?*

**Hook:** To induce highly qualified individuals to go into teaching, you have to be willing to pay. Further, you have to provide the school with the essential materials, books, visual aides. I also think Dewey would have been in favor of paraprofessionals and of parents' paying greater attention to what is occurring in the classroom, sometimes even to the point of participating in it.

He wanted to integrate the school and community and make communities more aware of their schools. What he has advocated has, to some extent, been realized. In my day, most people regarded the school as something beyond their concern, even when they were parents and taxpayers. But today many more people are interested, and Dewey would regard that as a healthy development.

**Main:** *Was Dewey interested in institutional reform? Beyond his push for progressive education methods, did he fight for other reforms?*

**Hook:** Yes. He was a member of the Citizens' Lobby in New York City and Washington, which functioned somewhat like Common Cause does today. And he was active in enlightened political causes. All his life he was politically active with regard to education.

He was a strong believer in the importance of teachers' unions at a time when they were regarded as subversive. I should say that a great many educators disagreed with him profoundly about that. Many people thought his stance degraded the profession to blue-collar rank. But Dewey denied there was a sharp separation between trades and professions.

**Main:** *You spoke about giving teachers greater flexibility in the way they approached their material. But what is the basic material that Dewey thought had to be covered, and on what basis did he prefer some subject matter over others?*

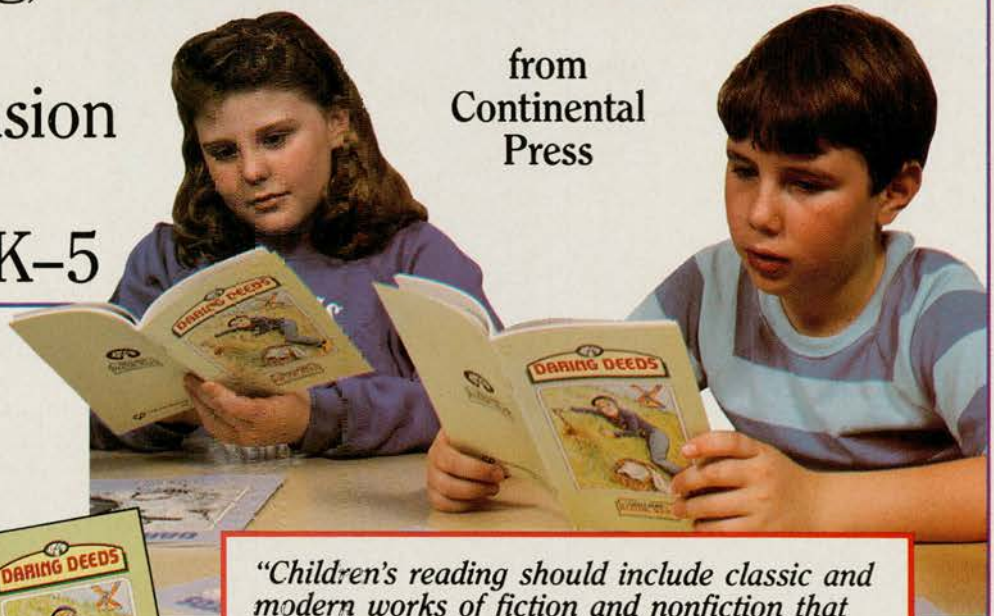
**Hook:** Dewey would say those subjects should be taught that are relevant to the students' needs, to the society in which they are living, and to the problems the students will probably face in that society. If you look at Dewey's masterpiece, *Democracy and Education*, you will see chapters devoted to the teaching methods of each subject.



