

RETOOLING THE SCHOOL: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE ORIGINS OF  
FEDERAL FUNDING FOR LOCAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that the beginnings of federal funding for local public schooling are rooted in the popular vocational education reform movement, which broke across the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as an initiative that expressed discontent with the academic status quo of the American high school. To solve perceived educational, social, industrial, agricultural, and economic problems, vocational promoters from education, business, manufacturing, labor, and politics obtained federal dollars to introduce and maintain pragmatic courses in the curriculum. This work explores how, beginning with the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, the federal role expanded in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, overcoming generations of opposition to federal involvement in K-12 public classrooms. It demonstrates that the vocational education initiative changed the core purpose of schooling for young people by pinning teaching and learning to the goal of creating human capital to benefit the American economy and national security. It argues that the elements of the successful vocational education movement—broad criticism of public education’s shortcomings, the perception that the United States is vulnerable to the threat of foreign economic and political competition, and proposals for repairing the nation’s school system through curricular reform attached to high-stakes testing—were echoed in subsequent school reform initiatives, including the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA). This dissertation concludes by contending that the major traits characteristic of the early vocational education reform movement are found in modern school reform initiatives.

To Tenten, who believed,  
and to our parents, who sacrificed for our education.

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## Introduction

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, federal funding for elementary and secondary public education is a given fact. Local schools are accustomed to receiving federal money coupled with regulations to support various types of general and specialized education. Without money from Washington, some districts would have to make uncomfortable cuts in programs and services. In 2011 the federal government spent nearly \$79 billion on K-12 public education, covering about 12% of the total cost of operating the nation's far-flung community-based school system. In some states, the federal government paid for over 80% of the cost of maintaining public schools. A large Washington bureaucracy, the U.S. Department of Education, oversees federal outlays and ensures that taxpayers' money is being spent effectively and as intended. In some cases, federal funding measures are attached to standardized test results, as in the case of the No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top programs.

Money from the central government for public education has become so critical for elementary and secondary schools that policymakers lobby Congress and the Department of Education for such aid and protest when federal dollars are reduced or denied. Politicians frequently make federal funding a plank in their election platforms, often viewing the central purpose of education as the preparation of youth to participate in the nation's economy in order to secure American leadership in the world marketplace and to maintain national security.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts: School Year 2010–11 (Fiscal Year 2011)*, Figure 1: "Public school system revenues for elementary and secondary education, by funding source and year: Fiscal year 2010–2011," (Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics, Department of Education, 2013), 5; *Digest of Statistics*, Table 203: "Revenues for public elementary and secondary schools, by source and state or jurisdiction: 2009-10", National Center for Educational Statistics, accessed at [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12\\_203.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_203.asp). On public education and the economy, President Barack Obama has regularly reiterated his view that education and participation in the economy are unavoidably connected: "In today's global economy, a high-quality education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite to success. Because economic progress and educational achievement are inextricably linked, educating every American student to graduate from high school prepared for college and for a career is a national imperative."

This dissertation will explore the beginnings of federal funding in public schooling as rooted in vocational education and examine how this federal role expanded through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Four questions guide the scope of this work.

1. What was the role of lawmakers, government, and public officials in driving the vocational education debate that would eventually provide federal funding of public elementary and secondary education?
2. How did individuals, groups, and organizations outside the government influence the vocational education debate and the federal role in public K-12 education?
3. What were the tensions around the purposes and structures of public education and the federal vs. state role?
4. From the beginning of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917, which provided federal funding to public secondary schools, what is the legacy of vocational education in contemporary public school policy?

The following chapters examine how and why the first federal funding efforts for public schools began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the Smith-Hughes Act (1917) and how inextricably linking schooling both to the nation's economic progress and its national defense enabled its persistence into modern times.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, many parents, teachers, policymakers, and students *expect* federal aid for their local schools. Yet a century ago no one had this expectation because the federal government did not pay for K-12 public schooling. There were no federal grants below the university level—no money for general or special education, for school construction, feeding programs, teachers' salaries, or after-school activities. Funding was left entirely to state and local entities, most of whose policymakers did not want Washington poking its fingers into

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*EDUCATION: Knowledge and Skills for the Jobs of the Future*, (Washington, DC: The White House, 2014), accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12>.



community school affairs. Interestingly, however, there was interest in public funding for roads and infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

This work argues that the federal appropriations that are so ubiquitous in modern times began with a reform movement whose history has been overshadowed by scholarly exploration of general education: the vocational education reform initiative, a popular Progressive schooling idea that spread across the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Like many school reform enterprises, vocational education's advocates presented it as a cure-all for the ills of a public school system that was deemed to be in crisis—out of step with the socioeconomic demands of a modern industrializing and urbanizing society whose economy had become the largest and most powerful in the world.

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, vocational education occupies a quiet space in the nation's public high school. Few, if any, policymakers challenge its legitimacy. Now labeled Career/Technical Education (CTE), it is an accepted feature of the modern public secondary school curriculum: nearly 90% of America's high schools offer CTE courses.<sup>3</sup> However, its placid status in modern times masks a past of controversial national debate over the core purposes of education.

Vocational education warrants additional historical attention because it was the first example of federal funding for local public schools on a national level. This dissertation shows how it was the leading wedge of federal involvement and policymaking in community schooling that so characterizes public education in modern times. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Congress had set aside public lands to indirectly support common schools and paid for local schools in individual territories. Federal education money was terminated when a territory earned statehood. The

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<sup>3</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/95024-2.asp>

following chapters illustrate that it was not until the Smith-Hughes Act established federal appropriations for vocational training in public high schools in 1917 that the central government paid for local public schooling in the individual states. Smith-Hughes legislation set patterns for future school reform initiatives and opened the floodgates for federal involvement in the community schoolhouse that expanded throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and persists in the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Along with the unprecedented funding under the Smith-Hughes Act came regulations and accountability measures written by Washington bureaucrats. Until 1917, all curriculum decisions, regulations, and accountability guidelines had been left entirely to the individual states in concert with local school districts. The vocational education reform movement that broke out in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and peaked in the 1920s formed the leading wedge that opened the door to increased funding and regulatory oversight so common in contemporary public schools.

I also argue that the vocational movement also changed the core purpose of education. Where 19<sup>th</sup>-century common schools emphasized Protestant morality while stressing patriotism and democratic civic responsibility, the vocational movement pivoted the purpose of education toward preparation of youth to participate in the world's largest economy and toward strengthening national defense. It also enhanced the traditional high school academic curriculum by introducing pragmatic courses that were aimed at keeping academically disinclined students in high school. Civic responsibility certainly remained a component of education, but after 1917 it was rivaled by economic and national security emphases. As I will demonstrate, the occupational reform movement of the Progressive era represents an important watershed in educational history that shaped subsequent school reform initiatives as well as the language politicians and policymakers continued to use throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century when discussing the role of education in the lives of American youth.

A range of historians have investigated the vocational movement and have produced thoughtful, thorough, and perceptive analyses of its philosophy, key leaders, and legislative triumphs. This work aims to extend the historical record of vocational reform by arguing that it was the first reform to obtain federal funding and that, as such, it established a pattern of traits that marked later reforms.

I seek to expand the historical narrative by tracing the history of attempts to secure federal funding for public schools from the Constitutional Convention of 1787 into repeated efforts to obtain federal support for local schools throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in the successful passage of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, the first instance of the central government's fiscal support of local public schools. This legislative event not only enabled money to flow from Washington into state and local school coffers, it also introduced regulations, lines of accountability, and a measure of federal oversight. These elements, which are taken for granted in K-12 education in modern times, were unknown before America's entry into World War I.

This dissertation demonstrates how before the 1917 Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act changed the calculus of school funding and involved the federal government in local classroom instruction, states and communities rigorously protected their prerogative to control the schools. Their spirited guardianship was successful despite the efforts of several members of Congress and educational organizations to persuade federal lawmakers to help underwrite the costs of schooling the nation's youth. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the power of the nationwide vocational education reform movement that dominated school debates overwhelmed a long tradition of states' rights opposition to federal school aid and launched a new tradition of Washington largesse toward public education that persists in modern times.

Since the federal funding of local schools got underway in 1917, it has never stopped. The pattern of federal funding has taken on a shape something like this: a crisis in education occurs or is thought to be unfolding; appeals are made to the federal government to assist with creating and paying for a program; funding for specially designed programs to alleviate the crisis is offered on a temporary basis in connection with regulations and accountability; the newly funded programs are carried out through state education offices and school districts; local, state, and federal officials evaluate the results using standardized tests and empirical inventories; programs are, in many cases, renewed beyond their original termination date whether they are successful or not. This paradigm was established by the Smith-Hughes Act, which was renewed several times beyond its original termination date of 1926, and which lives on in modern times through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act that currently provides over \$1.1 billion to local public high schools. Early vocational education reform advocates helped perpetuate the pattern of renewable funding and expanded regulatory oversight.<sup>4</sup>

### **Summary of the Chapters**

Chapter one traces the history of failed attempts to obtain federal money for public schools from the early Republic through the Civil War, continues with the establishment of the U.S. Office of Education in 1867, and culminates with energetic efforts of Senators and Representatives to convince Congress to pay for community based schools in the 1870s and 1880s. As early as the 1780s, government leaders and citizen observers outside government launched efforts to persuade Congress to pay out funds for local schooling. For the next 130

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<sup>4</sup> *Career, Technical, and Adult Education Fiscal Year 2015 Request*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2014), O-5.

years, various members of Congress and individual citizens tried over and over again to wrest money from the federal fist to support education, but the fist remained closed. States' rights, budget concerns, and fears of federal officials overstepping the authority of the central government as envisioned by the Founders remained obstacles to securing federal money for elementary and high schools.

Chapter two examines the growth and characteristics of the public high school at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and contextualizes the continuing drive toward obtaining federal funding in the ethos of the Progressive reform era. It argues that the timing and rationale for Congressional grants for high school vocational courses matched the priorities and needs of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in a way those earlier efforts to secure federal largesse had not been able to do. I use Richard Hofstadter's interpretive framework of the complex Progressive impulse that characterized the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in which so many middling and upper class reformers were swept up. The atmosphere of American society and the priorities of those who were committed to the improvement of life—especially for the disadvantaged and immigrant classes—helped set the stage for Progressive vocational reformers to make a clear and compelling case for federal funding to improve public high schools. Riding the Progressive wave of enthusiasm for straightforward solutions to nagging social problems, vocationalists were able to craft clear, efficient, pragmatic, and digestible arguments that suited Washington lawmakers' political palettes and convinced them to pay for educational change by underwriting occupational training curricula. Their rationale for federal funding, expressed through professional organizations and intense lobbying, made sense to the White House and Congress.

Chapter three traces the evolution of vocational education from its beginnings as “manual training” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to its efforts to become professionalized as “vocational

education” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter demonstrates how a European concept was adapted to American needs beginning in the 1870s and how hard vocationalists fought to gain acceptance for hand-work training alongside the traditional academic high school curriculum. The chapter argues that public education was tagged for the first time as a tool to serve the American economy. Schooling was harnessed to human capital and economics via the argument that manual training would prepare youth to enter the job market. Students would be trained not only for an occupation, but also to make contributions to the American economy that by the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the largest in the world. Further, manual training classes would increase high school retention rates, keep youth off the streets, and steer them away from dead-end jobs. After the breakdown of the long-lived apprentice system that dominated the practice of the mechanical arts, the high school would now equip youth to work in offices, shops, and factories in the expanding consumerist and industrial landscape.

Chapter four probes the intellectual history of the vocational reform movement through national debates that broke out among educators and lay observers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as policymakers contemplated the role of occupational education in the high school. While vocational educators obtained federal funding for schools below the university level for the first time, their road to victory was filled with tension and obstacles. On one side of the debate over vocational education stood educators who believed that efficient schooling meant training children and youth to assume their proper roles in society as adults. Thinkers such as David Snedden and Charles Prosser aimed to use narrowly conceived vocational education to efficiently equip students to enter occupations for which they were best suited. Objective testing methods and guidance counseling would send pupils into the tracks that offered the best fit. At the same time, a collection of nationally appreciated critics challenged the ideas of vocational

education enthusiasts. John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Anna Julia Cooper were among those faultfinders who believed that vocational education posed the danger of enrolling students in preconceived tracks, thereby funneling them into jobs based on socioeconomic class rather than on free choice. The chapter also shows that vocational determinism among African American educators was controversial. Booker T. Washington operated the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and trained African American students in trades that Southern society—if not the entire nation—expected them to enter. His model was followed by a number of Black educators, most notably by Nannie Helen Burroughs in Washington, DC. For Washington and Burroughs, the main purpose of education for African Americans was to prepare students for the types of work that were “acceptable” for Blacks to enter. W.E.B. DuBois was a vocal critic of any vocational determinism. He attacked Washington’s approach to education as a capitulation to White vocational expectations.

Chapter five demonstrates how traits that characterized the successful vocational education reform initiative reverberated in 20<sup>th</sup> century school reform movements. These reform movement markers included the development of human capital theory, envisioning schooling as an individual investment in skills for the economy and preparation for adult work, viewing federal grants to public education as ways to expand the economy and spur economic growth. It also saw schooling as a way to combat national security crises through industrial and vocational training with the persistence of federally supported programs despite serious problems. Although there are numerous examples of this legacy—particularly the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the No Child Left Behind Initiative, and the Race to the Top program—this chapter explores the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA) as an example of this phenomenon as it played out during the Cold War era.

Before considering these issues in the chapters that follow, a historiography of vocational education and its ties to federal funding will help establish how this aspect of public secondary schooling has been interpreted by scholars as well as the place this dissertation seeks to occupy in it.

### **Historiography**

The historiography of the beginning of federal funding for local public schools and its relationship to the vocational education movement establishes a context for exploring how this dissertation proposes to supplement and extend this field of study. Tracing the history of Washington's struggle with the question of whether or not to appropriate money to support local schooling, recognition that vocational education was the first grant made to K-12 public education by the central government, and viewing the vocational movement as a paradigm for future national school reforms stretches the narrative beyond current historiographic boundaries.

