Chapter 21

EDUCATION IN A DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

The Common School is the greatest discovery ever made by man.

HORACE MANN

The most significant fact in this world today is, that in nearly every village under the American flag, the schoolhouse is larger than the church.

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL

Don't sell your books and keep your diplomas. Sell your diplomas, if you can get anyone to buy them, and keep your books.

WALTER B. PITKIN

FOR 300 YEARS, Americans have almost unanimously agreed that education is one of their most important concerns. This does not mean, of course, that we have ever agreed, or now agree, on every point connected with the subject of education. Just the contrary seems to be the case: we disagree on almost every point, while agreeing on the whole. In fact, the history of American education is the history of great debates, several of which are being carried on vigorously today.

We provide education for everyone — but we disagree about how good it is. We are unsure, even conceding the desirability of universal education, just what kind of education everyone should have. Should everyone be educated in the same way? Or is one kind or degree of education appropriate for one group of our young people, another kind or degree for another? We also continue to be divided on the question of who should pay for education. Should all education be publicly supported, or should there continue to be "private" schools? Should public education be supported by the federal and state governments, or should it be supported — and controlled — entirely at the level of local government? How "private" should private schools be? Should they have the right, for example, to bar their doors to students of this color or that religious creed? Can they, in a democracy, properly refuse admission to students who

lack a certain measure — however defined and tested — of intelligence, skill, and knowledge?

The list of educational controversies, both in the past and in the present, could be extended almost indefinitely. What is the role, and what should it be, of higher education in our national life? What should the university be called upon to do? And who should control the universities — the students, or the teachers, or the professional administrators? Should the running of a modern university be undertaken by students and faculty together — on the grounds that students are the prime victims of error in this realm? But even if that is conceded, can teachers remain free to teach the truth as they see it if they are subject to the control of their students — and (touching on another great modern controversy) subject to the control of the politicians who, at least for public colleges and universities, provide the funds that make such education possible? Finally, what is the political responsibility of the universities? Should they be content to provide, as they have for at least a century, "experts" whose special knowledge is put to use by elected officials who have general knowledge of the country's needs? Or should the universities be expected to provide, as they have in recent years, a new breed of experts — leaders who make policies instead of merely advising on their implementation?

The present chapter does not, nor can it, go into all of the questions about education that have puzzled and plagued Americans throughout our history. Certain technical matters are ignored; questions of educational practice, for example, are for the most part not discussed here. We are concerned primarily, as the title of the chapter indicates, with education *in a democracy,* not with education in its most general aspects. But even that subject, though limited, is large.

1. EDUCATION IN A FREE SOCIETY: THE ISSUE OF COMPULSORY PUBLIC EDUCATION

"IT IS AN AXIOM in political science," wrote the authors of the Texas Declaration of Independence (March 2, 1836), "that unless a people are educated and enlightened it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty, or the capacity for self-government." It was indeed an axiom, though perhaps not of political science in general, but only of American political thought. The point had been made over and over, in official documents as well as informal statements, for generations.

The Massachusetts School Law of 1647 is one of the first expressions of it in our history. "It being one chief project of that old deluder Satan to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures," the law declared, ". . . it is therefore ordered that every township in this jurisdiction" shall, upon attaining the size of fifty households, appoint one "within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read." "Wisdom and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties," asserted the constitution of Massachusetts of 1780, ". . . it shall be the duty of the legislatures and magistrates, in all future periods of this Commonwealth, to cherish the interest of literature and the sciences, and of all seminaries of them." The constitution of Vermont concurred, laying it down in 1791 that "a competent number of schools ought to be maintained in each town for the convenient instruction of youth." The constitutions of Ohio (1802) and Indiana (1816) were no less firm, and the constitution of Texas (1845) made the same point. Indeed, hardly any state in the Union lacks some such statement of educational principle.

Thomas Jefferson was one of the strongest supporters of the proposition that edu-

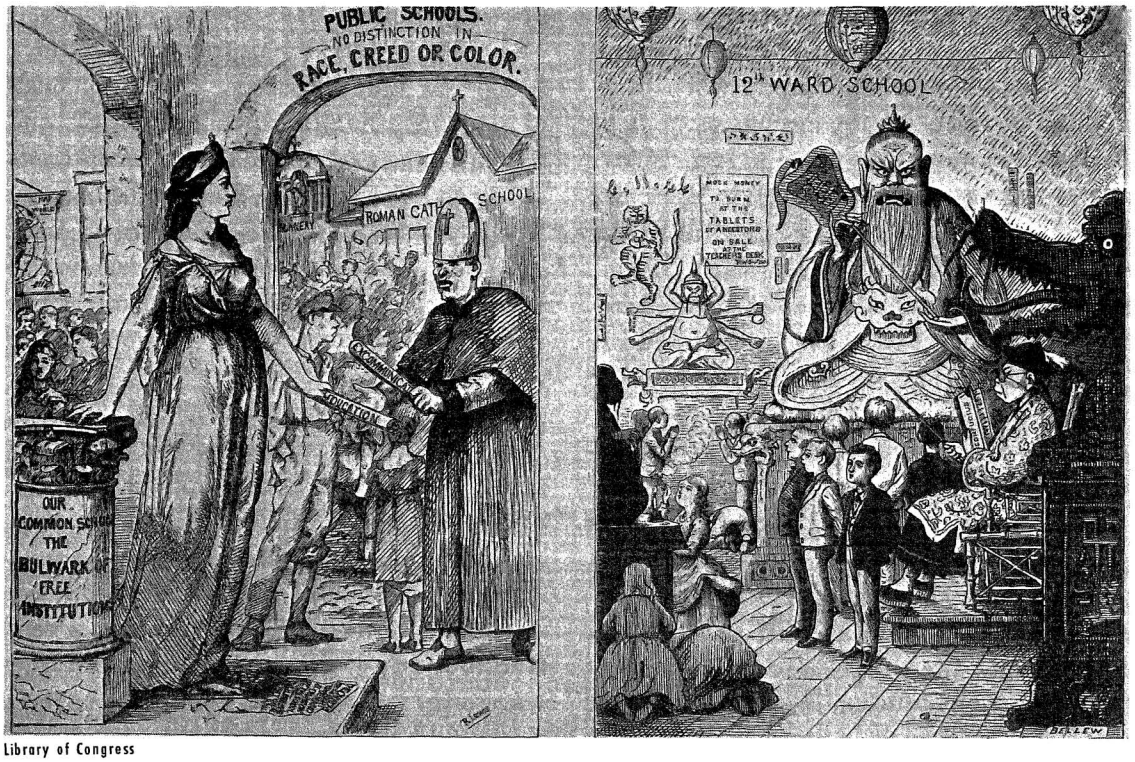
cation, as the basis of an informed citizenry, is a requirement of democratic governments. "Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone," he declared in his *Notes on Virginia* (1781-1782). "The people themselves therefore are its only safe depositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree." Similar statements were made by many persons and organizations during the first half century of our national existence. Thus, for example, the Report of the Workingmen's Committees of Philadelphia asserted in 1830 that "in a republic the people constitute the government, and . . . are the makers and the rulers of their own good or evil destiny. . . . It appears, therefore, to the committees that there can be no real liberty without a wide diffusion of real intelligence; that the members of a republic should all be alike instructed in the nature and character of their equal rights and duties as human beings and as citizens; and that education . . . should tend, as far as possible, to the production of a just disposition, virtuous habits, and a rational self-governing character."

Thirty years before Thaddeus Stevens gained fame (and, in the South, infamy) for his uncompromising egalitarianism as a leader of the congressional program for Reconstruction, he had already won a national reputation for his support of a statewide system of public education in Pennsylvania. The reasons he gave for his support were the same as those given by Jefferson and other early writers. "If an elective republic is to endure for any great length of time," Stevens wrote in 1835, "every elector must have sufficient information, not only to accumulate wealth and take care of his pecuniary concerns but to direct wisely the legislature, the ambassadors, and the executive of the nation — for some part of all these things, some agency in approving or disapproving of them, falls to every freeman." The great educational reformer Horace Mann felt the same way. "The true business of the schoolroom connects itself, and becomes identical, with the great interests of society," he wrote in the Twelfth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Board of Education, in 1848. He went on to say that in a republican government, "legislators are a mirror reflecting the moral countenance of their constituents."