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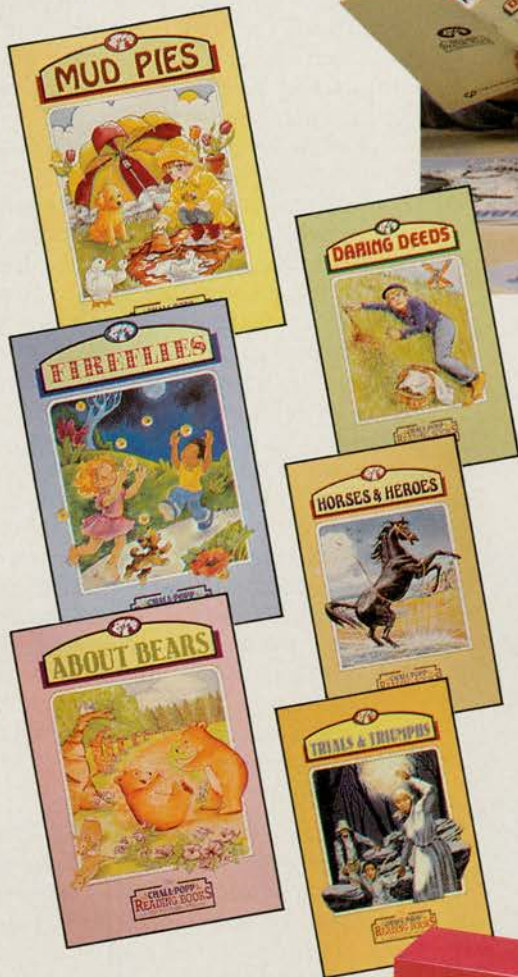
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**Main:** Expand a little bit on what those subjects are.

**Hook:** First of all, we take for granted some mastery of language, science, and the arts of calculation. Also, geography and history. But he would be critical of an emphasis upon history that made no reference to contemporary issues or that ignored the continuity between past and present.

**Main:** What about literature?

**Hook:** Dewey warned about allowing students to become addicted to "pop" novels. He felt their taste for good literature had to be cultivated. Detective stories and imaginary tales are an exciting stimulus. But if they became a steady diet—Dewey would not consider them educational because they do not contribute to growth.

Now when Dewey talked about growth, people usually asked, "Toward what did he want students to grow?" An obvious criticism of Dewey's doctrine is that you don't actually want students to grow in *all* directions. There is growth in vice and there is growth in virtue, there is growth in knowledge and there is growth in ignorance, and so on.

Dewey presupposed that, at any time, the dominant values of society are those toward which students will grow. He doesn't enumerate them, but he stresses conscientiousness, punctuality, honesty, cooperativeness, awareness of alternatives, critical awareness. He stressed developing those virtues not by indoctrination but by arranging educational situations in which those virtues are required to get to the solutions.

**Main:** You mentioned that Dewey emphasized personal growth and assumed that students will grow toward those values that are socially tested and accepted. But just what those values are is not always clear. I wonder if, as a practical matter, Dewey's teachings didn't really boil down to moral relativism?

**Hook:** On the contrary, Dewey refused to take a relativistic view about the key value of democracy, if by relativistic you mean, as most people do, "subjectivistic." Indeed, he may have assumed the validity of the democratic way of life too easily. Perhaps he is open to the charge that

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he was an absolutist about democracy.

And as far as the schools were concerned, Dewey certainly was not an ethical relativist. He believed that reason could provide objective resolutions to value conflicts. He maintained that, in a given situation, the relevant parties should try to agree on what the likely consequences of a given action will be. Then, in light of the envisaged consequences, one solution might be shown to be superior to other alternatives.

Some people think he put too much faith in intelligence and reason, believing as he did that they could resolve value conflicts. Even I at one point thought he had ignored the necessity of violent struggle in some cases in which certain issues could not be negotiated. But I realized that, while Dewey would concede that certain issues could not be negotiated in particular situations, he did not believe that such conflicts involved a clash of ultimate values. He said that every actual conflict is actually over secondary, not final, values and is, therefore, potentially resolvable by reason.

**Main:** *The issue of education and religion is back in the news after Judge Brevard Hand ruled that the public schools of Alabama have been inculcating the "religion" of secular humanism. Now, you call yourself a secular humanist. What does that mean and what do you think of this debate?*

**Hook:** Secular humanism is simply the belief that religion is a private matter.

**Main:** *Is there a de facto religion of secularism being taught in public schools?*

**Hook:** I don't think so. But I am not opposed to teaching about the Bible in a literary and historical context in school. If they don't read the Bible in school, many students may never find out anything about it. So long as school prayer is truly voluntary—as it was *not* in Dewey's day or mine—it is not incompatible with secular humanism.