Until the 1970s, vocational education history was a niche topic. Before that period, institutional narratives and liberal-progressive treatments dominated the field. The most widely used institutional history was Charles A. Bennett's massive *History of Manual and Industrial Education, 1870 to 1917*, published in 1926. The heavy hitters in educational history following World War II—Bernard Bailyn, Lawrence Cremin, Merle Curti, and R. Freeman Butts—focused their attention on *general* education with only passing references to the vocational reform movement. They said little about its accomplishments and did not reference it as a fulcrum point in the history of federal involvement in K-12 public education. Doctoral students between 1930 and 1960 produced a scant thirteen dissertations on the history of vocational education, far fewer than histories of general education. Most of those dissertations dealt with vocationalism in



colleges and universities. Not until 1967 did another comprehensive treatment of vocationalism's past appear, Melvin L. Barlow's thick, fact-stuffed *History of Industrial Education in the United States*.<sup>5</sup> None of these works explored federal funding and vocational education in the framework I propose here: the vocational education reform movement marked the first time that the central government funded local public schools and created a pattern for subsequent school reform initiatives.

Bennett and Barlow composed insider views of the vocational reform movement and its triumphs. Although they were devoted to praising vocationalism's accomplishments, neither of them pinned vocational education as the first-ever national school reform movement to attract federal dollars. Bennett's work appeared before other national school reform campaigns got underway. Barlow's 1967 narrative does not explore the influence of the vocational reform movement on subsequent initiatives to transform the school through federal funding and action. Their works focus primarily on the big picture: the schools, organizations, and leaders who defined vocationalism and campaigned for its popular acceptance, as well as the accomplishments of the movement over time. Using primary resources, letters, and minutes from leading educational groups, Bennett and Barlow do not critique occupational training in the schools. Barlow yields little space to educational leaders who opposed it, except to review how vocationalists triumphed over the opposition. However limited in depth, analysis, and nuance the volumes of Bennett and Barlow are, historians continue to troll them as valuable sources for authoritative background information.

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<sup>5</sup> Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States: A Study and Interpretation of American Educational History*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919); Charles A. Bennett, *History of Manual and Industrial Education, 1870 to 1917*, (Peoria, IL: 1926, 1937); Melvin L. Barlow, *History of Industrial Education in the United States*, (Peoria, IL: Charles A. Bennett Co., 1967). This number is based on an exhaustive search of the ProQuest Dissertations database. Of the 9,821 dissertations on vocational education between 1910 and 2009, only about 30 can be considered historical treatments (.003007%). In the period 1930-1959, scholars completed 162 dissertations on vocational education. Only 13 examined the history of the movement, a lean 8%.

Elwood P. Cubberley was a contemporary of Bennett who produced *Public Education in the United States* in 1919, which for many decades stood as the standard text in history of education courses in normal schools. Cubberley argues that the public secondary school had morphed into a truly democratic conduit “leading to higher schools or to life occupations and professions.” He points out that vocational education was the most modern reform of the American public secondary school and that it was backed by the new federally supported initiative that at the time of publication was sweeping the nation in the wake of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act.

Cubberley’s history praises the new federal involvement in local public education. He charges that community and state school boards had historically hesitated to accept new ideas and were slow to implement cutting-edge programs. Without federal aid, he stated, “it would have been at least a generation, and probably longer, before anything approaching a national system of vocational education would have been evolved.”<sup>6</sup> While applauding federal aid for vocationalism, Cubberley does not recognize the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act as the first incidence of federal K-12 funding. Nor does he assess it as the capstone of over a century of vigorously debated efforts to secure such aid for education.

Charles A. Bennett was another pro-vocational education reformer. He produced the first comprehensive history of high school vocational education in 1926. His volume, *History of Manual and Industrial Education*, remained the standard text for researchers and vocational teachers-in-training until the late 1960s.<sup>7</sup> His historical treatment of the vocational school reform movement is akin to Cubberley’s: a work of adulation and a sequential history of the movement’s triumphs flecked with rosy predictions about its importance to the nation’s

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<sup>6</sup> Cubberley, *Public Education*, 415.

<sup>7</sup> Charles A. Bennett, *History of Manual and Industrial Education, 1870 to 1917*, (Peoria, IL: 1926, 1937).

educational system.

Bennett's work was an in-house institutional narrative portraying the advocates of vocationalism as modern innovators who had triumphed over Luddite general educationists. Throughout the narrative, grand institutions serve as examples of the movement's success in transforming the high school from a narrowly focused academic space tailored to the needs of a special few into a comprehensive and more democratic institution that could meet the needs of all socioeconomic classes. Bennett views vocationalism's success in the evolutionary terms of steady progress and enlightenment. Vocationalism's triumph in the school reform wars of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the result of a long series of battles against obstructionist general educators who consistently erected impediments to halt the advances of manual training and vocational education.

Bennett stops short of recognizing the historical impact of the Smith-Hughes Act except in the narrowest terms of it being an important turning point for industrial education itself. Although he parses in detail the historical conflicts between educators over manual and vocational training in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, he does not unmask the rigorous debates over federal aid to education that flared up throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which eventually led to unprecedented Congressional appropriations for local high schools in 1917.<sup>8</sup>

Carter Woodson's historical treatment of vocational education departs from the institutional and triumphalist perspectives of Cubberley and Bennett by probing the effects of vocationalism on African Americans. His 1933 work, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, was a stinging historical polemic against African-American schooling's recent past. Woodson's discussion of vocational education demonstrated that federal money being spent on buttressing

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<sup>8</sup> Other histories sympathetic to vocational education produced in the 1920s were Charles Prosser and Charles Allen, *Vocational Education in a Democracy*, (New York: The Century Co., 1925) and Leonard Koos, *The American Secondary School*, (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1927).

occupational training curricula in public schools did not favor the socioeconomic advancement of African Americans. Woodson's interpretation of the schoolhouse as a tool for retaining status quo educational and socioeconomic inequities foreshadowed the revisionist histories that would appear in the 1960s and beyond.

Carter Woodson believed that the education of African-Americans had "served the oppressor." It neglected to prepare African American youth to participate in America's industrializing, professionalizing society. Smith-Hughes programs were engineered to meet "the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples."<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Cubberley and Bennett, Woodson was not impressed with the vocational reform movement. He asserted that African American leaders had only jumped on the vocational bandwagon "for political purposes." Their goal was not so much to benefit students and equip them for the modern industrial world, but to attract money to support their own institutions. In Woodson's interpretation, vocational education "swept the country by storm" at a critical juncture in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the needs of former slaves and their offspring coincided with the call for labor in the expanding industrial movement. As African American policymakers considered altering the high school course "to make the training of the Negro conform to this policy (of industrial training)," vocational education split African American leaders into two factions. One side contended that African American students needed a wide-ranging general education that emphasized academics. The other side pushed for more practical job-oriented training. This tug-of-war began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to Woodson, and characterized educational debates for the next several decades into the Great Depression. Woodson portrayed these conversations as a generally unhealthy exercise in the Black educational community. "For a generation thereafter, the quarrel as to whether the Negro should

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<sup>9</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, (Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1933), 9-10.

be given a classical or a practical education was the dominant topic in Negro schools and churches throughout the United States.” This struggle reflected broad national arguments over vocational and academic schooling that were peaking in the 1930s.

Departing from the Bennett-Cubberley perspective—which viewed all industrial training as universally beneficial to students and society—Woodson labeled African American vocational training at the high school level as completely “inadequate.” Students were not instructed in using the latest machinery and tools. Preparation for working with new technologies—electronics, the internal combustion engine, wireless radio, and the telephone, among others—was often not available in African American vocational classes. Black industrial training was behind the times. In Woodson’s view, “it was a failure.”<sup>10</sup>

Evaluating vocational education’s history between the 1880s and the early 1930s, Woodson argued that African Americans were caught in an educational catch-22. “The present system under the control of the whites trains the Negro to be a white and at the same time convinces him of the impropriety or the impossibility of his becoming white.” In fact, Woodson asserted, “the white man does not need the Negroes’ professional, commercial, or industrial assistance; and as a result of mechanical appliances, he no longer needs them in drudgery or menial service.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, for Woodson, federally funded vocational education reform merely reinforced past inequities and the future of African American high school education remained bleak.

Woodson’s fear that federally funded vocational training for black students would remain limited to non-technological, homemaking, and agricultural courses turned out to be accurate. In a series of articles (1994, 1997, 1999, 2001), Regina Werum argues that vocational education

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<sup>10</sup> Woodson, *Mis-education*, 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> Woodson, *Mis-education*, 22.

reform in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century involving federal funding was an exercise in social control of immigrants in the North and racial segmentation of the labor market in the South. Although it was marketed as a democratizing program that would give students greater choice in selecting courses at the high school level, in reality local vocational educators shunted immigrants and African Americans into high school vocational courses that would lead inexorably to low-skill, low-paying occupations.

In Werum's view, the vocational education movement backed by federal dollars was a paradox. It enlarged opportunities to complete a high school diploma when only a minority of Americans had accomplished this feat in the past. It also opened educational doors at the secondary level for African Americans, many of whom were denied access to a high school education in prior generations. At the same time, however, occupational curriculum that was created to appeal to working class and minority students North and South engineered vocational tracks according to socioeconomic class and race. High school vocational courses in technological fields were generally reserved for White males. African Americans were more often steered into agricultural and domestic service courses. As Woodson pointed out six decades earlier in *Mis-Education*, Werum's micro-studies of 1920s and 1930s Georgia, North Carolina, and Mississippi demonstrated that white elites dominated the policymaking boards that determined how federal money granted to these states for the purpose of paying for occupational classes would be spent.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Regina E. Werum, "Elite Control in State and Nation: Racial Inequalities in Vocational Funding in North Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi, 1918-1936," *Social Forces*, vol. 78, no. 1 (Sept., 1999), 145-186; "Sectionalism and Racial Politics: Federal Vocational Policies and Programs in the Predesegregation South," *Social Science History*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997), 399-453; "Matching Youth and Jobs? Gender Dynamics in New Deal Job Training," *Social Forces*, vol. 81, No. 2 (Dec., 2002), 473-503; "Political Process in the Pre-Desegregation South: Race and Gender Stratification in Federal Vocational Education Programs, 1917-1936," Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1994; "Tug-of-War: Political Mobilization and Access to Schooling in the Southern Racial State," *Sociology of Education*, vol. 72, no. 2 (Apr., 1999), 89-110; "Warehousing the Unemployed? Federal Job Training Programs in the Depression-Era South," *American Journal of Education*, vol. 109, no. 2 (Feb., 2001), 228-265.

Woodson's work on vocational education's history also anticipated Donald Spivey's scathing historical interpretation of vocationalism in the public schools. In *Schooling for the New Slavery* (1978), Spivey saw vocationalism for African American students as an open attempt to replicate the institution of slavery. "Industrial education was a major force in the subjugation of black labor in the new South," he argued. To analyze why this was so, Spivey examined race relations, the interests of Northern industrialists, and leadership within the African American community itself. Hampton Institute in Virginia was the embodiment of Samuel Chapman Armstrong's belief that the "race problem" could be solved through education.<sup>13</sup> His school taught African American students to be good, strong, subservient workers who knew their place, kept quiet about their rights, and steered clear of politics. Northern industrialists supported Hampton because Armstrong's vocational curriculum taught these values. For Spivey, this was not a "conspiracy theory," but a fact supported by primary documents. He portrayed Booker T. Washington's theory of vocational education for African Americans as "uplift through submission." As principal of the Hampton-inspired Tuskegee Institute, Washington looked askance at traditional academics for African Americans and education for its own sake and instead preached industrial education as the salvific program for eventual socio-economic gain. In Spivey's assessment, Washington taught students to "play the white man's game." The result was that Washington's approach kept Black and White labor segregated, maintained the racial status quo, played into the hands of Northern industrialists, and steered Black workers away from organized labor.<sup>14</sup>

Arriving at similar conclusions about federally funded vocational education, Eileen

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<sup>13</sup> In similar fashion, David Wallace Adams argued that education was used to relieve the "Indian problem" in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries

<sup>14</sup> Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education, 1868-1915*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), x, 4ff5, 99ff.

Tamura's *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity* (1994) examines the vocational education history of minority Asian immigrants in Hawaii's public high schools from the 1920s through the 1940s. Tamura profiles the tensions that appeared when second generations of Japanese, Filipino/a, Korean, and Chinese immigrants began to work toward fulfilling the American dream of socioeconomic upward mobility through the public school system. White-dominated school boards at the territorial and local levels repeatedly attempted to squelch Asian-American students in their quest to move up the social and occupational ladders by weighting their high school curricula with vocational courses, particularly in agriculture. Their campaign gathered steam after Congress sharply curtailed the importation of Filipino/a labor to Hawaii in the mid-1920s. While attempting to exclude the offspring of Asian immigrants from business and professional ranks on the islands, white politicians and school boards simultaneously hoped that high school vocational training would prepare them to follow in their parents' footsteps by working on the labor-starved sugar and pineapple plantations.

In Tamura's view, attempts at steering Asian-American high school graduates into the same backbreaking plantation labor that their parents had performed was an ironic repudiation of the Anglo ideal of using education to climb the socioeconomic ranks and fulfill the American dream. In this sense, her work echoes the views of Carter Woodson. Vocational education before World War II was a "channel for plantation work" in Hawaii instead of a democratizing force that might lead to a better life and more rewarding livelihood.<sup>15</sup>

For Woodson, Werum, Spivey, and Tamura, the first instance of federal spending on local public schools maintained the racial, social, and economic status quo and strengthened the foundation of educational inequities in America's public school system. They saw federally

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<sup>15</sup> Eileen Tamura, *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity: The Nisei Generation in Hawaii*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).



sponsored vocationalism as a watershed event in the sense that through financial and administrative involvement in public education, the central government was now supporting oppressive racial and socioeconomic structures that were already in place.

The impact of vocational education on the socioeconomic strata of American society was briefly broached by Merle Curti in his 1935 work, *The Social Ideas of American Educators*. Curti's text is a classic one for exploring the philosophical and sociological arguments of many American educators. His work comes to similar conclusions that are present in the interpretations of Woodson, Spivey, Werum, and Tamura. Curti narrated the conflict between those who favored narrowly conceived vocationalism as a boon to the working class and those who believed its adoption in public high schools at federal expense would merely foreordain working class youth to a life of manual labor with no opportunity for advancement into the middle and managerial classes.