Therefore, he asserted, the establishment of a republican government, without well-appointed and efficient means for the universal education of the people, "is the most rash and foolhardy experiment ever tried by man. . . . It may be an easy thing to make a republic," Mann added, "but it is a very laborious thing to make republicans; and woe to the republic that rests upon no better foundations than ignorance, selfishness, and passion."

Both Stevens and Mann were Whigs, which is to say that they represented the conservative advocates and supporters of public education in the first half of the nineteenth century. In their view, public education would satisfy the need for literate employees in a commercial-industrial society; it was the hope of the Whigs generally that education would be a conserving rather than a reforming influence and make the mass of voters more responsible, and that it would soften class lines. Education, as Mann himself put it, "is the great equalizer of the conditions of men — the balance wheel of the social machinery. . . . It does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich; it prevents being poor."

It should be noted that "conservative" is here being used in its traditional sense — retaining the best of the past and avoiding changes that are for the worse rather than for the better. On the whole, the Whig Party, the champion of which was Henry



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"The Public School Question — what sectarian appropriation of the school fund is doing — and what it may lead to"; pen and ink drawing in "Harper's Weekly," 1873

Clay and to which Abraham Lincoln belonged as a young man, was conservative in this sense. The Jacksonian Democrats were more radical (although hardly radical by twentieth-century standards); and curiously enough, although they felt a deep commitment to public education, they also distrusted it, believing, as many of them did, in the innate wisdom of the common man of the soil and in the superiority of experience over book learning. Thus the Jacksonians often seemed anti-intellectual, as did the Transcendentalists, with their emphasis on the superiority of intuition over both "common experience" and book learning. Emerson summed it up in his remark that intuition was more important than tuition.

The reiteration of the proposition asserted by Stevens and Mann in the above, which may be said to be the fundamental principle of American education, did not cease in 1848. "Popular education must increase the power of the people in politics," wrote John H. Vincent, the founder of the Chautauqua movement, in 1886, "augmenting the independent vote which makes party leaders cautious where lack of conscience would make them careless concerning truth and honesty." A school should be a model home, declared Francis W. Parker, founder of a famous Chicago school, in 1894, "a complete community and embryonic democracy." He added that the welfare of the child meant happier homes, better society, a pure ballot, and the perpetuity of republican institutions. And a half century later the Englishman Denis Brogan saw that the principle was still being applied. "The social and political role of American education cannot be understood if it is thought of as being primarily a means of formal instruction," he wrote in 1944. "The political function of the schools is to teach Americanism, meaning not merely political and patriotic dogma but the habits necessary to American life." And no year passes without

its statements of this great and enduring principle.

This is not to say, however, that the support of compulsory public education has ever been unanimous. At one time or another and for one reason or another there have been Americans who opposed the proposition that education is the *sine qua non* of the democratic way of life. Sometimes they have opposed it because they disapproved of that way of life itself, holding on the contrary — in line with the ancient view of the matter — that democracy is an inferior form of government and that aristocracy, or perhaps even some form of monarchy, is to be preferred. Not surprisingly, they have been persons who also opposed the extension of the franchise to all adult citizens and who looked with disfavor on the "leveling" tendencies — as they often called them — in our national life.

At the same time there have been others who, probably agreeing with the proposition in principle, have pointed out that its operation is not automatic. For example, Ben J. Wattenberg and Richard M. Scammon, authors of *This U.S.A.* (1965), expressed the hope that educated politicians serving an educated electorate would pass enlightened legislation for the betterment of all, but they went on to observe that there is "no such guarantee nor even conclusive evidence that this will happen. Hitler's Germany was one of the best-educated nations in Europe, certainly in 1939 better-educated than the Poland it was preparing to butcher. . . . Education in itself offers no ironclad guarantees against fascism, communism, or any other threat. We may hope that education will bolster the citizenry, and indeed, as the future unrolls we feel this will happen — but it will not happen strictly as cause and effect, nor will it happen if everyone relaxes and thinks that it will automatically occur."

Still others have objected, not to education per se but to compulsory public education, on the grounds that it was the wrong kind for their children — that in one way or another it infringed their basic freedom, as they often felt it to be, to bring up their children as they chose. On the one hand, there were those who asserted the greater value of experience than of book learning; and on the other hand — far the more influential group — were those leaders of religious denominations who, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, feared the influence of secular education on the faith and morals of the young people in their charge. They, indeed, were the main opponents of Mann's efforts to establish a public or common school system. Mann was supported by manufacturers and industrialists who disliked the idea of an uneducated proletariat that would nonetheless have the vote. But he was strongly and continuously opposed by those who thought that the Bible's teaching would be lost or perverted in common schools that all must attend.

Such opposition to compulsory public education persisted, of course, throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Roman Catholics, at least until the recent past, have traditionally been wary of efforts to extend the public school system on the grounds that their children would go to different, church-supported and -controlled schools in any event. Jews have also objected, pointing to the fact that many of their children go to Yeshiva schools. And other sects have also opposed compulsory public education in recent times, for example, the Amish in Pennsylvania, who have complained not only of the "secular atmosphere" of public schools but also of the fact that their children are carried to school in motor buses, of which they do not approve.

On the whole, such objections to public education seem to be lessening. At the same time, the idea that parents owe it to the

community — to the state or commonwealth — to provide for the education of their children is older than our nation. A Massachusetts decree of 1642 established punishments and fines for parents who neglected to "train up their children in learning." Benjamin Rush, in 1786, in a letter to British philosopher Richard Price, urged his correspondent to call upon "the rulers of our country to lay the foundations of their empire in *knowledge* as well as virtue. Let our common people be compelled by law," he declared, "to give their children . . . a good English education." The Massachusetts Compulsory Schooling Law of 1850, the result of Mann's devoted efforts in that state, provided for sanctions against "habitual truants, and children not attending school, without any regular and lawful occupation, growing up in ignorance, between the ages of six and fifteen years." (The law established "suitable penalties, not exceeding, for any one breach, a fine of $20.") And an amendment to this law declared that every person "who shall have any child under his control, between the ages of eight and fourteen years, shall send such child to some public school" for at least twelve weeks a year — "if the public schools within such town or city shall be so long kept."

Incidentally, these statements reveal the difference between compulsory schooling in the nineteenth century and compulsory schooling in our time. Schooling in Massachusetts in 1852 — the year of the amendment — was no less compulsory than it is today, although in fact a child over ten who was engaged in "regular and lawful" employment was usually excused from school, whereas today the child labor laws of most states prevent this. But three months of schooling — "six weeks of which shall be consecutive," as the law of 1852 required — is a far cry from the modern regimen. Few children today fail to spend upward of nine months a year in school from the time they are six until they are fifteen or sixteen; and the school "dropout" is considered to be not only a legal but a social problem as well.

An occasional parent even today objects to being required to send his child to school. However, the grounds are hardly ever simply parental freedom; almost always, the grounds of such action are disapproval, on the parent's part, of the education that his child has received or is likely to receive. Indeed, most of the opposition to compulsory schooling in modern times is not to the principle involved but to the quality of the education provided.

Criticism of the quality of public school education, which is rife at the present day, is by no means confined to the present. As early as 1862, Israel J. Benjamin could complain: "More than once the press has called the attention of the public to the fact that the public schools are academic and merely hothouses for memory, calculating, craftiness, and cold reason, and leave all the higher capacities of youth, the noble impulses and the lofty feelings of the young, wholly untouched and undeveloped." To James Bryce, writing in 1888, the situation had not improved. "That the education of the masses is . . . a superficial education goes without saying," he asserted in *The American Commonwealth*. "It is sufficient to enable them to think they know something about the great problems of politics: insufficient to show them how little they know." And contemporary attacks on the education — or lack of it — of public school teachers, on the vacuousness and lack of challenge of textbooks, and on the misplaced emphases — on sports, driver-training courses, and the like — are so familiar as not to require quotation.

Other criticisms also abound. The French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville pointed more than a century ago to the anti-intellectual spirit of many Americans; the conclusion followed inescapably that schooling in America must be pragmatic and largely superficial. A more serious charge was leveled

at American schools in 1890 by Calvin M. Woodward, who asserted that they taught "the science of wealth, the details of banking, exchange, stock-buying and selling, and speech-making, the high art of political demagogues" — but little else. More recently, Robert M. Hutchins has attacked even higher education on these grounds, in the process coining a widely used phrase — "the service-station conception of a university." "Undoubtedly the love of money and that sensitivity to public demands that it creates has a good deal to do with the service-station conception of a university," he wrote in 1936. "According to this conception a university must make itself felt in the community; it must be constantly, currently felt. A state university must help the farmers look after their cows. An endowed university must help adults get better jobs by giving them courses in the afternoon and evening."