I am not very popular with many secular humanists. They always say to me, "If voluntary prayer is allowed, those students who choose not to participate will be embarrassed." That is ironic because in the Jehovah's Witnesses case, the



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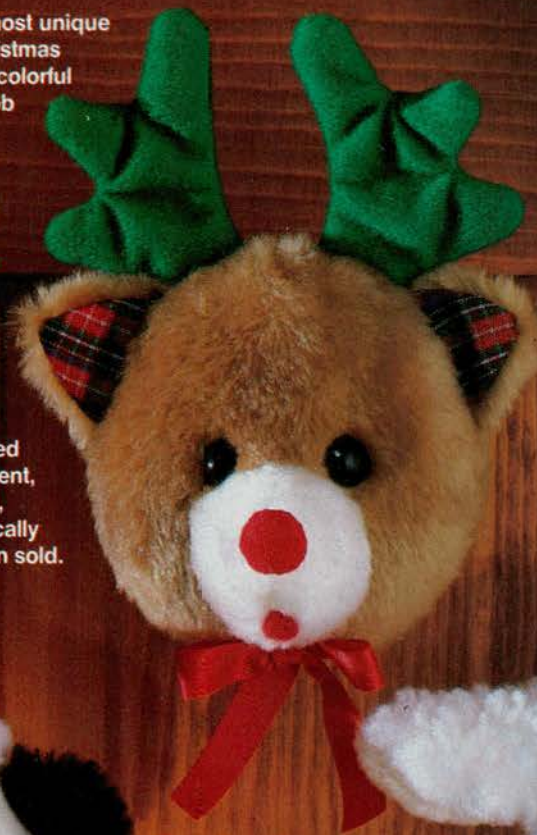
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Supreme Court ruled that saluting the flag in school is fine and that the Witnesses could simply abstain. I have taught in elementary school. I know how students would react to those who refused to salute the flag. They would probably tear them to pieces. Nevertheless, all the secular humanists approved that decision.

I think it is legitimate for a democratic community to require a symbolic act, although under certain circumstances we should exempt some from it. We could explain to the students that we are a tolerant community, and that is why some don't participate. We could make it an occasion for teaching a lesson in patriotic tolerance. Similarly, the public refusal of students to engage in school prayer, vocal or silent, could be an appropriate occasion to refer to the Bill of Rights.<sup>2</sup>

Everybody is unhappy with me about something or other: libertarians, neoconservatives, the socialists, the secular humanists. I think it is because I have a sense of history. I would like students to read my books and learn about the past. They know very little about the past.

**Main:** *Why do you think history is so important? How has knowledge of history affected your ideas?*

**Hook:** I think we need knowledge of the past in order to understand the danger of absolutism. Also, historical knowledge is necessary if one is to see the progress democratic society has made, if one is to appreciate the value of democratic life, if one is to have a sense of citizenship.

What is it that people are prepared to die for in this country? I feel I owe something to the people who fought for this country in the past, who made my freedom possible. That is why I believe in some form of national service, as opposed to some libertarians who think you can pay people to give their life for this country on the basis of a cost-benefit or economic analysis!

Cost-benefit analyses are fine, but not when it comes to questions of honor or to those values that are of basic importance. Freedom comes first—and then cost-benefit analyses.

**Main:** *Thank you.* □

<sup>2</sup> This view is further developed in *Religion in a Free Society*, "The Montgomery Lectures at the University of Nebraska," Lincoln, NE, University of Nebraska Press, 1967.







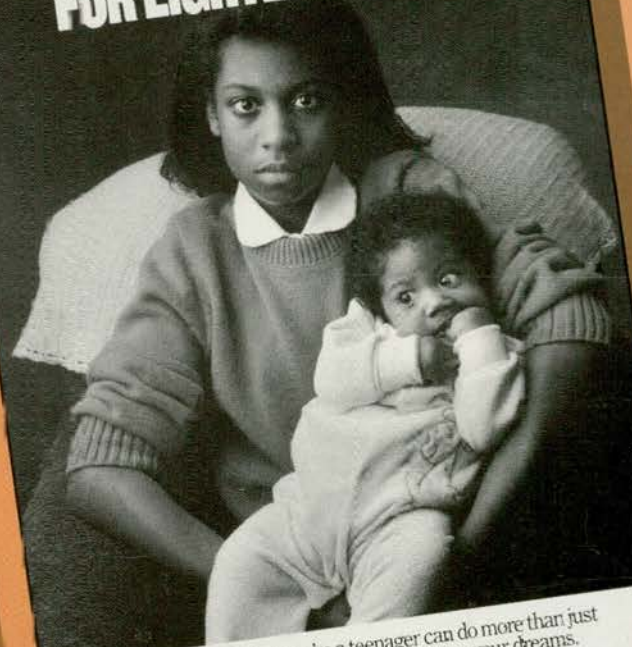
The one on the left will  
finish high school before  
the one on the right.



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