Curti's work connects with this dissertation in terms of the relationship between American public education and national defense. Curti briefly references the advent of World War I as a factor in hastening development of vocational education as a federally funded program. "The war stimulated vocational education by identifying it with preparedness and the more efficient production of munitions and ships, it enabled the friends of the movement to gain wider support by maintaining also that it is necessary to achieve true democracy at home." His short foray into the interplay of vocationalism in public schools and national security leaves the door open for additional research, which this dissertation attempts to address.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to the work of Carter Woodson and others who have examined the racial and socioeconomic consequences of the Smith-Hughes Act, a set of moderate voices in the

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<sup>16</sup> Merle Curti *The Social Ideas of America's Educators*, updated edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935, 1959), 559.

historiography of vocational education wrote sparingly about vocational training and its impact on the history of American public schooling. New educational histories flourished between World War II and the early 1960s, spearheaded by liberal-progressive progressive historians such as Lawrence Cremin, Bernard Bailyn, and Freeman Butts, all of whom viewed the American public school system as a generally benevolent institution.

During the heyday of liberal-progressive interpretations between the end of World War II and the mid-1960s, the public school in general and vocational education in particular expanded along with the growth of the Baby Boom generation and the spread of suburbs. However, scant historical research was produced in the field of vocational education during this period. Significant works by leading scholars spent little energy tracing the development of high school occupational training. No works during this era viewed the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act as a turning point in educational history. In Cremin's landmark text, *Transformation of the Public School* (1961), the treatment of the vocational education reform movement is scattered in bits and pieces across 30 widely separated pages. In the final installment of his three-volume history, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience*, vocationalism is overwhelmed by a tidal wave of analysis of general education. Freeman Butts, a prolific scholar between World War II and 1970, waited until 1978 to broach the topic of vocationalism. Even then, it was a minor player in the history of school reform: he devoted only 15 pages to it in *Public Education in the United States: From Revolution to Reform*.

While expertly exegesis other topics in educational history and adding significantly to the historiographic corpus, the liberal-progressives left the door open for a new set of scholars to examine vocationalism in a new interpretive light that contrasted sharply with the hagiographic narratives of Cubberley, Barlow, and Bennett. These works extended the historiography in a

variety of ways, especially in tracing the history of vocationalism in specific states and regions; however, none of them identified the vocational education reform movement as a groundbreaking event that attracted federal funding and set precedents for future school reform initiatives.<sup>17</sup>

If Freeman Butts was correct that historical revisions arrive in successive waves of discontent to wash over and replace established interpretations of the past, then the scholarship that swept onto the shores of educational history in the late 1960s amounted to a tsunami. The aspirations and motives of politicians and educators who introduced school reforms were examined in the harsh light of late 20th-century sensibilities that were influenced by social and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. Revised versions of the school's past appeared at a time when confidence in public education had ebbed. Historians' examinations of the past began to reflect society's weakening faith in the equality and effectiveness of the nation's school system. Laurence Veysey noted that "cynicism and defeatism are far more prevalent" in the new histories, "and fundamental questions are raised about the value of the undertaking that would have been unthinkable in earlier discussions."<sup>18</sup>

Berenice Fisher's *Industrial Education* (1967) expanded the narrative by connecting the philosophies of vocationalists with social transformations that played out in the 19th and early

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<sup>17</sup> M. Ray Karnes, "Evolving Concepts of Industrial Education in the Thinking of Organized Labor", Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1948; Melvin L. Barlow, "A History of Trade and Industrial Education in California", Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1949; J.D. Deatherage, "History of Federal Participation in Vocational Education in Agriculture", Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1950; Marion Franklin, "A History of Industrial Education in Oklahoma up to 1950", Ed.D. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1952; Robert Jack Freeman, "A History of Selected Areas of Vocational Education in Mississippi Public Schools", Ph.D. diss., The University of Mississippi, 1959; Leon S. Tunkel, "Policies and Procedures in Adult Vocational-Industrial Education in New York State Based on a Consideration of the History and Development of The Program, 1917 to the Present", Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1961; Leslie G. Freeman, "A History of the Vocational Education and Extension Board of Rockland County, New York, 1931-1959", Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 1961; Chipman Gray Stuart, "Industrial Arts and Vocational Education: Their History and Present Position in Texas", Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1968.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Veysey, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 78, no. 4 (October, 1973), 1136-1137. For examples of revisionist school histories, see Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968);

20th centuries. Fisher drew upon "selected traditions in social historiography and sociology" to bring her work into line with historiographic practices that were current at the time. Her work added analytical depth that was lacking in institutional narratives. Rather than focus on vocationalism as a democratizing force, as Cubberley and Bennett had done earlier, Fisher contended that industrial education was mainly an ongoing conflict over determining the place of industry in American society and the relationship of the individual worker to it. The "ideal of the skilled workman" linked vocational training to early 20th-century conceptions of industrial and social efficiency, joining high school trade training with vocational guidance in an effort to fit youth to appropriate occupations.<sup>19</sup>

Walter Drost's *David Snedden and Education for Social Efficiency* (1967) followed Raymond Callahan's important work, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (1962). Drost questioned the motives of a leading educator who stood in the center of the vocational-liberal debates during the period 1900-1920. Snedden, a professor at Teachers College and outspoken advocate for building social efficiency through high school vocational education, tangled with John Dewey over the direction occupational training should take. Drost played open Snedden's social efficiency ideals and analyzed them in the broader context of educational theory that dominated the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He penetrated below the surface of "discussion" and "reporting" that characterized the works of Bennett and Barlow. He argued that Snedden and other educators adapted social efficiency theory to education in an attempt to enhance their professional standing. Drost portrayed Snedden as a member of a community of credentialed education professionals who began to think of themselves as the only persons qualified to

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<sup>19</sup> Berenice Fisher, *Industrial Education: American Ideals and Institutions* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), vi-vii. See also Fisher, "Industrial Education in the United States: An Historical Study of Ideas and Institutions", Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1965.

diagnose and cure social ills through schooling.<sup>20</sup>

In “The Industrial Education Movement” (1968), Sol Cohen placed the vocational initiative in the larger context of socio-economic realities of the early 20th century. He analyzed the academic public high school as an increasingly middle class institution. Middle class parents were anxious that introducing vocational classes into their children’s schools would dilute scholarship and impede student progress toward college and the professions.<sup>21</sup>

Marvin Lazerson and W. Norton Grubb (1974) argued that earlier vocational education historians along the Cubberley-Bennett axis were “apologists” for the movement. “The writing of the history of vocational education has been largely hortatory, designed to elicit support for vocationalism.” In the introduction to their documentary history, *American Education and Vocationalism*, Lazerson and Grubb briefly mention that vocationalism aligned public education with the American economy and transformed it into the main institution for preparing young people for participation in the industrial work force. The authors found that “vocational education has been a major force in the reconstruction of the American school,” and that “the traditional emphasis on industriousness, thrift, and sobriety” inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century common school was “supplanted by a commitment to instruction in job skills and to the categorization of youth by their future occupational roles.” Vocationalism showed that schools had co-opted themselves into “the emerging corporate order” and were part of a broader movement that recreated schools into rational corporate structures. Through occupational education, “economic criteria had become a primary force in educational decision-making.” Their conjecture that the vocational reform movement served as a pivoting point for changes in

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<sup>20</sup> Walter Drost, *David Snedden and Education for Social Efficiency*, (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967).

<sup>21</sup> Sol Cohen, “The Industrial Education Movement”, *American Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring, 1968), 95-110.

the purpose of elementary and secondary public education is extended in this dissertation.<sup>22</sup>

In *The Training of the Urban Working Class* (1978), Paul Violas examined the rhetoric of early vocational reformers and argued that vocational education would serve the needs of “new” students and prepare them to meet the demands of modern industrial society. His aim was to “understand the relationship between what American intellectuals said about education and what children experienced as they were initiated into American society, especially those experiences that occurred within the public schools.” Noting that “the labor force now required workers with habits, values, and personality patterns conducive to assembly line techniques,” Violas claimed that vocational educators were committed to developing workers whose “psychic structure” would lead to more assembly line output and render them less prone to the agitation and alienation patterns fostered by organized labor. Violas portrayed schools as grouping agencies that herded young people into the industrial working class under the conviction that each student had a discreet vocational future that was bounded by their socioeconomic situation. Janice Weiss used a revisionist framework in her detailed exploration of clerical courses that were sponsored by local public high schools before 1970. Like Violas, she studied the popular perceptions of and biases toward students—mostly girls—who took commercial courses in typing, bookkeeping, and office department in the vocational track.<sup>23</sup>

Arthur Wirth (1980) carried the revisionist torch to shed new light on the impact of social efficiency doctrine on vocational training in public high schools by examining the debates between liberal and vocational educators during the early 20th century. In *Education in the Technological Society*, Wirth depicted the struggle over vocational education—“one of the most

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<sup>22</sup> Marvin Lazerson and W. Norton Grubb, *American Education and Vocationalism: A Documentary History, 1870-1970*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1974),

<sup>23</sup> Paul Violas, *The Training of the Urban Working Class: A History of Twentieth Century American Education*, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1978), ix, 23. Janice Harriet Weiss, “Educating for Clerical Work: A History of Commercial Education in the United States since 1850”, Ed.D diss., Harvard University, 1978.

dramatic movements for school reform”—as a battle between Progressive reformers: the “conservative” social efficiency-oriented vocational educators led by David Snedden versus liberal humanistic reformers guided by John Dewey. Dewey and Snedden’s vigorous debate over the core purpose of education was presented in the form of an intellectual history. While Snedden’s version of Progressive reform represented social control, Dewey’s brand promoted democracy and social consciousness. Wirth argued that Snedden’s views prevailed in the end, thereby strengthening the socioeconomic sorting mechanism of public schooling. Snedden’s victory “proved detrimental to public schooling and left the nation a legacy of commitments that have led politicians and education leaders to conceive of education almost solely as an enterprise whose goal is to prepare young people for future occupations in a technology-oriented social order.”<sup>24</sup>

In a granular study of vocational education’s history in California, Harvey Kantor contended that it was not conceived so much as a form of social control initiated by business people and professional educators but as a means to meliorate social problems that vocational advocates perceived to be genuine. Kantor’s goal was not to ferret out “good” or “evil” motives, but rather to examine “how vocational reformers viewed the problems they faced, why they chose the remedies they did, [and] how their perceptions corresponded with actual conditions.” “I think that most (vocational reformers) believed their own rhetoric of social betterment and sought to address real problems....The trouble with vocational education was not chiefly that reformers wished to turn out docile workers (though many surely did) but that their solutions addressed the symptoms rather than the causes of the conditions they sought to eliminate.”<sup>25</sup>

In terms of vocationalism’s ability to survive economic depressions, moderate revisionist

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<sup>24</sup> Wirth, *Education in the Technological Society*, ix, 235.

<sup>25</sup> Harvey A. Kantor, *Learning to Earn: School, Work, and Vocational Reform in California, 1880-1930*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), xi-xii.

Larry Cuban suggested in 1982 that legislation to fund vocational education across the 20<sup>th</sup> century was perennially pushed by leaders in business, industry, agriculture, and the legislative leadership of Congress. Even “in the face of ample defects”, the vocational movement repeatedly drew Congressional money and endured. In his article, “Enduring Resiliency: Enacting and Implementing Federal Vocational Legislation,” Cuban observed that the AVA (American Vocational Association), a small Washington-based professional organization, has had its fingerprints all over each piece of vocational education.” His work portrays the paradox that vocationalism funding has persisted despite repeated criticism, and the “apparently faulty process of implementation” that characterized the program across sixty years. In reference to the argument I make in this dissertation, Cuban’s contention makes it seem even more remarkable that vocational education was able to break open the federal pocketbook to endow local public schools for the first time in 1917.<sup>26</sup>

Not all educational historians have agreed with revisionist interpretations. Diane Ravitch attracted the most attention for her rebuke of revisionism in *The Revisionists Revised* (1977). She argued that Katz and his successors were not simply writing bad history, they were attacking public education itself. No matter how stridently historians in the past had criticized the school system (even Cubberley had done that), they at least had faith in it, believed in its mission, and stressed its importance as a permanent institution. “Indeed, their complaints [were] directed to the end of making the schools better.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet Ravitch believed that a new and virulent attack on the schoolhouse became the dominant purpose of radical historians. “They directly challenged the usefulness of schooling

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<sup>26</sup> Larry Cuban, “Enduring Resiliency: Enacting and Implementing Federal Vocational Legislation,” in Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyack, *Work Youth, and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education*, (Stanford, CA: 1982), 46.

<sup>27</sup> Lakes, “Historical Inquiry in Vocational Education”, 11; Ravitch, *Revisionists Revised*, x.



and questioned not whether Americans had placed too much faith in education, but why they had placed any faith in education.” More than that, she said, revisionist school historians had committed the ultimate sin against Clio: they “flagrantly violated the rules of evidence and logic and went unchallenged.”

Katy Lee Brown Greenwood echoed Ravitch’s judgments in 1979. An historian of the early vocational movement, she told the American Vocational Association that they had not sufficiently monitored the debates between liberal and radical education historians over the interpretation of the school’s past. She warned that “vocational education has become a primary target for attack in regard to the early intentions and approaches of our own early leaders—particularly David Snedden and Charles A. Prosser.” These sieges against the decades-old bulwark of federally-funded vocational education were coming from “the liberal centers of activism in this country,” particularly Berkeley, Stanford, and the University of Wisconsin. The aim of the historical revisionism in the 1960s and 1970s was to use “historical interpretation as a method of bringing social change.” Educational history had become a “weapon toward social reconstruction and social action.” Greenwood noted that historical interpretation was “more subtle but more lasting than protest marches.”<sup>28</sup> It is unlikely that Greenwood would acquiesce to the assertions this dissertation makes: first, that K-12 public education has indeed been used to further economic and sociopolitical agendas and, second, that the vocational reform movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century became the role model for future reforms that promoted using the schools to advance those agendas, particularly in the National Defense Education Act of 1958.