So the attacks go. Education is profoundly important to Americans, and they are sensitive to the fact that the education their children are required to receive is not yet good enough. [For further discussion of some of the topics treated in this section, see Chs. 5: GENERAL WELFARE, and 9: EQUALITY.]

2. DIVERSITY OF METHODS AND GOALS IN EDUCATION: WHAT KIND OR KINDS OF EDUCATION SHOULD EVERYONE RECEIVE?

LET US GRANT, then, that the battle for universal education in America has been won — with significant exceptions to be discussed later — and that legal and social pressures are accepted by all to insure that all attend school. But that is by no means the end of the story. Questions remain, and are hotly debated today, about the kind or type of education that everyone should receive.

Americans have generally agreed that being an educated man is preferable to being an uneducated one. But they have not agreed about what it means to be "educated"; and they have often expressed serious doubts about whether schools and colleges are the places to get an "education" — whatever an education is.

With regard to the last point, there is a curiously strong and enduring distrust of schools in American thought — curious because our intellectuals have been the most eloquent proponents of it. Emerson, for example, many times voiced his displeasure with schools and their products. "The things taught in schools and colleges are not an education, but the means of education," he wrote in his *Journal* on July 15, 1831. He made the point more strongly in his essay "New England Reformers," in 1844. "We are students of words," he wrote: "we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation rooms, for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing." In 1860 he was putting it another way, but the point remained essentially the same. "You send your child to the schoolmaster," he declared, "but 'tis the schoolboys who educate him. You send him to the Latin class, but much of his tuition comes on his way to school, from the shop-windows."

In other words, the true and best education comes from experience, not from formal schooling. The position has been taken by many, among them Herman Melville. "As for me," he wrote in *Moby Dick* (1851), "if, by any possibility, there be any as yet undiscovered prime thing in me; if I shall ever deserve any real repute in that small but high hushed world which I might not be unreasonably ambitious of; if hereafter I shall do anything that, upon the whole, a man might rather have done than to have left undone; if, at my death, my executors, or more properly my creditors, find any precious MSS. in my desk, then here I prospectively ascribe all the honor and the glory to whaling; for a whale ship

was my Yale College and my Harvard."

What has been called the "unofficial motto" of U.S. college students asserts the same point: "Don't let your classes interfere with your college education."

Others have taken the question more seriously than men like Emerson and Melville may be presumed to have done. (Did they really mean that no one should go to school? Did they really mean to assert that lack of schooling would make a nation of great writers?) There is a long tradition of American statements of the ends or goals of education. For example, the founders of William and Mary College, in Virginia, proposed "three things" to themselves in 1727, "to which all its [the college's] statutes should be directed. The first is, that the youth of Virginia should be well educated to learning and good morals. The second is, that the churches of America, especially Virginia, should be supplied with good ministers. . . . The third is, that the Indians of America should be instructed in the Christian religion."

History has made largely irrelevant the third of these goals, and the second is no longer taken as a primary obligation by more than a relative handful of seminaries. But the first — that youth should be well educated to learning and good morals — might still serve as a formulaic expression of the goal of most U.S. colleges and schools.

The Rockfish Gap Commission report on the proposed University of Virginia (Thomas Jefferson was a member of the Commission) spelled out these goals in detail in 1818. The Commission laid down twelve objectives, among them:

> To give to every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business.
>
> To enable him to calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, as well as his contracts and accounts in writing.
>
> To improve, by reading, his morals and faculties.
>
> To understand his duties to his neighbors and to his country.
>
> To know his rights.
>
> To expound the principles and structure of government.
>
> To harmonize and promote the interests of agriculture, manufactures, and commerce.
>
> To develop the reasoning faculties of youth.
>
> To enlighten them with the mathematical and physical sciences that advance the arts and administer to the health, subsistence, and comforts of human life.
>
> And generally to form them to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others and of happiness within themselves.

This list, too — in substance if not in language — would probably be found acceptable to the great majority of contemporary American educators. So true is this, indeed, that it hardly seems necessary to quote any more modern expressions of the fundamental goals of education.

Nevertheless, some enduring disputes are embedded, as it were, in this list of objectives. Among them are the controversy about vocational or utilitarian education as opposed to liberal arts education, and the controversy about the elective system. In addition there is the great perennial issue about the place of religion in the public schools. [For a different treatment of some of the matters discussed here, see Chs. 1: National Character and 12: Minorities.]

3. LIBERAL EDUCATION VERSUS VOCATIONAL TRAINING

"The mass of our citizens may be divided into two classes," declared Jefferson in 1814, "— the laboring and the learned. The laboring will need the first grade of ed-

ucation to qualify them for their pursuits and duties; the learned will need it as a foundation for further acquirements." It was in the second grade of education — what Jefferson called general schools — that the separation was to take place. "Those destined for labor will engage in the business of agriculture, or enter into apprenticeships to such handicraft art as may be their choice; their companions, destined to the pursuits of science, will proceed to the college, which will consist, first, of general schools; and second, of professional schools."

These statements should not be surprising as coming from Jefferson, the famous "democrat" — for in fact they summed up the plan that was followed everywhere in America for over a century after his death. Only in very recent times has it been seriously suggested that all students in U.S. schools should receive the same education; even so, they do not in fact receive it to this day. What is more, Jefferson's idea that *all* students should receive the same education in elementary schools (his first grade of schooling) was revolutionary in his time. Many people felt, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that the majority of children — those "destined" for labor — needed little if any "education" or formal schooling, and probably did not want it in any case. They would be happier, in this view, if they were put to learning a trade or craft as early as possible. A minority would want to go on to learn a profession or "to share," in Jefferson's words, "in conducting the affairs of the nation, or to live with usefulness and respect in the private ranks of life." But these fortunate ones, even in the best of circumstances, would be few.

The first attacks on the idea of vocational training for the many were directed, interestingly enough, not at the lower schools but at the schools that trained some of the fortunate few for the professions. Francis Wayland, for example, charged in 1842 that "our colleges . . . are at present scarcely anything more than schools for the education of young men for the professions," and superficial ones at that. Instead, he declared, "nothing would tend so much to the progress of wealth among us as the diffusion throughout the whole people of a knowledge of the principles of science, and the application of science to the arts. And besides, a knowledge of moral and intellectual philosophy, of the fundamental principles of law, of our own Constitution, of history, of vegetable and animal physiology, and of many other sciences is just as necessary and just as appropriate to the merchant, the manufacturer, the mechanic, and the farmer, as to the lawyer, the clergyman, or the physician."

Later attacks were made in different terms. "We must . . . protect our growing-up youths against the trusts — both of capital and labor," said Laurence Gronlund in 1899. "We must have a new education for our boys — a truly democratic education. . . . Our people now are being forced — especially by the trusts — to take their places according to their capacity, as portions of a great machinery. That is, we are fast becoming a nation of specialists." Gronlund's words would probably have astonished Jefferson, who supposed, like most of the men of his time, that social classes — Gronlund's "specialists" — were not the evildoing of the "trusts," but were the result of immemorial and perhaps eternal social exigencies. However, much had changed since 1814, and, in particular, the nation's wealth had vastly increased.

The question, whether vocational training is appropriate for *anyone*, even those "destined to labor," was much discussed around the turn of the century, and continues to be discussed today. John Dewey, for example, in *Democracy and Education* (1916), strong-

Courtesy, Edward Kuekes, Cleveland "Plain Dealer"

"We'll always be grateful for the awakening," 1957

ly opposed vocational education, asserting that it was the training of slaves, not the education of free men. Hutchins has been one of the most eloquent opponents of such utilitarian training in our time. He declared in 1936 that "there is a conflict between one aim of the university, the pursuit of truth for its own sake, and another which it professes too, the preparation of men and women for their life work. This is not a conflict between education and research. It is a conflict between two kinds of education." And as proof of his contention that vocational education was more popular than liberal education, even in the colleges, even in the universities, he pointed to the new schools, avowedly professional in purpose, that had appeared in the past thirty-five years. "Since the beginning of the century, the following units designed to fit students for specific occupations have appeared and have become respectable: schools of journalism, business, librarianship, social service, education, dentistry, nursing, forestry, diplomacy, pharmacy, veterinary surgery, and public administration." Hutchins' point, of course, was that there is no real difference in principle between such utilitarian schools — the list of which could be greatly extended a generation later — and the apprenticeships of which Jefferson approved more than a hundred years earlier. Hutchins might concede that there had been an advance in sophistication and effectiveness of teaching, but he would insist that the goals were unchanged.