Greenwood warned the AVA against shunning its past and “our proud tradition in

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<sup>28</sup> Katy Lee Brown Greenwood, “A Rational Approach to Historiography: Misuses and Abuses of History.” Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Vocational Association, Symposium, “Historiography: The Revisionist and the Progressive Historical Interpretations of Vocational Education and Current Implications”, Anaheim, CA, December 4, 1979, 4-5, 8 (*italics in original*).

providing economic and social opportunity for people who otherwise had none” and called members to “enter the debate.” In so doing, she focused on “the validity of historical research, motives of historical researchers, and the kind of research responsibility necessary for any field of endeavor.” Greenwood asserted that “the practices of Michael Katz, Clarence Karier, Joel Spring, Paul Violas, and to some extent, David Tyack, [are] suspect records of history.” This “new breed” of scholars did not place faith in America’s public education, “but spew an *a priori* hostility toward America’s schools, American society, and the liberal tradition defined by progressivism in this country.” They asked “loaded questions” about evidence in advance, and “they could be fairly sure...what answer would emerge at the end.” In so doing, they “oversimplified the ambiguity, the incompleteness, and the complexity of historical events.”<sup>29</sup>

In reference to the vocational philosophy that drove early 20th-century debates between vocational and general education, Greenwood challenged Wirth’s description of the vocation/liberal dispute as a struggle between supporters of the academic high school—traditional educators— and “anti-academics”—vocational educators. The two sides were not “unyielding,” and the vocationalists were not involved in “an invidious scheme” to control the social order. In his biography of early vocationalism’s spokesperson, David Snedden, Walter Drost “selected just enough information to provide evidence for the viewpoint he hoped Snedden had represented.”<sup>30</sup>

Dennis Herschbach also defied radical reinterpretations by offering a more liberal approach to exegizing vocationalism’s past. His 1973 dissertation examined the ideologies that competed for acceptance in crafting a national industrial education program in the early 20th

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<sup>29</sup> Greenwood, “Rational Approach”, 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> Katy Lee Brown Greenwood, “Rational Approach,” 7 (italics in original); “A Philosophic Rationale for Vocational Education: Contributions of Charles A. Prosser and his Contemporaries from 1900-1917, Volumes I and II,” Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1978.

century. Social melioration, millennialism, scientism, social efficiency, and secular piety were ingredients in a stew of philosophies that influenced vocational education. Despite the competition between these approaches to vocational education, Horace Mann's "soft pedagogy" approach to using schools for social reform remained a powerful force.

Unlike radical revisionists who found nefarious motives cloaked behind the actions of Progressive educators, Herschbach argued that struggles over how to educate children usually arose from the complexities that naturally existed in an industrializing society. He noted a paradox of vocational education's history: "On the one hand, the proponents of industrial education pointed to the fact that the subject could contribute to the upward mobility of the [immigrants]" by imparting skills necessary to succeed in American industrial society. However, "on the other hand, industrial educators reflected the existing social antagonism towards immigrants, and the subject field was seen as a means of controlling the social and economic success of the immigrant, to the extent that *native* [Anglo] children could be provided with a marked advantage in the industrial enterprise." Herschbach asserted that unlike the 1960s and 1970s, the criticisms that marked the educational environment during the Progressive era and the accompanying calls for improving public schools in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not shake society's overall confidence in the school system itself.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Dennis R. Herschbach, "Industrial Education Ideology," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1973, 340-341. Italics added.

## **Chapter One**

### **A Century of Struggle over Federal Funding of Public Schools 1787- 1884**

#### **Introduction**

Before the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act introduced federal financial grants into local public school systems, several presidents, members of Congress, and educational leaders attempted to secure educational money from Washington. Their initiatives to obtain federal aid experienced periods of momentum as well as setbacks between 1787 and 1884. At times, the main obstacle was politics. At others, the issues were race and the balance of federal versus states' rights. Ultimately, all of the proposals failed, impaled on the stakes of states' rights, narrow interpretations of the Constitution, and the unwillingness of Congress to assume any burdens for local school systems. The success of vocational educators to gain federal educational funding for their high school reform concept in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century becomes all the more remarkable when placed against the background of the repeated failures that are sketched here.

This chapter chronicles the attempts to establish federal financial intervention in public education at the elementary and secondary levels from the early republic through the 1880s. Educational historians have referenced this important narrative in general terms, but few have offered a detailed review of its issues and main players.<sup>1</sup> Using primary Congressional documents and letters, this section shows that the main obstacles to federal funding were the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example Lawrence A. Cremin's three volume series, *American Education*, the most detailed general study of America's educational history. Cremin spends no energy focusing on the subject of attempts to obtain federal funding.

beliefs that it was unconstitutional, not needed, and would introduce federal control over local schools that, once launched, would become perpetual.

Between the 1780s and the close of the Civil War, several American presidents, federal legislators, and educationists worked at convincing Congress to directly support local common schools. It is true that Washington *indirectly* supported schooling at the community level by setting aside lands in new territories for the construction and support of schoolhouses. Congress also approved land grants for agricultural, mining, and engineering schools at the *college* level under the 1862 Morrill Act. Some American Indian schools received federal allotments. But in the century from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most members of Congress saw public schools as sacred spaces to be walled off from federal intrusion of any kind.

At the core of resistance to federal funding for common schools was the concept historian Arthur M. Schlesinger labeled the “states’ rights fetish” and “the problem of harmonizing central unified control with state sovereignty.” The tension between centralized power and state sovereignty was not confined to a single political party or geographic region. Nor did it exist in a vacuum. Arguments over federal powers and state prerogatives in education were connected to issues at play in the broader society.<sup>2</sup>

From the 1780s until the Civil War political leaders and social pundits called for various intensities of federal financing, regulation, and control of public schools. Following the Civil War, the clamor for Washington activism in the common schools escalated, resulting in the creation of the U.S. Office of Education in 1867. The Office remained a small fact-gathering bureaucracy and information clearing-house for the nation’s growing network of public school

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, *New Viewpoints in American History*, (MacMillan and Co., 1961), 221, 243.

administrators. Although it influenced public schooling by sharing statistics and ideas for improvement of teaching and learning, it possessed none of the powers that the present U.S. Department of Education enjoys.

Between 1870 and 1890, three efforts to secure direct Congressional funding for community public schools were attempted. In 1870, Rep. George F. Hoar of Massachusetts worked to persuade Congress to help pay for public schools, establish national standards, and draw lines of school district accountability. After Hoar's bill failed, Rep. Legrand Perce of Mississippi proposed a funding measure that survived the House but died in the Senate. In 1884, New Hampshire Senator Henry F. Blair introduced a bill to gain Congressional funding for common schools. It met the same fate as the legislation proposed by Hoar and Perce.

#### **I. Federal Support of Public Schooling: Articles of Confederation and the Northwest Ordinance**

While still governed by the relatively weak Articles of Confederation, Congress provided for indirect federal support of public education through land set-asides in each township of the Northwest Territory. The congressional Land Ordinance of 1785 stated: "There shall be reserved the lot No. 16, of every township, for the maintenance of public schools within the said township." Because the Ordinance said nothing about the political process by which new states carved out of the vast Northwest Territory would be admitted to the Union, the Confederation Congress passed a second set of guidelines—the Northwest Ordinance—in July 1787. The Ordinance outlined the requirements, rights, and steps new states would be required to follow when joining the original thirteen states. Article III of the document stipulated that "religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." While the Northwest

Ordinance said nothing about reserving federal lands for the support of public schools, it did place the importance of education on a par with religion and morality.<sup>3</sup>

Only months after passage of the Northwest Ordinance, the Confederation Congress sold 1.5 million acres of federal land to the Ohio Company of Associates, a group of land-speculating Revolutionary War veterans interested in purchasing federal properties on the cheap in what is today southeastern Ohio. The speculators' intention was to resell them to New England settlers at what they hoped would be a handsome profit. In October 1787, the contract of sale between Congress and the soldiers' organization referenced the 1785 Land Ordinance, stipulating that the veteran "adventurers," as they called themselves, set apart one-sixteenth of each township to be reserved for public education and two townships for a university. A rarely mentioned codicil of Land Ordinance, by which the Ohio Company was bound, stated that the proceeds of "one-third of all gold, silver, lead, and copper mines to be sold, or otherwise disposed of as Congress shall hereinafter direct" were to be set aside for the federal government. Presumably, some of the proceeds from the sale of valuable minerals would help pay for public schools in the states that entered the Union from this territory. But this cannot be established for certain.<sup>4</sup>

The land grant initiative continued to send a trickle of funds from land sales to the states for local education until 1826. After that date, states were left alone to pay for their own educational systems. Some members of Congress attempted to reinvigorate federal activity in public education below the university level. We will explore these efforts later.

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<sup>3</sup> "Land Ordinance of 1785," in Roger L. Kemp, ed., *Documents of American Democracy: A Collection of Essential Works*, (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland and Co., 2010), 151.

<sup>4</sup> *Articles of Confederation*, (Washington, DC: United States National Archives & Records Administration), Section 14, Article III.

## **II. The Campaign for a “Diffusion of Knowledge” through Federally Supported Schools: The Constitutional Convention and the Washington Presidency**

The ties between the federal government under the Articles of Confederation and public education were already established when delegates from thirteen states gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to hammer out a new, stronger central government. However, the relationship between the central government and public schooling under the new Constitution of 1789 began with a paradox.

As delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia debated the political details of a new government, they had already been exposed to the doctrine that the preservation and growth of democracy depended chiefly on an educated population. John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon (1720, 1723), Benjamin Franklin (1749), Joseph Priestley (1771), and Thomas Jefferson (1779) were among those who had penned essays and proposed plans for the free education of children and youth. Their works were widely distributed along transatlantic Enlightenment channels. Together with political essays, their works on education were discussed in salons and coffee houses on both sides of the Atlantic.

While observers agreed that education was important, opinions about government involvement in it were mixed. Some commentators, such as Priestly, opposed government control of schooling and curriculum, fearing that it would inevitably endanger free thought and speech. Others, including Franklin and Jefferson, had few qualms with government support of education. The new nation had no monarchy to provide a collective unity. Unlike European states, it was populated by citizens who were pledged to different cultures and religious traditions. Marketplaces, auctions, and taverns hummed with European and African languages and dialects. Regional jealousies and boundary conflicts pitted state against state and frontier



territories against settled coastal enclaves. The founding generation tended to see universal public schooling as an institution that would tie together the disparate groups that inhabited the former British colonies. The new republic would need vast numbers of schools to cultivate the republican values necessary to properly elect enlightened public officials and to recognize tyranny when it reared its threatening head. The creators of the American political system therefore placed an enormous burden of expectation on universal public education to knit together a new union and to keep it strong across future generations.

In such an environment, it is paradoxical that the framers of the Constitution scarcely mentioned education in their debates at all. No direct federal role for public schooling was outlined. In fact, the motion to empower Congress to establish and oversee a public university in the nation's future capital was quietly defeated.<sup>5</sup> James Madison's notes on constitutional debates in Philadelphia show that delegates rarely broached the subject of teaching and learning. Madison referenced a proposal he and Charles Pinckney made to provide direct, purposeful federal action in public schooling by establishing a national university "at the seat of government." The motion was seconded by Pennsylvania's James Wilson. Madison, Pinckney, and Wilson referred to opening a national "university" for young males. A "college" or "university" at that time frequently admitted boys in their young-to-middle teens, the age at which youth attend middle and secondary schools in modern times.

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<sup>5</sup> John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*. ed. Ronald Hamowy, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, Liberty Fund, 1995); Benjamin Franklin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* [sic], (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1749); Joseph Priestley, *An Essay on the First Principles of Government, and on the Nature of Political, Civil, and Religious Liberty*, (London: J. Johnson, 1771); Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" (Virginia Legislature, 1779) in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Federal Edition (New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904-5). Vol. 2, Chapter LXXIX. For a discussion of libertarianism and education in Britain and America in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, see Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

Debates in the Constitutional Convention were often long-winded, but little breath was expelled in discussing the Madison-Pinckney proposal. Gouverneur Morris spoke against the measure with a mere sixteen words: “It is not necessary. The exclusive power at the seat of government, will reach the object.” To Morris, Congress’ ability to control the governance of the future federal capital made the Madison-Pinckney motion redundant. Three years after Morris so succinctly stated his case against specifically mentioning federal power in the Constitution to open a public school, the Tenth Amendment of the Bill of Rights made it clear that any power not expressly enumerated for the federal government in the Constitution would devolve to the individual states. As a result, the funding, organizing, carrying out, and evaluating of public education was left to the states by default and remained without direct federal money or support.<sup>6</sup>

The failure of the new Constitution to mention federal support for public education did not deter George Washington from pursuing Madison’s idea from the vantage point of the newly created presidency. Between 1790 and 1795, President Washington tried on several occasions to spur Congress into passing legislation to fund a national public university and to support the study of “science and literature.” Washington did not use the word “school” in his 1790 address to Congress, as at least one historian has pointed out. Instead, he called on Congress to fund “seminaries of learning already established by the creation of a national university or *by any other expedients*.” The term “seminary” was widely used in Washington’s time as a synonym for a place of learning whose curriculum was intended for children and youth. We can interpret his remarks to refer not only to federal financing of a

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<sup>6</sup> James Madison, *Journal of the Constitutional Convention*, ed. E.H. Scott, (New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1893), 68, 550, 726-727. For a cogent overview of arguments for federal involvement in education in the 1770s and 1780s, see Butts, *Public Education in the United States*, 26-35. For a more in-depth discussion, see Donald R. Warren, *To Enforce Education: A History of the Founding Years of the United States Office of Education* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974) and Gordon C. Lee, *The Struggle for Federal Aid: The First Phase*, (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1949).

national university—which would have admitted adolescent boys as well as young men— but also to granting support for public schools *below* the university level.<sup>7</sup>

Washington did not offer specifics in the form of a curriculum or a plan for federal involvement. Instead, he hoped that Congress would find a way to educate the public to strengthen citizens' knowledge of their rights and responsibilities. Congress did nothing about education during Washington's first term. Even his modest proposal to create a committee to study the need for federal involvement in public education fell on deaf ears. Only one member, Republican John Page of Virginia, spoke in favor of the president's idea, contending that "on the diffusion of knowledge and literature depend the liberties of this country, and the preservation of the Constitution." During his second term, Washington revisited the idea of a national public university and urged Congress to pass measures that in hindsight might have buttressed public schooling at the elementary and secondary levels. Once again, Congress failed to act on his idea.

In his farewell address to Congress in 1796, Washington again sounded themes connecting a public education for young people with the strengthening of American community and the perpetuation of national unity:

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<sup>7</sup> A note on the meaning of the word "seminary" here may help to understand my broader interpretation of Washington's intentions on involving federal agencies in public education below the university level. R. Freeman Butts observes in *Public Education in the United States* that Washington purposely avoided using the term "school" in the address to Congress (p. 35). Cremin follows suit, as does Catherine Reef (see citation below). However, the etymology the word shows that between 1585 and the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term "seminary" was often used interchangeably with "school," along with other meanings. For example, English author Jonathon Swift used this term when referring to schools at the Inns of Court (1709). British antiquities scholar Jacob Bryant employed it in 1774 to describe places "where young people were educated," and Edmund Burke used it in 1794 when referencing "a seminary for learning." In Samuel Knox's 1799 essay on public education, discussed below, the author uses "seminary" to indicate schools for children and youth *below the university level*. Although Washington certainly referred to establishing a national university in his 1790 "Address to Congress," the etymology of the term "seminary" and his use of it indicate that *we cannot exclude his meaning schools for children and adolescents below the university level*. Schools for educating children and young women were frequently called seminaries in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>. Many examples existed, especially in the South before the Civil War. Modern usage has narrowed the term's reference exclusively to indicate a graduate theological college where clergy are trained. For more information, see the entry for "seminary" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.its.virginia.edu/view/Entry/175684?rskey=NKONLd&result=1#eid>. Italics added.

The more homogeneous our citizens can be made in these particulars, the greater will be our prospect of permanent union; and the primary object of such a National Institution should be, the education of our Youth in the science of Government. In a Republic, what species of knowledge can be equally important? And what duty, more pressing on its Legislature, than to patronize a plan for communicating it to those, who are to be the future guardians of the liberties of the Country? <sup>8</sup>

## **II. “The Rock of Your Political Salvation”: Discourse Outside the Statehouse On the Federal Role in Popular Education, 1786-1799**

The debates over whether or not the central government should help support local schooling also occurred outside the statehouse, as they would in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the broader public, professional school leaders, noted philosophers, manufacturers, and labor union luminaries joined in a national school reform debate over whether Congress should fund vocational education in public secondary schools.

George Washington’s words in the early Republic echoed contemporary calls in the broader public discourse for the government to catechize citizens in democracy. Some observers called for a national curriculum, as politicians and educational leaders would do in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in the Common Core States Standards movement. Robert Coram, a Delaware schoolmaster and pamphleteer, went so far as to say that public education and government belonged together if the democracy were to survive. He cajoled Americans:

Remember, my friends, there is but one way to effect [*sic*] this important purpose—which is—by incorporating education with government.—This is the rock on which you must build your political salvation!

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<sup>8</sup> Butts, *Public Education in the United States*, 35; *Annals of the United States Congress*, II, 1550-1551; George Washington, “Speech to Both Houses of Congress, December 7th, 1796,” in Jared Sparks, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, Vol. XII, Part V, 71.

Philadelphia's Dr. Benjamin Rush published an essay in 1786 advocating a standardized curriculum in public schools for children and youth to create a loyal population of republicans who shared kindred ideas. His "Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania" emphasized the need for government to play a central role in designing and financing universal education. He argued that schooling was a key element in preserving the republic and in fending off threats of barbarism, monarchy, and aristocracy. As Washington would do later, Rush argued that a democracy grounded in liberty depended for its survival on the unbridled and equal "diffusion of literature" among the citizenry.

A free government can only exist in an equal diffusion of literature. Without learning, men become savages or barbarians, and where learning is confined to a *few* people, we always find monarchy, aristocracy, and slavery....While we inculcate...republican duties upon our pupil, we must not neglect at the same time to inspire him with republican principles. He must be taught that there can be no durable liberty but in a republic and that government, like all other sciences, is of a progressive nature.<sup>9</sup>

In an era when many, if not most, educated persons were instructed by paid private tutors, parents, hired schoolmasters, clergy, or through self-study, Rush argued that government—in this case, the Pennsylvania legislature—should make available a program of teaching and learning to every citizen at taxpayer expense. Those who could not afford to pay for tutors or tuition at a private academy would learn to read, write, and cipher. The curriculum would immerse them in the core values of republicanism. To fund public "colleges" for those who had already completed a basic education, Rush suggested that income collected from rental of state lands be used to cover some of the costs of public schools and for the colleges that were already

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania; to Which Are Added, Thoughts upon the Mode of Education, Proper in a Republic*, in Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., *American Political Writing During the Founding Era: 1760-1805*, vol. 1, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 492.

funded by Pennsylvania's legislature. (The University of Pennsylvania and the college at Carlisle—now Dickinson University—are two examples.)

But Rush was tacking against the wind. His ambitious plan for government sponsored schools looked good on paper but was not well received. This was primarily because Pennsylvania's ledgers were in the red, and the legislature needed every shilling it could collect to retire the state's debt. However, Pennsylvania's budget woes did not deter Dr. Rush. In an open letter to the people of Philadelphia in 1787, he again argued that the state should finance public schools for children and youth in every city and settlement. He told Philadelphians that "the blessings of knowledge can be extended to the poor and laboring part of the community only by means of free schools." Rush allowed that accessible public schoolhouses might be difficult to open along the Pennsylvania frontier, but he insisted that the experiment could begin right away in Philadelphia. He cautioned his audience that "where the common people are ignorant and vicious, a nation, and above all, a republican nation, can never long be free and happy." Referencing the state's troubled finances, Rush offered a solution: "The price of a bottle of wine or of a single fashionable feather will pay the tax of an ordinary freeholder for a whole year to those schools." What amounted to a modest luxury tax would be used to erect schools and pay teachers whose curriculum would inculcate republican values of thrift, hard work, honesty, patriotism, morality, and democratic intelligence for everyone from the impoverished rag-picker to the children of Philadelphia's wealthiest merchants. Eventually, universal public schooling could be extended to the family of every hard-scrabble farmer on the western edge of the state.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Rush, "To the Citizens of Philadelphia, and of the District of Southwark and the Northern Liberties," *The Independent Gazetteer* (March 28, 1787), in Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), Vol. I, 415.

In 1789, Rush published an essay in the *American Museum* calling for a new curriculum for a new republic. Prefiguring the high school curriculum debates of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that played out in the national discourse over vocational education, he called for “dead languages” such as Greek and Latin to be retired from the schools. In their place he suggested that modern languages be taught, particularly French and German, as well as more practical subjects such as public speaking and science.<sup>11</sup>

Noah Webster, teacher, itinerant lecturer, author of the best-selling “Blue Back Speller” and entrepreneur extraordinaire, not only campaigned for standardized English spelling, he also called for a uniform national curriculum to be taught in schools and paid for in part by the federal government. In his essay, “On the Education of Youth in America,” Webster defended the concept of a democratic catechism that children and youth would be required to memorize in public schools. Common morals, values, culture, and adherence to the fundamentals of republican government were essential to Webster’s vision of education that would be backed by national, state, and local governments. Webster was aware that some libertarians were critical of government-controlled schoolhouses whose teachers might squelch free thought and speech for fear of losing their paychecks. He warned that schools should never be “subservient” to governments that establish them and called for legislators at every level of government in the new republic to open and finance public schools. “Education, in a great measure, forms the moral characters of men, and morals are the basis of government. Education should therefore be

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<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Justice, “The Great Contest: The American Philosophical Society Education Prize of 1795 and the Problem of American Education,” *American Journal of Education*, vol. 114, no. 2 (Feb 2008), 198.

the first care of a Legislature, not merely the institution of schools but the furnishing of them with the best men for teachers.”<sup>12</sup>

Webster closed his 1790 essay by exhorting citizens of the new nation to unhook themselves from the educational ideas of contemporary European powers, especially Great Britain, and strike out on their own with a new system of schools. A fresh start in governance required a new curriculum to meet the needs of a country that had no monarch and no hereditary titled aristocratic class.

Americans, unshackle your minds, and act like independent beings. You have been children long enough, subject to the control, and subservient to the interest of a haughty parent. You have now an interest of your own to augment and defend. You have an empire to raise and support by your exertions, and a national character to establish and extend by your wisdom and virtues. To effect [*sic*] these great objects, it is necessary to frame a liberal plan of policy and build it on a broad system of education. Before this system can be formed and embraced, the Americans must *believe* – and *act* from the belief – that it is dishonorable to waste life in mimicking the follies of other nations and basking in the sunshine of foreign glory.<sup>13</sup>

While Webster was cajoling Americans to unfasten themselves educationally from Britain and other European powers, the lesser known Robert Coram was proposing a national system of public education to be funded by the new central government. A veteran of the American Revolution, Coram was a self-taught schoolmaster and expert in Latin and French. He entered the public discourse on government and education when he produced a complex 120-page pamphlet, *Political Inquiries: to which is Added, a Plan for the General Establishment of Schools throughout the United States*. He supported the concept of universal public education

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<sup>12</sup> Noah Webster, “On the Education of Youth in America,” *American Magazine*, New York, December 1787, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/makingrev/independence/text3/websteramericanidentity>, National Humanities Center, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Webster, “On the Education of Youth in America,” 5.



funded by government and was dissatisfied at the inequalities of wealth and privilege that he witnessed around him. While the wealthy trundled in fine coaches along the streets of his home in Wilmington, Delaware, impoverished parents and their children were scarcely able to sustain themselves. Such circumstances, he believed, contradicted the purposes of the Revolution itself, which were to spread political equality and give every citizen an equal chance to make a living.

The core of his argument involved the ability of citizens to acquire property and to support themselves in a republic whose elected government neither doled out aristocratic titles accompanied by lands that would convey to future generations by birthright nor privilege the wealthy over other socioeconomic classes in sharing political power. Coram published his essay in 1791 as the French Revolution and the accompanying anger of the French commoners intensified over aristocratic privileges, land inheritances, and lavish lifestyles. The major problem European governments faced, Coram insisted, was the unequal distribution of land and the inability of most common folk to purchase property in order to sustain themselves and their families. He contended that universal, free public education in the American republic would enable citizens to own land by providing children and youth with the knowledge and practical skills to earn a living while saving enough money to purchase their own plots.

Coram's emphasis on the importance of schools teaching pragmatic skills in preparation for the adult work world prefigured the arguments that vocational educators would make in their pursuit of federal funding in the Progressive Era. Additionally, his belief that government supported schools could provide socioeconomic uplift foreshadowed the same argument that would be made by vocationalists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The already existing inequities between schools in farm areas and those in the towns were apparent to Coram, who feared that

unless government became involved in establishing funding and regulating public education, the city-dwelling merchant class would forever control the levers of political power.

In Rousseauan fashion, Coram believed that education in the “savage state” was “perfect.” But in the “civilized state” it was deeply flawed because it was not in any way connected to government.

In the civilized state education is the most imperfect part of the whole scheme of government or civilization; or, rather, it is not immediately connected with either, for I know of no modern governments, except perhaps the New England states, in which education is incorporated with the government or regulated by it.<sup>14</sup>

Following in the footsteps of Noah Webster, Coram urged government to pay for equal public schooling for every child. The schoolhouse was the anteroom of economic opportunity in adulthood. It was the required preparation for making a living that would enable all citizens to afford land, food, clothing, and shelter. Education was not only for spreading republican values. Its purpose was also to build the economy. A stable economic system would enable America to avoid the unsettling events that were unfolding in France’s revolution at the time. Only in this manner could the young republic avoid the impending disaster of European aristocratic society and mend the economic inequalities that Coram saw in the streets of Wilmington, Delaware. It was the clear duty of government to provide teaching and learning on equal footing to all Americans.

Society should then furnish the people with means of subsistence, and those means should be an inherent quality in the nature of the government, universal, permanent, and uniform, because their natural means were so. The means I allude

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Coram, “Political Inquiries: to which is Added, a Plan for the General Establishment of Schools throughout the United States,” in ed. Charles S. Hyneman and Donald Lutz, eds., *American Political Writing During the Founding Era: 1760-1805*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), Vol. 2, no. 54, p 45.

to are the means of acquiring knowledge, as it is by the knowledge of some art or science that man is to provide for subsistence in civil society. These means of acquiring knowledge, as I said before, should be an inherent quality in the nature of the government: that is, the education of children should be provided for in the constitution of every state.

By education I mean instruction in arts as well as sciences. Education, then, ought to be secured by government to every class of citizens, to every child in the state. The citizens should be instructed in sciences by public schools, and in arts by laws enacted for that purpose, by which parents and others, having authority over children, should be compelled to bind them out to certain trades or professions, that they may be enabled to support themselves with becoming independency when they shall arrive to years of maturity.<sup>15</sup>

By “government,” it is not clear whether Coram meant that the federal Congress or the state legislatures should ultimately be responsible for national public education. Because he was an anti-federalist, he most likely would have supported state control and taxation for public schools in lieu of federal oversight. Whichever the case, Coram linked schooling for youth with skills for the economy in ways that vocational education leaders would recognize a century later and use as a lever to convince Congress that it should help pay for local schools.<sup>16</sup>

As suggested by Benjamin Rush in 1786, Coram invoked the practice of paying school taxes to support instructor salaries, buildings, and equipment necessary to provide universal public education through the various levels of government. Anticipating howls of protest from wealthy landowners, he wrote:

Now when we consider that such a trifling tax, by being applied to this best of purposes, may be productive of consequences amazingly glorious, can any man make a serious objection against public schools? “It is unjust,” says one, “that I should pay for the schooling of other people’s children.” But, my good sir, it is more unjust that your posterity should go without any education at all. And public

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<sup>15</sup> Coram, “Political Inquiries,” chapter 2, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Butts, *Public Education in the United States*, 34; Hyneman and Lutz, *American Political Writing*, 44.

schools is [*sic*] the only method I know of to secure an education to your posterity forever.<sup>17</sup>

The conversation over federal activity in public education filtered its way into the taverns and coffee houses of the day by way of newspapers and pamphlets. Certainly, the debate reached the ears of the influential American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. The Society, founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1743, met periodically to share the latest opinions of the day, normally by reading out loud the collection of newspapers, pamphlets, essays, journals, and books that came to their attention. At the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Society's membership included some of the most prominent thinkers and actors of the Revolutionary generation: Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Washington, and Noah Webster were involved. The Society's transatlantic reputation also drew European thinkers into its fold.<sup>18</sup>

By Washington's last full year in public office, the prominent Society had been for several decades the most prominent clearing house for the spread of scientific, literary, and philosophical ideas in America. Its reputation, coupled with the proximity of the Society to the seat of government in the Pennsylvania State House—later known as Independence Hall—inspired members to sponsor an essay contest on a "system of liberal Education and literary instruction, adapted to the genius of the Government of the United States." Inaugurated in 1795, it was the first essay contest for educational scholars in America. It carried a \$1,500 cash prize for the winner. To ensure that authors remained down-to-earth and outlined pragmatic applications of their ideas, submissions were also to address "a plan for instituting and

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<sup>17</sup> Coram, "Political Inquiries," chapter 2, 54.