Vocational education, of course, has not gone undefended. As early as 1815 Robert Finley could urge that colleges teach both "theoretic and practical knowledge of agriculture." The state universities that began as agricultural and mechanical colleges were one result of such urgings. Indeed, the best-defined educational trend of the nineteenth century was a vigorous movement to make schools more "practical," to bring them closer to the facts of everyday life, and to make them more capable of producing graduates trained to operate successfully in the world in which they would have to live. Nor has the trend ceased to be observable in our own time, when the emphasis has been on technical education, so-called, rather than on vocational training. National need has often been cited — especially after the first Russian Sputnik flashed across the sky in 1957 — as the basic justification for this kind of education; and what were once "mere" technical schools, such as MIT and the California Institute of Technology, have become among the most prestigious of the nation's places of higher learning.

The trend toward more utilitarian education was at one time so powerful that it swept up even those who disapproved of it. The most famous case is that of Dewey himself, whose famous statement, "We learn by doing," was adopted by two generations of educators, although in fact it was not a call for utilitarian education at all.

The statement applies as much to logic as to farming, as much to mathematics as to dressmaking, and indeed is undeniable; but the effort to make it apply more widely than it actually did (Dewey applied it in the context of a discussion of educational methods, not of educational goals) led, around the turn of the century, to an overemphasis on "practical" subjects in the schools and to underemphasis on "theoretical ones" — a situation that to some extent obtains today.

Dewey's own position may be summed up in his "Pedagogic Creed" of 1897. "I believe," he wrote, "that all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race. . . . Through this unconscious education the individual gradually comes to share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together. . . . The most formal and technical education in the world cannot safely depart from this general process. It can only organize it or differentiate it in some particular direction." In short, Dewey was an advocate — one of the most eloquent in our history — of what is called liberal education; at the same time, he felt, what many of his foes and even some of his supporters did not realize, that liberal education — education that, as its name indicates, *frees* men from ignorance — was the most "useful" of all kinds of education.

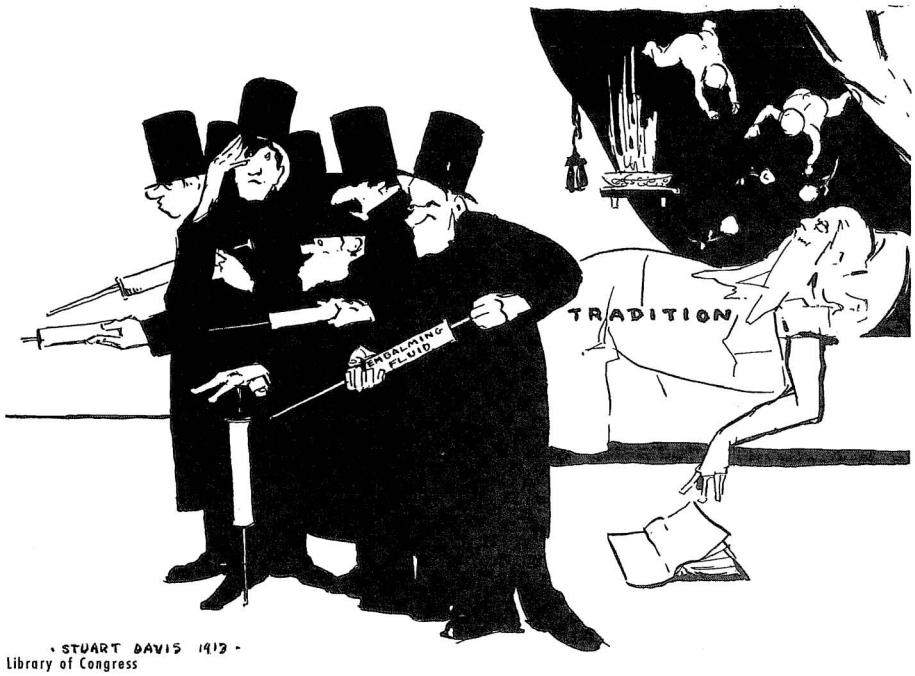
Mention of the term "liberal education" brings us to another of the great controversies in American education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

"Hey—Don't Forget The Bottom Part, Too"

Courtesy, Herblock, "The Washington Post"

4. THE CLASSICS VERSUS THE ELECTIVE SYSTEM

THE YALE REPORT OF 1828 described the goals and the justification of liberal education in terms that remain meaningful today. "The course of instruction which is given to the undergraduates in the college," its authors, Jeremiah Day and James Kingsley, wrote, "is not designed to include *professional* studies. Our object is not to teach that which is peculiar to any one of the professions but to lay the foundation which is common to them all." They went on to answer the question that concerned many of their readers, as it may concern many readers today. "But why, it may be asked, should a student waste his time upon studies which have no immediate connection with his future profession?" they asked. "In answer to this, it may be observed that there is no science which does not contribute its aid to professional skill. 'Everything throws light upon everything.' The great object of a collegiate education, preparatory to the study of a profession, is to give that expansion and balance of the mental powers, those liberal and comprehensive views, and those fine proportions of character which are not to be found in him whose



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"Saving the corpse"; drawing by Stuart Davis for "The Masses," 1913

ideas are always confined to one particular channel."

More than a hundred years later Malcolm MacLean of the University of Minnesota was saying almost the same thing. "We are trying in the general college," he wrote, ". . . to devise a general education that may underlie specialization for the future, to awaken leaders in so-called fields to interrelations of other areas with their own, to give them the opportunity to become intelligent laymen in the temples where they are not high priests."

The agreement between these statements, spaced a century apart, does not necessarily mean that their context is the same, or that a great deal of educational turmoil had not occurred during those hundred years. As a matter of fact, just the opposite is true.

The study of the classics in their original languages — as the purveyors of liberal education, as what have come to be called "the great teachers" — was already under severe attack when the Yale Report of 1828 appeared. As early as 1790, Noah Webster was deploring "a too general attention to the dead languages, with a neglect of our own. . . . What advantage," he asked, "does a merchant, a mechanic, a farmer derive from an acquaintance with the Greek and Roman tongues?" Benjamin Latrobe argued in 1798 that a boy of ten or twelve "could much sooner make a perfect botanist than a good Greek scholar; and I am sure the botanist would be happier, healthier, and less agitated by false notions of glory and honor than the expositor of Homer; nor do I believe his mind would have acquired less activity and vigor."

Such attacks were numerous in the first half of the nineteenth century, and later as well. Rote learning, dull recitations, and dry-as-dust scholarship — which were probably the norm rather than the exception — were seen to be inadequate as well as inappropriate to the requirements of the day.

However, the solution proposed, according to many writers, consisted in throwing out the baby with the bath water. George Bancroft was complaining about this in 1830. "Our countrymen profess," he said,

"many of them, to strive to see how much of the learning of former ages may be dispensed with, rather than how much may be retained. In the absurdly boasted march of mind, they would propose to throw away the accumulated stores of preceding ages as useless baggage, forgetting that all knowledge is but an accumulation of facts and of reasonings based upon them. The rejection of the wisdom of the past does not awaken originality, but produces poverty of intellect by the loss of the materials on which originality should be exercised."

Such prudent words were drowned in a flood of criticism. The most important innovation to come out of all this was the so-called elective system, a reform that became in time — as reforms are wont to do — as excessive as the practice that it had been designed to change.

One of the early proposals of an elective or free-choice system of education was made by Wayland in 1850. "The present system of adjusting collegiate study to a fixed term of four years, or to any other term, must be abandoned," he declared, "and every student be allowed, within limits to be determined by statute, to carry on, at the same time, a greater or less number of courses as he may choose."

As such, Wayland's proposal did not go very far. But the idea was taken up by others, notably by President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard, its most vigorous supporter. His arguments for the adoption of the elective system have a strikingly modern tone.