<sup>18</sup> "History of the American Philosophical Society," (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2013), <http://www.amphilsoc.org>.

conducting public schools in this country, on principles of the most extensive utility." Harrison Smith and Samuel Knox shared the winner's purse. Both men composed long, complicated essays on the importance of public education.<sup>19</sup>

Anticipating laws that would be enacted by the states in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Smith called for compulsory schooling. Presaging the campaign of the vocational education reformers, he also called for a direct federal role. Property taxes would pay for education for all children and youth from age 5 through 18. He suggested that education was so vital to the survival of the United States that a *federal* committee be appointed by Congress to oversee every aspect of public schools in the states and localities from buildings and grounds to teacher preparation and the vetting of textbooks.<sup>20</sup>

Samuel Knox served as a Presbyterian minister and principal of the Frederick Academy in Maryland. A theologian and classical scholar, Knox was an experienced teacher who had logged fifteen years in various classroom settings. In his essay he detailed plans for a four-level taxpayer supported education system that would be secular, state-operated, and open to all males. Rather than use the Bible or focus on any particular denominational theology, Knox proposed

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<sup>19</sup> In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the terms "philosophy" and "science" were used interchangeably. Thus, the American Philosophical Society dealt with practical inventions such as founding member Benjamin Franklin's smokeless stove. Its members also discussed papers on "moral philosophy" or "moral science" (ethics, politics, and economics), "natural philosophy" (what modern English calls "science" or "technology"). When founding the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson proposed courses in "technical philosophy" to train mariners, machinists, mechanics, soap makers, metallurgists and the like in these practical skills. The *Oxford English Dictionary* history of the term "science" notes that the word was used to mean knowledge or the state or fact of knowing. See Eugene F. Miller, "On the American Founders' Defense of Liberal Education," *The Review of Politics*, vol. 46, no. 1 (Jan. 1984), 79.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Harrison Smith, "Remarks on Education, Illustrating the Close Connection Between Virtue and Wisdom" To Which is Annexed, A System for Liberal Education," in Benjamin Justice, ed., *The Founding Fathers, Education, and the 'Great Contest,'* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013), Part III (unpaginated). That Smith graduated from the University of Pennsylvania at age 15 is evidence that even the term "university" (it was called a "college" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century)," as used by President Washington in his 1790 "Address to Congress" referred to schools that educated *adolescents*. It was common in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries for America's colleges to admit teenage boys as well as young men.

that the federal government develop a nationwide “moral” catechism to be introduced in “parish” (local) schools at the elementary level. The central government would oversee the entire system and choose appropriate textbooks. Given the vast distances between the capital at Philadelphia and individual schools across the thirteen states, state and local school committees would carry out the minutiae of operating the schoolhouses themselves.<sup>21</sup>

### **III. “Parental Government”: Joseph Richardson’s Quest for Federal Funding of Public Schools**

Fifty years after Rush and Webster advocated central control of public schooling, and nearly a century before vocational education leaders convinced Congress and President Woodrow Wilson to fund public education at the local level, Rep. Joseph Richardson lobbied Congress to financially support a national apparatus to educate the Republic’s children and youth in free and open community schools. Although an obscure member of Congress, his work is important to educational history because his words sounded virtually the same notes that advocates for federal financing of vocational education would strike in the early 20th century.

Richardson argued that the central government should behave like a parent when considering education for the nation’s youth. He was persuaded that good education would improve the economy and steep immigrants in republican values. As we will see in a later chapter, Charles Prosser, David Snedden, and the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education would deliver the same message to Capitol Hill in the 1910s: the responsibility of Congress and the executive branch to provide for a national education reform; the Progressive impulse to view the central government as a beneficent parent and concerned partner in overseeing important aspects of the public’s general welfare; the link between good

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<sup>21</sup> Catherine Reef, *Education and Learning in America*, (New York: Facts on File, 2009), 21-52

public education and the economy; and public schooling as an agent to help Americanize immigrants.

Arriving in Congress in 1827, Richardson set about finding a way for Washington to underwrite nationwide public education at the local level. He was elected from Massachusetts, where the state had been engaged in spirited debate over the establishment of public schools supported by local taxation since the opening decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With taxpayer supported common schooling underway in his home state, the new member of Congress worked to convince his colleagues on Capitol Hill that federally financed public education was the best solution to solidify the union in the face of regional pluralisms and immigration.

Richardson therefore proposed legislation to launch a national school system to be guided by the federal government. Borrowing Jefferson's idea from his 1805 inaugural address, he suggested that extra money from the "embarrassment" of a surplus in the federal treasury could be used to pay for local schools. An Anti-Jacksonian "Adams Man", who believed the central government should address national issues such as banking policy, the economy, and the building of roads and canals to improve commerce, it followed logic for Richardson that federal power and money should be applied to local public schooling on a national scale as an "internal improvement." Richardson also noted that the general welfare clause of the Constitution could be interpreted to include federal oversight of public schooling. What "internal improvement" could be more critical to the nation's welfare than the education of its youth?

Richardson penned a series of "letters" to Congress in 1829 to favorably influence his colleagues' opinions on funding public schools from Washington. He also hoped to sway the general public by inviting newspaper editors to publish his correspondence in their pages. He

was clearly frustrated that Congress had done nothing about this issue in the thirty years that had passed since Washington's appeals in 1790 and 1796.

Straightaway in his *Letters to Congress on National Free Schools*, Richardson referenced the first president. Like Washington, he preferred a strong central government: "the policy of a good government will be parental" in matters relating to the general welfare of the nation. His letters made five main points:

1. "The importance of National Free Schools to secure permanency and prosperity to this Union" is beyond measure.
2. "Two or more millions of dollars [should] be conditionally appropriated during short periods of time for the support or patronage of National Free Schools, and in such manner that, in the event of war, the appropriation may be suspended and applied to purposes of defence [*sic*].
3. "It is proposed, that the appropriation for this purpose shall be apportioned among the several states and territories of the Union, in a ratio according to the representation of each State and Territory. Such apportionment would leave undisturbed the unhappy controversy between the two great sections of the Union.
4. "The present is a period of peace with the entire world, with a prospect of its continuance. Although among some classes of citizens, embarrassments are felt, yet seldom does it fall to the lot of any nation to experience greater prosperity than this now enjoys.... It may be proper to advert to the example of the early settlers of the country, and to consider whether embarrassments induced them to neglect the important duty of providing for the education of their children.
5. "The effects of the system now proposed, on the general character of the people, would be beneficial in the highest degree.... A system of national free schools established and maintained by the General Government would extend to every family in the United States a common vital element whose influence all could at once see and feel."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Richardson, *Letters to Congress on National Free Schools*, (Washington, DC: publisher unknown, 1829).



Richardson lamented that Congress had virtually left public education an orphan to fend for itself in the individual states. “By our Presidents, nearly without exception, the same object has been in vain urged upon the attention of Congress.” To his appeals to the records of former presidents, Richardson added the weight of precedent. He argued that since the beginning of the republic until recently, Congress had appropriated public *land* to indirectly support public schools in new territories without raising the specter of it being an unconstitutional act. He reasoned that by logical extension, Congress could help pay for common schooling in the states using public *money* and not tread on the Constitution’s tenth amendment:

But so far as precedent gives authority the power in question is placed beyond dispute. Appropriations have been made by Congress for founding and supporting the Academy at West Point, the Columbian College in the District of Columbia, for the support of common schools in Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, and other States or Territories, and other literary institutions. Whether the appropriations were made in money or lands, the mode of appropriation does not affect the question of power. Appropriations in public lands to a great extent have been unavailing for the purposes of education. If Congress has power according to the Constitution to appropriate public lands to the support of common schools, and other literary institutions, can it be doubted that it has power to apply for the benefit of the whole people, *the revenue taken directly from the pockets of the people*, in a manner to promote their welfare and especially to secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and their posterity?<sup>23</sup>

Having argued that Congress possessed the power to offer direct financial support to public schools, Richardson sketched a plan for how federal money would be dispersed. He called Congress to pass legislation funding schools for five years at a rate of 2 to 4 million dollars annually. Suggesting an appropriation of \$2,160,000 per year for this period, Richardson figured that each congressional district would receive an equal amount of \$10,000. He reasoned

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<sup>23</sup> Richardson, *Letters to Congress*, Letter II, 6-7.

that this would support twenty-five teachers in public schools in each district for one year, or fifty instructors for six months.

Richardson anticipated the economic arguments of colleagues who would oppose his plan. In Letter III he appealed to unnamed opponents who would look suspiciously on using public money for education even when a glut of revenue put the federal treasury in the black. To those who would vote against using surplus federal income for local schools until all federal debts were paid off, the Massachusetts congressman posed a rhetorical question. Again, he compared the federal government to a parent:

The cry that the public debt should first be paid is not the language of sound discretion. What parent would not be spurned for his cruelty in suffering his children to grow up in ignorance until his debts were all paid? The policy would be as insane as that of him, who, threatened with death by disease, should defer calling a physician until his debts were all discharged.<sup>24</sup>

Some observers among the founding generation had argued for federal investment in community schooling because they were convinced that it would pay *economic* benefits to individuals and the nation. Richardson drew on this rationale as well:

Let the general government give to the whole people the advantage of Free Schools and the resources of wealth and power and prosperity will be rapidly developed. New avenues would be at once created for a beneficial exchange of products between the eastern and western, northern and southern sections of the Union. Let other states [i.e. nations] observe what science has already done in some of our States in developing and applying to purposes of wealth and prosperity the agents and elements of our national independence and national glory.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Richardson, *Letters to Congress*, Letter III, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Richardson, Letter VI, *Letters to Congress*, 22-23.

Richardson presaged the vocational education reform leaders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who would argue that federally funded occupational training in public high schools could Americanize vast numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia. In 1829 he reasoned that allowing money to flow from Washington's coffers to the states for public education would assist newcomers to understand and participate in a democratic nation:

The fact of the immense influx from the surplus population of Europe urges the proposed measure upon this government. Without reproach to that portion of our population it is a fact too true to be disregarded, that it has not been prepared by the influence of institutions like ours to improve and enjoy in the best manner the advantages offered by a free government. The mental elements on which liberty depends do not, like the physical elements, circulate without human efforts. If we would have our vast tracts of unsettled country inhabited by an intelligent, virtuous and free population, they must be raised to that condition by the influence of an education forming them to a character suited to the genius and spirit of a Republican government. For this purpose no time should be lost. In new countries, with a sparse population the means of education are obtained with great difficulty. Government therefore ought with parental solicitude and liberality to extend to them such advantages as will meliorate their condition. By this policy, it is evident that the prosperity of the Union might be greatly augmented.<sup>26</sup>

In December 1829, after circulating *Letters to Congress*, Richardson proposed that a standing committee on education be established in the House of Representatives. The committee's duty would be to consider all educational matters brought before the House and to make recommendations to members on how to proceed with them. Richardson faced a Sisyphean task. He was an anti-Jacksonian who adhered to the creed of a strong federal authority. The majority of representatives in the House in the 21<sup>st</sup> Congress were Jackson men who favored reining in the central government's powers. A spirited debate on the House floor broke out over the constitutionality of Congress' control over states' rights, affairs that had been

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<sup>26</sup> Richardson, Letter V, *Letters to Congress*, 15.

assigned to the individual states, and the role that education should play in the nation's unity.

Rep. Thomas H. Hall spoke against the proposal. A fervent Jacksonian from North Carolina and predictably committed to limiting federal powers, Hall stated his frustration that the influence of Congress into the affairs of individual states was growing tiresome. Congress was already overextended and had no business controlling public schools outside the territories and the District of Columbia. "The subject of education, evidently, so far as legislation can be carried to it, properly belongs to the State authorities....If we go on assuming authority over subjects entirely foreign to our sphere of authority, where are we to end?"

Henry Randolph Storrs, an anti-Jacksonian representative from New York, opposed the resolution on the grounds that Congress had already provided land to the existing states to support public schools, and all issues regarding the relationship between those lands and educational enterprises were being referred to the House Committee on Lands. A permanent committee on education would be redundant. "[I am] not aware... of any necessity for a standing committee on the subject [education]."

Richardson countered that the fingers of Congress were already extended into state and local affairs, and that intervention in supplying the financial means to support public schools was a legitimate and urgent enlargement of federal power:

The gentleman from North Carolina has stated that he has constitutional objections to the proposed measure. Is it possible that the constitution [*sic*] prohibits the power to raise a committee on education, whilst there are committees on agriculture, manufactures, Indian affairs, and various interests, never named in the constitution [*sic*]?...Is it possible that the Congress is vested by the power to pass any laws, or adopt any measures not provided by it, which are essential to 'provide for the general welfare of the United States.'? All unite in bearing testimony that the general diffusion of knowledge in the United States is essential "to the general welfare, and to secure the blessings of liberty."

Richardson's impassioned plea repeated arguments stated earlier in his *Letters to Congress*. The "immortal Washington" had urged Congress to establish funds for public education, as had Jefferson and Madison. The only obstacles to their proposals had been federal debt and the War of 1812. However, President Andrew Jackson had informed Congress that a surplus in the federal budget was imminent. Attempting to fend off the pro-Jackson contingent that argued for fencing in federal authority, Richardson argued that the federal treasury could afford to assist public schools, and "[i]t is virtually recommended by the President, in his message just communicated, where we are informed the amount required for the discharge of the public debt will be at the disposal of the Government for other important objects."

William Segar Archer, pro-Jackson representative from Virginia, noted that the issue of whether Congress should involve itself in local public schooling was "one of the largest and, in the most favorable sense, *one of the most contestable questions of power which had ever been presented in the operation of the Government*." After acknowledging Richardson's point that several national leaders had asked Congress to exercise its power in favor of public education, he was not persuaded on the constitutionality of it and, like Hall, feared that creating a standing committee to handle school issues would open the floodgates to more congressional activism. Having made his argument, Archer moved that the Richardson resolution be tabled. The House overwhelmingly approved the motion by a vote of 156-52. Voting in the majority were two future presidents, James Buchanan of Pennsylvania and James K. Polk of Tennessee. Perhaps fittingly, if not ignominiously, the House dropped its conversation on education and proceeded immediately to discuss the memorial of a deceased member.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United State*, First Session, Twenty-First Congress, (Washington, DC: Duff Green, 1829), 42, 55; Joseph Gales, ed. *Register of Debates in Congress, Comprising the Leading Debates*

Richardson's proposal expired in the House of Representatives, but educators in the common school movement kept the idea of federal involvement alive during the Jacksonian period and beyond. The American Lyceum movement, the Trades' Union, and other organizations dabbled with the idea of a federal agency to collect and disseminate school statistics. Their efforts relied on voluntary collection and reporting of data. They fell flat because most of their members were indifferent to such projects. On the political front, Democrats found it difficult to convince their fragile constituency of workers, religious leaders, and immigrants—many of whom professed tepid commitments to education in the first place—to support state-run centralized agencies to oversee local schools. Democrats continued to vigorously oppose federal educational initiatives of any kind. Many of them feared centralized power of any kind. Some opposed public schools that would welcome children and youth of all races and ethnic backgrounds. Others expressed concern over how much universal, national schooling would cost and wondered who would foot the bill. The common school cause was taken up by Whigs who campaigned for strengthened state oversight of local common schools. Their objectives were to buttress local communities, promote republican virtues of liberty and equality, and to enhance their own political profit.<sup>28</sup>

#### **IV. Federalism, States' Rights, and the Crusade to Establish the U.S. Bureau of Education**

In the decades between Richardson's attempt to secure federal involvement in local schools and the outbreak of the Civil War, the common school movement expanded across the United States as part of a collection of reform movements that tackled social concerns related to

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*and Incidents of the First Session of the Twenty-First Congress*, (Washington D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1830), 475-477. Italics added.

<sup>28</sup> Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 39-46; Butts, *Public Education*, 89-91.

poverty, prison conditions, ill-kept hospitals, voting rights for women, and temperance. Horace Mann in Massachusetts was often found at the vanguard of common school development. A consummate politician, Mann's mission was to unite the nation through a common education governed by individual states. With prophetic foresight, he sensed that conflicts between North and South would one day escalate into violence. Standardized curricula that would reinforce basic skills, inculcate proper morality, and emphasize republican values could prevent the national calamity of an internal war. Borrowing the Enlightenment concept that an educated citizenry would ensure a healthy society, Mann's Massachusetts colleague Charles Brooks—an indefatigable social reformer—witnessed the horrific conditions of the nation's expanding cities, the plight of children who labored in mills and factories, illiteracy among all age groups, and riots between Catholic and Protestant mobs over such issues as which version of the Bible to use in common school classrooms.

Like Joseph Richardson, Brooks saw the state's role as parental. Common education was the antidote for social problems. Henry Barnard in Connecticut and Rhode Island joined the growing collection of civic leaders who pressed for individual states to fund and regulate public education. Midwestern activists included Samuel Lewis, Samuel Galloway, and Calvin Stowe from Ohio, Ninian Edwards in Illinois, as well as John Pierce and Isaac Crary in Michigan. John Sewett pressed for public schooling in faraway California.<sup>29</sup>

Bending to the pressures of common school leaders such as Mann, Barnard, and Brooks, federal census-takers in 1840 agreed to collect data on literacy and education for the first time. The statistics from 1840 and 1850 demonstrated to some observers the positive results of

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<sup>29</sup> Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 30-39.

individual state organizing and funding of schoolhouses. In 1840, enumerators reported that nearly 2 million students attended 47,000 public elementary and secondary schools within the past year. The overwhelming majority of them were located in the northern states. For 1850, census takers reported that the public school population reached 3 million, a 50% increase. The number of instructors had doubled to nearly 100,000.

Most of the common school effort focused on encouraging individual states to organize and pay for schools. But pleas for the federal government to support a national school system continued to echo in the convention halls of educational association meetings, where members gathered annually to hear statistical reports and speeches from elite educators. Proponents of a federally backed system agreed that ongoing control of local common schools by reform-minded elites at the state and grass-roots levels would inevitably result in educational inequities. A national apparatus of common schools under the federal umbrella, however, would dilute the control of paternalistic do-gooders and ensure that teachers, parents, and local leaders of all socioeconomic classes would have a voice in the way schoolhouses were operated.

Some reformers believed that congressional involvement would ensure not only *equity* but *quality* as well. Equal learning opportunities in a republican society dedicated to avoiding a controlling aristocratic class would set the United States apart from its European counterparts and feed into America's sense of exceptionalism. Schools would use similar textbooks and curricula. Teachers everywhere would be trained in like manner. Washington would compensate for local and state school budget shortfalls. Classrooms in the North, the South, and along the ever-moving westward frontier would be essentially the same, with children and youth being schooled in the same subjects using similar pedagogies. Congressional input would enable higher standards of quality, improve educational equity among socioeconomic classes, and build



a broader base of stakeholders beyond the class of elite community activists and political insiders who tended to oversee local school jurisdictions in the states. Only the federal government was a large enough entity to ensure that public schools would be operated efficiently and without class prejudice. Further, educators argued that equitable schooling under Washington's watchful eye might even help ease sectional tensions that were tightening between North and South.<sup>30</sup>

In 1838, attendees at the American Institute for Instruction convention heard Samuel G. Goodrich argue that all levels of American government should be involved in supporting education for children and youth:

Ought education not, then, be laid at the foundation of our political system? Ought not provision be made by every government, in every country, for the instruction of all the people in that knowledge which is necessary to enable them to form just opinions upon all the great questions of life? In our country, where the government is placed in the hands of the people, ought we not especially make arrangements for the education of every member of society to this extent?<sup>31</sup>

At the 1843 American Institute for Instruction convention, S.J. May pleaded for federal money to support the growing public school movement. He castigated Congress for paying little attention to the needs of teachers and students:

I have said that schools are the most important of all our social institutions. Who would suspect this, from the procedure of the people in their primary meetings, or from the doings of Legislatures of the States, and the Congress of the Union? Banks, railroads, and tariffs,--the rival projects of the political parties, and the pecuniary schemes of private individuals, occupy a hundred fold more of the time and attention of those who enact, and those who administer the laws, than those institutions whose object is to form the character of the rising generation, in

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<sup>30</sup> "Scholars in Primary and Common Schools" Census of 1840 and Census of 1850, at Library of the University of Virginia, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu>; Frank J. Munger and Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *National Politics and Federal Aid to Education*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1962), 77.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel G. Goodrich, "Man the Subject of Education," *Lectures and Proceedings, American Institute for Instruction, 1838*, (Boston: William Ticknor, 1839), 183.

whose character are vested the hopes, the future well-being the salvation of our country. It is not matter for surprise, for alarm that ephemeral concerns should have so much more of the regard of the people and, the rulers, than they bestow upon this one, which is enduring and momentous in all its consequences—*the education of our children?*<sup>32</sup>

At the 1849 convention of the Friends of Education—later to be renamed the American Association for the Advancement of Education (AAAE) — president Horace Mann spoke firmly for federal fiscal help for local public schools, urging that Congress work to open and support schools in every American settlement. Mann believed that universal schooling in morals, civic responsibility and democratic traditions in concert with a curriculum in basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills would equip the Union to quell debates over secession. At Mann’s urging, the AAAE membership passed a motion to petition Washington to establish a federal office of education to collect and report school data. It was thought that if individual states and localities could view comparative statistical reports and read pamphlets about teaching ideas, school government strategies, and curriculum plans, consistent standards of education could be met throughout the country. Perhaps such information sharing, with the financial backing of Washington, could inculcate children and youth with enough republican values and intelligence that the growing sectional crisis could be averted. Congress, however, had a tin ear when it came to listening to tunes played by educational groups. No one on Capitol Hill appeared to be interested. The matter of federal funding or involvement of any kind in local public schools quietly slipped away to be considered at a future time when the federal government was not so preoccupied with regional politics and negotiating ways to maintain the Union.

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<sup>32</sup> S. J. May, Lecture IX, *The Journal of Proceedings*, American Institute for Instruction, 1843, (Boston, MA: William Ticknor and Co., 1844), 229. Italics in original.

In 1850, Henry Barnard proposed to the Friends of Education that a federal education officer be appointed. The group was not receptive to Barnard's proposal, which lay dormant until his return from a European trip in 1854. In that year, Barnard offered a detailed scheme for opening a federal office of education in Washington. He suggested that the newly endowed Smithsonian Institution be named as the central government agency to take on the task of a federal bureau of education. The Institute's general secretary, Joseph Henry, turned Barnard's proposal away.<sup>33</sup>

The 1850s saw educators continue their calls for Congress to fund public schools. At its first convention in 1851, members of the newly renamed American Association for the Advancement of Education voted to petition Congress that "the future instalments [*sic*] of the surplus revenue" be set aside "for the benefit of the Common Schools in the several States."<sup>34</sup> For the remainder of the decade, however, the AAAE abandoned discussions of *federal* aid and instead concentrated on urging *individual states* to pay for and regulate public schools. Rather than comment on the rising storm of sectional conflict in the 1850s, lecturers at AAAE meetings rolled out platitude-filled speeches on moral instruction, Bible reading in school, parental responsibilities in children's education, and the need for religion to pervade the curriculum alongside republican civics and basic skills in arithmetic, reading, and writing.

The National Education Association (NEA), formed in 1857, picked up the notion of involving Washington in local school aid as the Civil War approached. In its early years, the NEA focused much of its attention on gathering common school statistics. It pressed for a

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<sup>33</sup> Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 49-51.

<sup>34</sup> *Proceedings of the First Session of the American Association for the Advancement of Education*, (Philadelphia: E.C. and J. Biddle, 1852), 18.

federal bureau of education to collect and share data on public education throughout the United States. At its first meeting, Thomas W. Valentine observed that “we need this [Association], not merely to promote the interests of our profession, but to gather up and arrange the educational statistics of our country, so that the people may know what is really being done for Public Education, and what yet remains to be done.” He compared education’s needs with those of other entities when he argued that “surely these interests [Agriculture, Interior, Navy, and the like] cannot be more important than those which pertain to the intellectual and moral welfare of our people.” In 1858, NEA president Zalmon Richards called the Association to campaign for a national federal office to act as a clearing house for school information. In 1859, Andrew J. Rickoff, president of the Association, pointed out that “the educational statistics of no two states are so prepared that they afford any basis at all for comparative statements or estimates. This statement applies in an equal degree to the statistics of the school-going population and to reports of receipts and expenditures.” A Committee on School Statistics was established in 1860 to address Rickover’s concerns; however, it was apparent to the NEA membership that a federal agency would be a more efficient and effective alternative.

At the NEA convention in 1864, S.H. White introduced a motion urging that a national bureau be created for such a purpose and that an NEA committee be appointed to investigate the matter. His motion was successful and a committee was formed to lobby Washington powerbrokers. Committee members met with President Andrew Johnson, senators, and representatives in 1865 in an effort to convince them to act on the idea.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Proceedings*, National Teachers Association, 1857, (Syracuse, N. Y.: C. W. Bardeen, 1909), 12-13; S. H. White, "A National Bureau of Education," *Proceedings of the National Teachers' Association, 1864*, (Syracuse, N. Y.: C. W. Bardeen, 1909), 399,436-40. Also quoted in J. Cayce Morrison, "Twenty-Five Years of Educational Research, *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 26, no. 3, (June, 1956), 205-209.

The American Institute of Instruction's (AII) discussions of federal involvement in the schoolhouse echoed those of the NEA in the quest for the holy grail of a federal bureau of education. In their meetings held during the Civil War, the AII renewed calls for federal involvement in local public schools. While lamenting that the war had moved the national conversation on public education into the background, elite speakers at conventions blamed the outbreak of war on Washington's failure to support local schools. They blamed lack of support from state and federal governments, flaccid moral training in classrooms, and incomplete instruction in republican values. Additionally, Northern members of the trans-regional Institute identified low numbers of Southern state-supported schools as the root cause of the nation's conflict. Before Southern secession, AII's Southern members had joined their Northern colleagues in calling for federal activism in public schools as long as Washington did not tread on state laws regarding education of slaves and free Blacks. The AII's simplistic explanation for the outbreak of the Civil War was that a federal education agency could have accomplished something more proactive than making land grants for education. They could have strengthened the South's public schools and averted the violence that now engulfed the United States.<sup>36</sup>

Institution member Henry Barnard, publisher of the influential *American Journal of Education*, noted with frustration that the only interest many teachers and superintendents displayed in federal assistance to schools during wartime centered on how they might help

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<sup>36</sup> The South's public school system was relatively smaller and less fortified than schools districts in the North. However, this does not imply that Southern leaders were not concerned about education. Laws passed in the 1830s forbidding the schooling of slaves suggests that Southern politicians well understood the power of teaching and learning to influence the social order. Further, many seminaries and academies were established in the South before the war. Some of the curricula in these schools surpassed those of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. See Anya Jabour, "Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated: Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 64, no. 1 (Feb., 1998), 23-64; Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

Washington prepare young men for military duty and how the conflict between North and South would affect public education in the aftermath.<sup>37</sup>

In 1864, the Institute followed the NEA's lead and voted to pressure Congress to vote into law a pending bill that would establish a federal bureau of education within the Department of the Interior "for the purpose of procuring educational information and statistics, and diffusing them throughout the country." With states' righters from the Southern Democratic wing now absent from Congress, perhaps the time had come for an initiative to enact federal assistance for education to pass the House and Senate.

When the war was over, teachers and administrators resurrected their claim that public education could reform and shape American society. One way the central government could have avoided war was to encourage and fund public schooling. B.G. Northrup's August 1865 presidential address before the Institute's convention summarized the opinions of many Northern school leaders:

"Who can doubt that had a national Bureau of education been established fifty years ago, and a hundredth part of the cost of this war been then devoted to the education of all the people, South as well as North, black as well as white, this terrible Rebellion, possible only by absence of free schools and the consequent ignorance of the masses, would have been averted?...Let the Government encourage universal education. This implies no dictation or interference with the free action of the several States."