"In education," he said in 1869, "the individual traits of different minds have not been sufficiently attended to." He conceded that "through all the period of boyhood the school studies should be representative; all the main fields of knowledge should be entered upon. But," he went on to say, "the young man of nineteen or twenty ought to know what he likes best and is most fit for." That was what the young man ought to do, and thereby he would find happiness. Society would also gain an advantage, since "for the state, it is variety, not uniformity, of intellectual product which is needful."

There is much to be said for these views, as few educators would fail to admit. The trouble was that enthusiastic followers of Eliot carried his program farther than he probably had intended it to go. Eliot thought that the student "of nineteen or twenty" was prepared to make elective choices; that age was gradually extended downward until, two generations later, high school freshmen were likely to be faced with a variety of "courses" and "programs" that was often bewildering. The freshman at Eliot's Harvard had no choice whatever; during the next three years about half his courses were prescribed. In the 1930s and 1940s even one year of prescribed courses was a rarity in U.S. colleges. Other restrictions on student choice in the Eliot program were also relaxed. "The liberty of choice of subject is wide," he had insisted in 1869, "but yet has very rigid limits. There is a certain framework which must be filled." Most important, perhaps, "the choice offered to the student does not lie between liberal studies and professional or utilitarian studies. All the studies which are open to him are liberal and disciplinary, not narrow or special."

Today's college graduates know how different education became in the years after Eliot's death. Seminars, once confined to graduate schools, moved down into colleges, first into the senior year and then to the junior and even the sophomore years; and a choice between several different kinds of science and mathematics courses, and between different languages and different historical periods, moved down into the high schools. In the 1930s, indeed, it seemed that the day of one prescribed program for all students had gone forever.

In education, however, as in other realms, yesterday's conservatism is likely to be today's liberalism. The years since World

War II have seen a return to many of the practices of the early nineteenth century — admittedly in a new guise. The need for scientists and engineers in the post-Sputnik period led, by circuitous but perhaps inevitable routes, to the injection of much more science and mathematics into the curriculum. They were injected earlier than they had ever been; but the notion that mathematics is a liberal art — that is, a kind of general knowledge useful in the study of many subjects — was a traditional one. At the same time, owing in part to curricular experiments at Columbia University, the University of Chicago, St. John's College, and elsewhere, the "great books" — usually in translation — found their way back into the curriculums of many colleges. Here again the new-old materials were injected earlier, so that the program of many high schools in the United States looked fascinatingly like a typical college program of a century and more ago.

These developments probably define a trend. Experiments in scattered school systems over the country — in Seattle, in Anaheim, California, in New York and Pennsylvania and Massachusetts — indicate that the old opposition between the classics, on the one hand, and the elective system, on the other hand, may have been resolved by the simple expedient of taking the best of both. Curriculums will probably never again be as hidebound as they were in 1800; nor, probably, will it be possible for a long time to come to "get through" college by electing "snap" courses that demand almost nothing of the student and leave him as empty as he was when he enrolled. Instead, a new policy may eventually prevail, that of adopting a kind of total elective system, marked by ungraded classes, team teaching, and independent study — combined with the use of "great books" all the way from junior high school through college.

Any such predictions must be taken with a grain of salt. Education, now the single largest affair (one hesitates to say business) of the country, has many mansions. Some of the old controversies still rage, and new ones are probably boiling under the surface, ready to explode. The equivalent of a new Sputnik could have unexpected effects — as could another depression or another world war.

5. MORAL EDUCATION: RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

THE TWOFOLD GOAL of the founders of William and Mary College — that youth be well educated to learning and good morals — has not been fully discussed here, for the second element in that formula, the inculcation of good morals, has so far been largely ignored. Of course, it cannot be ignored. Moral education, or the formation of character, or the instilling of good habits, has often been said to be a proper function and responsibility of American schools.

In the beginning it was taken for granted that making graduates virtuous as well as learned was the office of religion, and specifically of the Christian religion. In the seventeenth century, almost all teachers — at least in the better schools — were clergymen who conceived their main task to be the making of more clergymen, and even as late as 1850 the great majority of college presidents were men of the cloth. It is important to remember, and a little hard to do so in our secular times, how closely religion and education were related in early America.

The eighteenth century, the Age of Enlightenment, shook the schools loose, as it were, from the domination of the strict Calvinist divines who had controlled them during the previous century. But as late as 1800 no one really doubted the important scholastic role of religion. "Such is my veneration for every religion that reveals the at-

tributes of the Deity, or a future state of rewards and punishments," Benjamin Rush wrote in 1798, "that I had rather see the opinions of Confucius or Mohammed inculcated upon our youth than see them grow up wholly devoid of a system of religious principles. But the religion I mean to recommend in this place," he was quick to say, "is that of the New Testament." And he went on to declare that "a Christian . . . cannot fail of being a republican, for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy and the pageantry of a court. A Christian cannot fail of being useful to the republic, for his religion teaches him that no man 'liveth to himself.' "

Rufus Choate put the case colorfully in 1844. "I would not take the Bible from the schools," he wrote, "so long as a particle of Plymouth Rock was left, large enough to make a gun-flint of, or as long as its dust floated in the air." And John H. Vincent, defining the Chautauqua goal of education in 1886, let it be known that "the theory of Chautauqua is that life is one and that religion belongs everywhere. Our people, young and old, should consider educational advantages as so many religious opportunities. Every day should be sacred. The schoolhouse should be God's house."

This view, once almost a monopoly of Protestant divines, came in time to be the characteristic position of the Roman Catholics in America. As Bishop John Lancaster Spalding put it in 1895, "The Catholic view of the school question is as clearly defined as it is well known. It rests upon the general gound that man is created for a supernatural end, and that the church is the divinely appointed agency to help him to attain his supreme destiny. If education is a training for completeness of life, its primary element is the religious, for complete life is life in God."

The position has continued to be maintained by the Protestants, too, as we pointed out in the previous section. William Jennings Bryan's testimony at the Scopes trial, in Dayton, Tennessee, on July 16, 1925, is a case in point. Bryan, then an old man (he died five days after the trial was over), was a witness for the prosecution in the trial of John Scopes, the high school teacher who was accused of teaching the supposedly anti-religious Darwinian theory in his biology class. "The parents have a right to say," Bryan declared, "that no teacher paid by their money shall rob their children of faith in God and send them back to their homes skeptical, or infidels, or agnostics, or atheists." Scopes was convicted; and it was not until 1967 that Tennessee repealed the law under which he had been charged. It would not have been difficult to find many Americans in the 1960s who agreed with Bryan's statement of forty years before.

The opposition to including religious teaching in the public schools also goes far back in our history, finding its basis in documents such as the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom (of which Jefferson was the author) and in the First Amendment to the Constitution, which declared that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Report of the Rockfish Gap Commission on the Proposed University of Virginia of 1818 (Jefferson was once more involved) drew strength from this constitutional prohibition. "In conformity with the principles of our Constitution," the Report declared, "which places all sects of religion on an equal footing, with the jealousies of the different sects in guarding that equality from encroachment and surprise, and with the sentiments of the legislature in favor of freedom of religion manifested on former occasions, we have proposed no professor of divinity"; instead, the Report pro-

posed that the "professor of ethics" take all religious matters in his purview.

This interpretation of the meaning of the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion grew more forceful as the nineteenth century wore on. Thus, for example, Francis Ellingwood Abbot laid down "Nine Demands of Liberalism" in 1873, which included: "3. We demand that all public appropriations for sectarian educational and charitable institutions shall cease. 4. We demand that all religious services now sustained by the government shall be abolished; and especially that the use of the Bible in the public schools, whether ostensibly as a textbook or avowedly as a book of religious worship, shall be prohibited."

The controversy has come to a head a number of times since, but most notably, perhaps, in the early 1960s, when Mrs. Madelyn Murray, a private citizen of Baltimore, sued the Board of Education, demanding that school prayers be prohibited in the public schools of that city. Her argument, in effect, was that any religious observance in the schools, for example, the chanting of the Lord's Prayer in the morning, was in fact an intrusion on the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion. Mrs. Murray held that such religious observances would not only infringe the rights of Mohammedans, Hindus, Buddhists, and others — even if there were no such in the class — but they would also infringe the rights of an atheist, which she confessed to being herself.

The Supreme Court agreed with this argument, presented by Mrs. Murray and by other petitioners. Justice Tom C. Clark held that "nothing we have said here indicates that . . . study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistent with the First Amendment. But the exercises here do not fall into those categories. They are religious exercises, required by the states in violation of the command of the First Amendment that the government maintain strict neutrality, neither aiding nor opposing religion." And other members of the Court in separate opinions on this case made mention of what has been called "the core of the Court's position," originally stated by Justice Hugo Black in 1947 (*Everson* v. *Board of Education*) and repeatedly cited since.

"The 'establishment of religion' clause of the First Amendment means at least this," Justice Black said: "Neither a state nor the federal government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or nonattendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practise religion. Neither a state nor the federal government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa. In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect 'a wall of separation between church and state.' "

Admittedly, Black's position, as here stated, is an extreme one, even for the modern Court. The provision in the First Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting the making of laws concerning any establishment of religion derived at least in part from the fact that five of the original thirteen states did have an established religion and wished to prevent the federal government under the new Constitution from interfering with it. Nevertheless, the Court

has seemed in recent years to go farther in the direction of "a wall of separation" than anyone, perhaps, would have thought possible only a generation ago.

The import of such views as those of Black and Jefferson was recognized very early. A statement by the Roman Catholics of New York in 1840 made this clear. They objected to the principles promulgated by a "Public School Society" composed of "gentlemen of various sects, including even one or two Catholics." The Society had professed "to exclude sectarianism from their schools," which, the Catholics' statement conceded, was necessary to entitle them to public funds. But, the statement went on to declare, "if they do, as they profess, exclude sectarianism, then your petitioners contend that they exclude Christianity — and leave to the advantage of infidelity the tendencies which are given to the minds of youth by the influence of this feature and pretension of their system."

The question, in short, may be put thus: If, as many hold, the only effective way to instill good morals into youth, and to make them virtuous citizens, is through religion, then is there any way, without infringing the basic constitutional right to freedom of religion, to put religion back into the schools, and thereby regain the moral advantages that this once was supposed to have conferred? On the whole, most Protestant leaders, and even some Catholics, have said that the answer to the question is no. Others have disagreed, for example Senator Everett M. Dirksen of Illinois, who proposed an amendment to the Constitution making school prayers legal, although with careful restrictions on their use. The amendment had little chance of passage (and in fact was defeated), but one did not have to support it to recognize that the principle of the separation of church and state has sometimes been carried to ridiculous extremes in America's schools and colleges. Thus most state universities still prohibit the study even of comparative religion; and until very recently no religion, except that of the seventeenth-century Puritans, was studied in history courses in any U.S. colleges except those that were church-supported. [For another treatment of some of the matters discussed in this section, see Ch. 22: RELIGION.]

6. WHO SHALL PAY FOR EDUCATION? THE ISSUE OF SEGREGATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

THAT THE PUBLIC should support the education of youth was a proposition that was early concurred in by the majority of Americans. "The necessary expense must . . . be submitted to without reluctance," said Samuel Harrison Smith in 1796, for, "when the greatness of the object is correctly estimated and truly felt, all prejudices ought at once to be annihilated." It was William Plumer's contention in 1816 that "there is no system of government where the general diffusion of knowledge is so necessary as in a republic," and he concluded from this that it is therefore not less the duty than the interest of the state to patronize and support the cause of education. Archbishop John Ireland was in full agreement in 1890. "As things are," he said, "tens of thousands of children will not be instructed if parents solely remain in charge of the duty. The state must come forward as an agent of instruction; else ignorance will prevail." And he added that "no tax is more legitimate than that which is levied in order to dispel mental darkness and build up within the nation's bosom intelligent manhood and womanhood."

In recent times, few if any could be found to disagree with the basic principle underlying such statements — the principle, stated by Mann in his Tenth Annual Re-

Courtesy, Edward Kuekes, Cleveland "Plain Dealer"

"The key to the situation," 1955

port (1846), that wealth is the creation of society, and therefore that the society's wealth is obliged to support and foster social well-being, including education. At the same time, however, disputes have occurred regarding two questions. Given that the public should provide the funds (or most of the funds) for education, then what kind of public funds should these be — local, state, or national? And — a closely allied question — given once more that the public should support education, then what sort of degree of control should it have over the education that it supports?

Education traditionally has been the responsibility of local governments — a large proportion of school funds is still drawn directly from the localities that the schools serve — and so the main purport of the first question has revolved around the proper role of the state governments and, especially, the federal government in this matter.

The debate about federal support of education is lively at the moment, but many people are not aware of how active the national government has been throughout our history. Thus the Northwest Ordinance of 1785, for example, reserved one section of every township for the endowment of schools within that township, an action that may have had more effect than all of the modern programs put together. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 made similar provisions; and the Morrill Act of 1862 provided for grants of federal land to each state for the establishment of colleges specializing in agriculture and mechanical arts — hence the so-called land-grant colleges that grew into the great state universities of today. At the end of 1964, there were sixty-seven land-grant colleges in the fifty states and Puerto Rico.

Other federal measures in support of education include the establishment in 1867 of an independent federal Department of Education, later (in 1929) renamed the U.S. Office of Education, and attaining Cabinet rank and status with the inclusion of its functions under those of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in 1953. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 set up the first program of federal grants-in-aid for vocational education, and the 1930s saw various federal emergency agencies set up to help educational activities as part of the relief program. The Lanham Act of 1940 authorized federal aid to local governments for school construction, and the 1944 GI Bill enabled many thousands of returning veterans to receive more schooling than they could otherwise have afforded. Federal aid to education, then, is far from being new; and, in such forms as the GI Bill, is absolutely noncontroversial.

Since World War II, the pace of such federal activities has quickened. All told, between the years 1945 and 1965, the national government spent over $50 billion on educational programs of one kind or another. Significant events during this period includ-

ed the National School Lunch Act of 1946, which authorized aid in the form of funds and food to both public and nonprofit private schools; the Agricultural Act of 1954, which authorized the Commodity Credit Corp. to spend up to $50 million a year for school milk programs; two 1950 laws that authorized federal grants to areas "impacted" by tax-free federal property and installations, Indian reservations, or government contractors; the 1950 Housing Act, which authorized fifty-year, low-interest government loans to both public and private colleges and universities for dormitory construction; and the establishment in 1950 of the National Science Foundation, to promote scientific research and the education of future scientists. (The National Humanities Foundation was established in 1965, with similar aims in its own field.)

Of greatest import, perhaps, was the passage in 1958 of the National Defense Education Act, which authorized expenditures of more than $1.5 billion in that year; similar bills have been passed in subsequent years, providing for even greater expenditures. In addition, other federal programs were either initiated or expanded under the administrations of Kennedy and Johnson.

Recently, serious objections to such aid have been raised. They are based on two main grounds. The first involves the question of whether federal aid for school construction and for the purchase of textbooks and the busing of students, when it is applied, as it has been applied, to parochial and other private school students, violates the First Amendment guarantees of civil freedom. The arguments in this dispute are similar to those in the issue about religion in the public schools, and need not be explored here.

The other ground of the recent objections to federal and even state aid to education involves the important question of whether support for education carries with it control and direction of the kind of education offered — and, even more essential, of the students for whom the education will be provided. Stated simply, shall a community be forced, because it accepts aid, to provide education for the children of all of its members in the same way and in the same place?

The argument is complex and has deep roots in American history. Incidents occurred as early as 1848, when Harvard College proposed to admit a Negro student. President Edward Everett replied to protests against this action by saying that "if this boy passes the examinations, he will be admitted; and if the white students choose to withdraw, all the income of the college will be devoted to his education." Harvard was of course a privately supported institution; but with the victory of the North in the Civil War, and the consequent prohibition of slavery, the question of Negro public education came to the fore. (The teaching of slaves to read and write had been forbidden by law in most Southern states before the war.)

The first resolution of the problem was the establishment, in both Northern and Southern communities, of "separate but equal" educational facilities for Negro children. The legality of this was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* (1896), under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. A half century later, however, the Court changed its mind, basing its reversal on sociological as well as constitutional grounds — including the same Fourteenth Amendment. "We come then to the question presented," Chief Justice Earl Warren declared for a unanimous Court on May 17, 1954: "Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other 'tangible' factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe

Courtesy, Vaughn Shoemaker, "Chicago's American"
"Mary had a little 'lamb'," 1965

that it does. . . . We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

The decision was met by indignant outcries in the South and, as it later developed, by strong though less vocal opposition in the North. Some of the indignation was obviously politically motivated, but there were also some writers who presented reasoned arguments against school integration, notably Herbert Ravenel Sass, a Charlestonian whose essay "Mixed Schools and Mixed Blood" appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* for November 1956. The essay presented the "racial" reasons for the opposition on the part of many conservative Southerners to integration. The essay also argued the South's view that education was purely a local matter and thus not subject to constitutional requirements and prohibitions. In fact, however, the Court, as it made even clearer in later decisions, did not dispute that education was a local matter; even if that were so, the Court was saying, the Fourteenth Amendment, guaranteeing all citizens the "equal protection of the laws," applied.

The two related questions that are being discussed here — the question of what level of government shall be responsible for the support of schools and the question of whether the state and national governments shall have a say about what kind of education is offered to whom — were brought even more closely together than they had been before by the Court's decisions of 1954 and after and by arguments like those of Sass. Additional actions of Congress and of the Justice Department under Robert F. Kennedy, Nicholas Katzenbach, and Ramsey Clark seemed to exacerbate the problem even more. The attorney general was given the right under laws passed during the administration of President Johnson to withhold federal aid from schools that had not integrated with the "deliberate speed" for which the Court had called. Few if any actions were taken under these laws, but their threat hardened resistance, which, combined with popular dismay at the civic disturbances in many Northern cities in the "long, hot summers" of 1965, 1966, and 1967, seemed to provide grounds for the prediction, widely made, that the school integration movement would slow down rather than speed up in the years ahead. Whether or not that occurs, however, most observers seem to feel that the general trend toward greater state and federal aid to education, and also toward greater equalization of educational opportunities for all students, both white and black, will probably continue. [For a more extensive discussion of Negro segregation, see Ch. 12: MINORITIES.]

7. "HIGHER" EDUCATION IN AMERICA

EVER SINCE QUINTILIAN took education out of the hands of the Roman *paterfamilias* and put it into the service of Emperor Vespasian

with an eye to restoring the virtues of the old Roman citizens, education in the West has been inevitably and deeply political. This has been especially true in America, where constant change — the westering experience, the destruction of an elite leadership by an equalitarian ideology, the sudden transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, the assimilation of millions of immigrants — has attenuated traditional forms of social control. Scholars like Bernard Bailyn (*Education in the Forming of American Society,* 1960) and Lawrence Cremin (*The Transformation of the School,* 1964) have recently reminded us that in America education has been one of the chief institutions to maintain continuity over generations and at the same time to accommodate change. The major moments in the history of American higher education — higher education *in a democracy* — can therefore be described as the encroachment of these paired and sometimes conflicting needs on higher and higher levels of education.

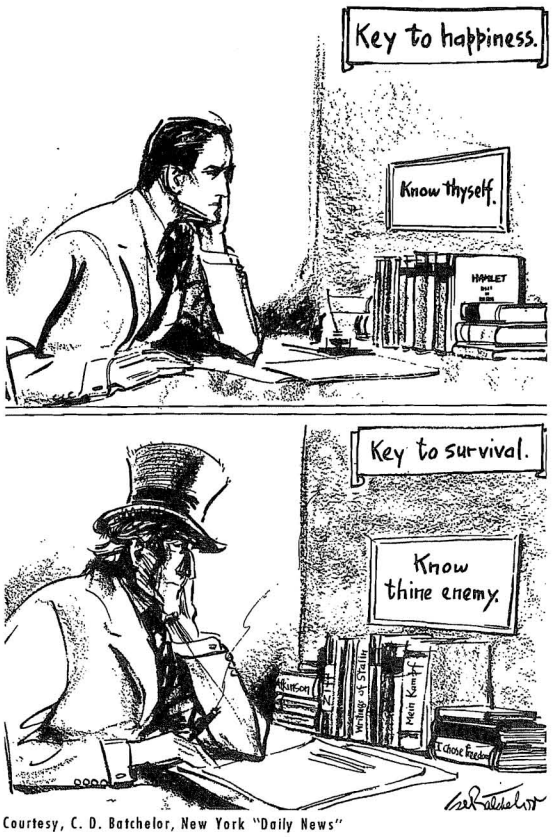
Thus, for example, the agitation for common, public, state-supported schools in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s came from two opposed social groups. One group was the workers, who saw education for an economic and social elite as a form of discrimination that ran counter to their equalitarian ideals. Nearly every working-class movement in the early nineteenth century had a strong education "plank." The other group, opposed to the workers on almost every other issue, was the men of property, old Federalists and new Whigs, who distrusted the bumptious democracy of Jackson's Democratic Party and who wanted some kind of restraining influence built into society. They could not deny the common man the suffrage, so they had to support an educational system that might make that man less common and more respectful of the rights of property and of class.

Horace Mann made brilliant use of the support of both of these social groups in his efforts to establish common schools in Massachusetts. But Mann's insight was more than merely political. He saw that the ideal of American society was a self-reliant, self-directed, intelligent, and virtuous citizenry, liberated from tradition and from external restraints, but also capable of handling such freedom. In his view, only a system of common schools could produce such a society.

Mann's efforts were devoted to the common school, what we now call the grade school level. The next historical moment came at the end of the nineteenth century, when the growing importance of the high school can be seen as a measure of the decline of the old apprenticeship systems and customary ways of training labor for local, neighborhood crafts. These old ways were destroyed by the new industrialism, which led to the establishment of high schools everywhere. As before, the new schools were intended both to conserve traditional social usages and to accommodate innovations.

The push and pull of social change was largely restricted to the grade and high school levels until the twentieth century, but in recent years it has washed over the colleges and universities. In part this is because, as President Johnson put it in 1966 (thereby stating one definition or version of democracy), education is a right, not a privilege, and everybody should have as much of it as he wants and can take. This might explain the recent very great increase in the number of college students, but it does not really go to the heart of the problem.

The heart of the problem is seen when it is recognized that here, as before, education must try to conserve as well as to make allowance for change. Higher education in the twentieth century is immensely important because it is now fair to say that intelligence, skill, and knowledge have become the chief sources of economic growth and development. In addition to this economic fact, which derives from the increasingly complex and specialized character of the



Courtesy, C. D. Batchelor, New York "Daily News"

world in which we live, there is the related social fact that one's position in our open and "classless" society derives largely from one's educational level.

At the same time, there persists the old democratic ideal that education ought to create good and virtuous citizens and not just trained functionaries capable of filling economic and social roles. The problems raised by this perennial ideal were pointed out by Walter Lippmann in an article in the *New Republic* in 1966. "The proposition with which I am starting is that as men become modern men," Lippmann wrote, "they are emancipated and thus deprived of the guidance and support of traditional and customary authority. Because of this, there has fallen to the universities a unique, indispensable, and capital function in the intellectual and spiritual life of modern society." This function, as he put it, is to fill "the modern void." "The thesis which I am putting to you is that the modern void, which results from the vast and intricate process of emancipation and rationalization, must be filled, and that the universities must fill the void because they alone can fill it." And Lippmann added that "it is a high destiny. But it must be accepted and it must be realized."

If this analysis is correct, then the university — higher education in general — is being asked at the present time to accept the responsibility for continuing economic growth, for maintaining cultural authority and order, and for investigating and producing the conditions for radical social progress. It is a large order, and recently the universities have shown signs — notably in the troubles in institutions such as the University of California at Berkeley — that they are breaking under the strain.

The troubles at Berkeley and at other U.S. universities are interesting because they illustrate the point being made here. The students of the country are in revolt against old ways and are feeling their political oats as they have never done before in our history. To some extent, they are merely repeating the experience of college and university students in other lands, who have been a potent political force for many years. But in other respects American students are ahead of, rather than behind, the rest of the world. They are demanding what many Americans have demanded for two centuries, a good society — a society based not on economic and political interest but on the rights of man. They are demanding peace, justice, and equality; like so many of their countrymen before them, they want to pursue happiness in their own way, and they want their education to help them find it. And many adults, including some of their professors, agree with them.

Others, who also include teachers and professors in their number, are distressed by the student rebellion that seems to be

sweeping over the land. (It may have reached its apogee at Columbia in 1968, and may now be moving in the opposite direction.) These, not all of them older and some of them certainly not wiser, point to the necessity, even in a time of radical change, of conserving the best of the old along with the best of the new. The auspices are not altogether good. Both the common school and the high school may be said to have foundered under the pressures and responsibilities to which they were exposed; the programs of study of both seem to us now to have been a lamentable falling-off from the high ideals that lay behind them. The same thing may happen to the American university in the coming years. [For a different view of some of the matters discussed here, see Ch. 24: PROGRESS.]

Courtesy, Joseph Parrish, "The Chicago Tribune"
"By another name", 1967

8. EDUCATION IN AMERICA: CULTURAL ASSIMILATION AND CHANGE

FROM THE BEGINNING, America has suffered — or felt that it suffered — a special and peculiar loneliness in the world. Emigrés from their Old Home, generation after generation of Americans came to a New Home where, their social and cultural roots severed, they faced a vast and, for two centuries, a largely unknown land. Thus the Americans have been put upon their own resources in a way that few groups of human beings ever have been, and in a way that almost no other large group has been during the modern era.

Americans have reacted by emphasizing, among other things, the importance and value of education. The colonists knew that their chances of survival, which they probably thought were not very good in any event, would be very much worse if they did not immediately establish the best possible schools for their children. There was, for the first arrivals, a pragmatic necessity for education; the colony would soon die out if it had to depend for key personnel on the mother country.

But there was more than a mere pragmatic necessity for education. The arts of survival might be gained by imitation and experience; a primitive level of existence can be maintained without any system of formal schooling. But the firstcomers to this land wanted more than that. They had been motivated to go to America by political and cultural ideas that they considered to be of first importance, and they wanted these carried on to later generations. And they wanted knowledge not only not to be lost but also to advance. They hoped that in this new land the human race could discover what people in the old world had either forgotten or had never known.

As the country grew and prospered, the fundamental aims of education of the earliest arrivals remained unchanged, although other aims were added to them. The first task of the schools was to fit pupils for life in the society that they would, in the course of nature, join — by training in the necessary common skills, such as the traditional three Rs; and by education (if such a distinction can properly be made), or the development of individual qualities both for personal satisfaction and for work considered useful to the society as a whole.

However, American schools had — and still have — two other functions, not shared by schools in other societies. All schools share the common institutional function and aim of fitting pupils for their adult roles as citizens. But American schools have perhaps taken this task more seriously than have schools in other countries, recognizing, as they have, for nearly two centuries, that American boys and girls will grow up to be *active* citizens, not merely passive ones. Thus the educational system has tended to expand and become more complex as the franchise has been extended.

Furthermore — the point was discussed with eloquence by Englishman Denis Brogan in his *American Character* (1944) — American schools also had the function of assimilating the children of aliens and newcomers, children whose parents, if not the children themselves, were foreign to the common national culture. This was of first importance for a century, although the period of assimilation of the immigrant groups is now pretty much in the past. Now the problem is the assimilation of minority groups, primarily the Negro and his children; and here again the extension of public schooling and of the franchise are more or less in step. Negroes, of course, have been in America for a long time, but the problem of assimilating them to the common culture was not really confronted on a large scale or as a general preoccupation until after World War I.

The necessity for doing so has long been realized by some if not by all. More than a century ago, before the Civil War, when most of the Negroes in the country were slaves and enjoyed no public educational privileges at all, Negroes in the North were usually educated in separate, "equal" schools, even in Boston, that "citadel of freedom." A case arose in 1849 when a Negro child, aged five years old, sued the Boston Board of Education for the right to attend a white public school instead of an "African" school that was much farther from her home. She and her parents were able to obtain the services of Charles Sumner, the eminent Abolitionist and later the Civil War senator from Massachusetts, to argue her case before the court. In the process, Sumner delivered one of the great speeches against Negro segregation in our history. But he also — and that is the point here — discussed the need for the assimilation of all citizens into a common culture by means of common schools.

"The whole system of common schools suffers," he declared, by segregation of any kind. "It is a narrow perception of their high aim which teaches that they are merely to furnish an equal amount of knowledge to all, and therefore, provided all be taught, it is of little consequence where and in what company. The law contemplates not only that all shall be taught, but that *all* shall be taught *together.* They are not only to receive equal quantities of knowledge, but all are to receive it in the same way. . . . The school is the little world where the child is trained for the larger world of life. It is the microcosm preparatory to the macrocosm, and therefore it must cherish and develop the virtues and the sympathies needed in the larger world. And since, according to our institutions, all classes, without distinction of color, meet in the performance of civil

duties, so should they all, without distinction of color, meet in the school, beginning there those relations of Equality which the Constitution and Laws promise to all."

We have spoken in the above of a "common national culture," to which alien groups had to be assimilated. It should be recognized, however, that the schools also had the task of *creating* such a culture, which at the beginning did not exist, and perhaps does not yet exist. In this regard, it can be noted that other countries have also faced the problem of creating a homogeneous culture — most notably India at the present time and Germany a century or more ago. However, such acculturation does not always work, and it has seldom worked as well as it has in this country. The enforced programs, first of Russification, then of Germanification, and then of Russification again, in Poland in this century were far from voluntary and were resisted. The contemporary world shows many other examples of such government programs, planned and administered by a central authority, that do not work and that are the cause of much distress. In America acculturation *has* worked, and what is more it has been carried out without a centralized school administration or policy.

With regard to the preparation of young people for active citizenship, it should be recognized that this is a far cry from the education of a "ruling elite" as this has been attempted in other countries. Ideally, all citizens are rulers in America; and so all must be prepared as well as any. One result is the active programs of student government that operate in many U.S. schools, as far down as the elementary school level. All students are expected to become — or at least are thought of as potentially becoming — not only voters but also officeholders, not only law-abiding citizens who perform a useful economic function but also active political citizens who make their own laws and create their own world.

Once the problem of assimilating the Negroes into the common culture has been solved, as solved it almost certainly will be within the next generation or two, where will the schools turn? What new goals will they adopt, and what new functions and tasks will they undertake? One thing that could happen is that these two separate goals — assimilation or acculturation on the one hand, and preparation for active citizenship, on the other hand — will become less distinct. If an adequate portion of social resources is made over to the schools — this is a large if, but in America, at least, it is more than a pious hope — then the development of a higher culture by means of education may turn out to be the highest form of training for citizenship, in the sense both of performance of universal duties and the differentiation of the contributions to the culture that each individual will want, and be able, to make. This indeed would be a very paradise — but is it any more than the American common school has always implicitly promised, and still promises today? [For further discussion of some of the subjects touched on in this section, see Chs. 10: PLURALISM and 11: INDIVIDUALISM.]

The foregoing discussion has explored some of the perennial disputes and controversies in the history of American education. Controversies are easy to talk about; and educational controversies in this country have been particularly vocal. Nevertheless, the impression should not be left that education in our country has been only a series of disputes. It has also been a great success.

A great many Americans have gained an education of one sort or another in the last two centuries. Sometimes the education was good and sometimes it was very bad; but for a hundred years at least, America has probably educated a higher proportion of its

citizens well than any country on earth. The agency for this success is the common school, taken in its most general meaning of schooling for *all* from the lowest level to the highest to which *any* may aspire. The common school, in this sense, is not yet a reality, but it is not wholly unreasonable to expect that it will some day be a reality, and it is clear that if it ever does become so, it will become so here. In any event, the dream is American, and it is a glittering one. As Horace Mann was wont to say — the words are inscribed on the walls of many a public school — "The Common School is the greatest discovery ever made by man."

We in this country are sometimes unable to see our own achievements in the proper light. To understand the story of American education it is perhaps necessary to put ourselves in the place of others, of outsiders, who for more than a century have envied us not only our wealth and power but also our political and social principles. American education has many faults; it has always had them, and it will continue to have them. These faults are very clear and very important. We must try to correct them. But some words of Mary Antin in 1912, who, like millions of others, came to this country before the turn of the century, may help to remind us of how others have seen us, and still see us, in this regard.

"Education was free," she wrote in *The Promised Land.* "That subject my father had written about repeatedly, as comprising his chief hope for us children, the essence of American opportunity, the treasure that no thief could touch, not even misfortune or poverty. It was the one thing that he was able to promise us when he sent for us; surer, safer than bread or shelter. On our second day I was thrilled with the realization of what this freedom of education meant. A little girl from across the alley came and offered to conduct us to school. My father was out, but we five between us had a few words of English by this time. We knew the word 'school.' We understood. This child, who had never seen us till yesterday, who could not pronounce our names, who was not much better dressed than we, was able to offer us the freedom of the schools of Boston! No application made, no questions asked, no examinations, rulings, exclusions; no machinations, no fees. The doors stood open for every one of us. The smallest child could show us the way."