As the NEA's Thomas Valentine had done in 1857, President Northrup noted that Congress had already set a precedent for Washington's involvement in local affairs through financial programs sponsored by the Department of Agriculture. If farmers and state agriculture bureaus qualified for federal aid, why not schools? Donald Warren has observed that the drive

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<sup>37</sup> *Journal of Proceedings*, 1863, x.

for establishing the U.S. Office of Education was inspired by patterns laid down in creating the Department of Agriculture, the first sub-cabinet bureau at the federal level. Although operators of small and medium size farms did not want federal intrusion into their affairs, elite gentlemen farmers pressed for the Department and persuaded Congress to create it. Abraham Lincoln signed it into law in May 1862.<sup>38</sup>

Gordon Lee's history of the movement to establish federal activity in public schools through the U.S. Bureau of Education cites three major legislative precedents that prepared the way for Congress to approve a federal bureau of education in 1865. These include the 1862 Morrill Act to create land grant colleges, the 1865 Freedmen's Bureau legislation, and the Department of Education Acts. Republican Rep. Justin Morrill (Vermont) crafted the 1862 act that ceded federal land to individual states to open colleges and universities whose curricula would concentrate primarily on agriculture, mining, and engineering.<sup>39</sup> The original measure had been vetoed by President James Buchanan as an unconstitutional infringement of individual state sovereignty. As the 1917 Smith Hughes Act would be in the future, Morrill's 1862 bill was successful in part because it was tied to national defense during the opening years of the Civil War. Lincoln signed the bill in July 1862.

## **V. The Freedmen's Bureau and Federal Funding for Public Schools**

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, also known as the Freedmen's Bureau, was the second precedent that prepared the way for future federal activism

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<sup>38</sup> *An Act to Establish a Department of Agriculture*, Thirty-Seventh Congress, Session II, Ch. 72, in George P. Sanger, ed., *The Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America from December 5, 1859 to March 3, 1863*, (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Co., 1863), 387-388; Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 72-74.

<sup>39</sup> "An Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories which may provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts," 37<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States, Public Law 37-108. ; Lee, *The Struggle for Federal Aid: The First Phase*.

in public education. The debates over a bill establishing the Freedmen's Bureau dredged up the same concerns as had earlier Congressional discussions over federal activism in local affairs: states' rights and local control.

Samuel Cox, a Northern Democrat from Ohio, strongly opposed the Freedmen's bill on the grounds that it was "crude and undigested," as well as "seeping and revolutionary." He reminded Congress that the federal government was designed to hold "limited and express powers." A Freedmen's Bureau would constitute a move "so latitudinarian that the whole system of our Government is changed." Cox warned that Republican supporters of the bill were opening up "a vast opportunity for greed, corruption, tyranny, and abuse." Philanthropy attempted by "our Federal government of limited and delegated powers" would never succeed, no matter how humanitarian the intention. As opponents to federal public education initiatives had done during the debate over Joseph Richardson's proposal for federalism in public schools in the 1820s, Cox tapped into the vein of American Constitutional fundamentalism when he argued on the House floor that an act to benefit freed peoples and white Southern refugees was an assault on the "ramparts of constitutional restraint against such radical usurpations." The counter-argument that eventually carried the day for the bill's passage centered on the inability of Southern states to provide for the general welfare of freed slaves and dislocated white populations on their own. Such circumstances, supporters argued, called for Washington's intervention.<sup>40</sup>

The act originally contained no language about schooling. It was a broad proposal aimed at humanitarian relief, especially for African Americans recently freed from slavery. Signed into

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<sup>40</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 38<sup>th</sup> Congress, *House of Representatives*, New Series, no. 45, February 19, 1864, (Washington, DC: John C. Rives, 1864), 705, 712



existence by Lincoln in 1865, the Bureau gradually adopted teaching and learning programs as a benevolent aid initiative during the expansion of the bureau's scope after 1865. School leaders and Bureau officials argued that education for freed slaves was of paramount concern because they needed to master basic skills and because many believed that freed people needed to learn the essential tenets of republicanism and civic virtue as preparation for participating in the democratic process. The Bureau appointed state and local superintendents to oversee school jurisdictions. Federal money was used to build, repair, and remodel buildings for educational uses. Superintendents' reports to the Washington Bureau show that they were involved at the most granular levels of public schooling in the communities of freed slaves in the South. Such an example would inspire education leaders to press on toward the goal of a national bureau for education with broader powers.<sup>41</sup>

## **VI. "We Cannot Build a Republic Without Intelligence": Ignatius Donnelly and the Push for More Federal Control of Local Schools**

A federal office for education had been discussed in common school circles in the antebellum period and during the Civil War. Conventioneers heard speeches calling for education to play a role at the federal level in rebuilding the shattered nation. Although the national education office that appeared in 1867 was set up as a small number-crunching and report-generating bureau, elite educators harbored a greater vision for a strengthened national bureau that had power to do more than gathering statistics and publishing reports. As we have seen from speeches given at educational conventions during the Civil War, education leaders blamed Southern state governments for lackluster support of public education, failure to

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<sup>41</sup> For full Superintendents Reports on Freedmen schools at the state and local levels, see National Archives, African American Heritage collection, Microfilms M799 (Georgia), M810 (Alabama), M822 (Texas), M844 (North Carolina, M980 (Arkansas), M1000 (Tennessee), M1026 (Louisiana), M1053 (Virginia), and M1056 (District of Columbia). Additional microfilm rolls exist for Reports of Assistant Superintendents.

inculcate youth with republican principles, and barring four million enslaved persons from being schooled at all. Now that the South had been defeated, the federal government faced the colossal task of restoring the South's agricultural and industrial base. Millions of people were displaced, and jobs were difficult to find. As Jane Turner Censer has pointed out, many of the children and youth of white families who had owned slaves lacked the basic manual skills to make a living. School experts believed that public education needed to play a major role in refashioning the Union. Although such language did not appear in the final 1867 Department of Education Act, it is clear from convention debates during the war and in the aftermath of Appomattox in 1865 that the real intent was to invigorate public school improvement in the defeated South and throughout the nation, and to improve local public schools through publication of administrative ideas, organizational aids, and the latest pedagogical techniques. Embedded in such reports and in the dissemination of statistics from the states would also be suggestions to address the moral, civic, and academic shortcomings that the "schoolmen" saw in antebellum education systems. They suspected that if local school boards and state education commissions were left alone in the postwar era, schools in all regions of the country would not be up to the task of promoting the healing of civic, moral, and academic scars created by the recent conflict. Further, educational spokespersons worried that some classrooms would be barred to people of color, especially freed slaves in the South and those who had made their way to Northern cities.<sup>42</sup>

The act to form a bureau of education in the federal capital was introduced on the floor of the House of Representatives in December 14, 1865 by the idealistic radical Republican Ignatius Donnelly from Minnesota. A product of Philadelphia public schools, Donnelly blamed the recently ended war on "the absence of common schools and general education among the people

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<sup>42</sup> Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

of the lately rebellious States.” His bill called for the Joint Committee on Reconstruction to investigate “the expediency of establishing in this capital a national bureau of education, whose duty it shall be to enforce education without regard to race or color” on states whose schools “fell below a standard to be established by Congress.”

Donnelly’s vision recruited Congress as the originator of regulations and the arbiter of accountability for the nation’s schoolhouses. This was a powerful proposal that prefigured themes of federal involvement in local schools through funding the vocational education movement, the National Defense Act of 1958, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as well as the No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top initiatives of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Had it passed with all its potent provisions intact, Donnelly’s resolution might well have laid the groundwork for federally mandated racially integrated public education, which did not appear until the 1950s. After urging that a robust educational bureau become a “permanent part of any system of reconstruction,” Donnelly’s resolution was not debated and survived an attempt to table by a vote of 113 to 37.<sup>43</sup>

Still alive and coursing through the labyrinth of Congressional paths toward passage, Donnelly’s resolution found a persistent supporter in Rep. James A Garfield, a Republican from Ohio. A former teacher, principal, and president of what would later become Hiram College in Ohio, Garfield appeared to be a natural choice to chair a special committee to examine closely Donnelly’s school proposal and sharpen its focus. Garfield’s bipartisan committee reported the bill favorably to the House on June 5, 1866. The Act to Establish a National Bureau of Education contained three elements:

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 78.

1. The Department of Education would act as a clearinghouse for collecting and disseminating data showing the status of education in the individual states and territories of the Union. It would also generate reports on pedagogical and administrative ideas that make for efficient schools. These actions would “promote the cause of education throughout the country.”
2. With the consent of the Senate, the President of the United States would appoint a commissioner at a salary of \$5,000 per year to oversee the agency’s operations. The commissioner was empowered to hire and supervise a modest staff of a chief clerk and four researchers.
3. The commissioner would prepare an initial report to Congress demonstrating how monetary trusts established under land grants for schools had been managed.<sup>44</sup>

Congressman Donnelly claimed the floor of the House and delivered a long jeremiad on the need for a federal bureau to collect and distribute school statistics and information that could strengthen the recently reunified republic. His assessment of the War Between the States and its aftermath led him to two conclusions. First, “the hitherto governing populations of those States could not be trusted to uphold the National Government.” In the name of radical states’ rights, “they have sought through unparalleled sacrifices to overthrow it.” They had overthrown the “temple of our liberties” and succeeded at least in “burying their own prosperity in ruins.” Second, four million liberated slaves in the South were uneducated. Washington could not leave them alone to simply drift without the means to earn a living or participate in republican government. “Proclaiming nothing, promising nothing, we have thrown open all doors to the black man and cried God speed to him as he moves forward in the future.”

Donnelly stated that schooling for Southern whites who had returned to the federal fold and for freed peoples was the best remedy for the problems faced by a ravaged South whose territory was crawling with refugees, whose cities were ghostly hulks, and whose fields and

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<sup>44</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, U. S. House of Representatives, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, June 5, 1866, (Washington, DC: John C. Rives, 1866), 2966-2967.

factories had been depleted and destroyed. He then posed a rhetorical question to the House: “What pressing necessity results from these two facts?” Donnelly answered his own question with one word: “Education.” Before yielding the floor, he excoriated Congress and the executive branch for having shirked its responsibility to provide educational opportunities for the nation’s children and youth since the ratification of the Constitution. “Is it not a shame, Mr. Speaker, that this nation, which rests solely and alone upon the intelligence of the citizen, and without which it could not exist for an hour, *should thus far have done literally nothing either to recognize or enforce education?*”

Before Donnelly finished, the Radical Republican acknowledged that indeed public education—“that grandest of all interests”—had been placed in the hands of state governments. Acknowledging the position of states’ rights opponents to the bill who had argued that the central government had no business in the local schoolhouse, Donnelly observed that “we will be told that we have left all that to the States. *Yes; and we have had the rebellion as a consequence.* The attempt to invert the pyramid and build a great, wise nation upon an ignorant, bigoted and brutalized population has cost half a million lives and \$4,000,000,000 of debt.” To rebuild the nation without federal support of schooling—even through a modest office of education in Washington—was akin to “mak[ing] bricks without straw. We cannot build a republic without intelligence.”<sup>45</sup> Moreover, backers of Donnelly’s bill were, like antebellum common school leaders, committed to the vision that public education could remedy social ills and unify the fractured nation. The theme of a social messianic role for public schools would be echoed in the campaign to establish federal funding for vocational education later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early in the 20<sup>th</sup>, when vocationalists would argue that pragmatic occupational training would

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<sup>45</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, House of Representatives, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, June 5, 1866, 2966-2967.

meliorate the needs of students who were headed for careers in the nation's factories, mills, and stores.<sup>46</sup>

Donnelly's chief opponent was Andrew Jackson Rogers, a New Jersey Democrat who had not only been educated in that state's common schools, but had taught in them for two years. Rogers was a minimalist when it came to federal powers. Although he missed nearly half of the House's roll calls during his two terms in Congress, Rogers happened to be present for the debate on extending the already expanding list of federal powers to include the creation of a humble, bare-bones bureau to gather and disseminate educational information. Disturbed by Garfield's bill, Rogers pleaded that the federal treasury was "sufficiently burdened" with war debts and "we should allow the States, as they have been the habit of doing, the entire control of looking after the education of our children."

But Rogers' reason for opposing the Garfield bill was deeper than a plea for fiscal frugality: *it was about states' rights*. He reminded his colleagues that permitting the central government to have a hand in the educational affairs of the states and localities "would be something never before attempted in the nation." Never before had anyone in Congress worked to open a federal bureau "for the purposes of diffusing intelligence throughout the States of the Federal Union." Leaning on a fundamentalist's literal interpretation of the Constitution, Rogers told the House that "there is no authority under the Constitution of the United States to authorize Congress to interfere with the education of the children of the different States of the Union in any manner, directly or indirectly." Further, the former public school teacher warned his fellow legislators that "it proposes to put under supervision of a bureau established at Washington all

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<sup>46</sup> Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 80-85.

the schools and educational institutions of the different States of the Union by collecting facts and statistics as will warrant them by amendments to the law now attempted [H.R. 276] to be passed to control and regulate the educational system of the whole country.” Rogers admitted that Garfield’s bill would not directly regulate local schools; however, he said somewhat contradictorily that gathering school data and disseminating it “will give controlling power over the school systems of the States.”

Rogers predicted that the cost of a bureau of education in the capital would eventually cost the government half a million dollars, not the modest sum of about \$15,000 that the bill estimated would be necessary to pay salaries and rent office space. He was disturbed that the proposed cost of the educational commissioner’s salary in such a bureau would be \$5000, “\$2000 more than a member of Congress receives.” For Rogers, the question of a federal office of education was “not a political question; it is a mere wild scheme of philanthropy.”<sup>47</sup>

Republican Frederick Pike of Maine echoed Rogers’ concerns but went further by suggesting that Washington-controlled schooling would inevitably lead to Washington-controlled religion.

In summary, states’ righters and fiscal conservatives believed that a central education agency was a waste of money that would balloon into a bloated money-gobbling bureaucracy alongside the Freedmen’s Bureau. Their arguments established two main points:

1. The war had sapped the federal treasury. Anticipated reconstruction costs endangered the health of the federal budget. Washington needed to cut spending wherever possible, and the creation of a new department seemed frivolous. The government did not need a discreet Department of Education to collect and share school statistics. Hiring a few clerks in the Department of the Interior could accomplish the task at a

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<sup>47</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, House of Representatives, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 2970.

more reasonable cost.

2. The newly created Freedmen's Bureau was certain to expand as additional humanitarian missions were added to its list of responsibilities. In like manner, the scope and powers of an educational agency based in the nation's capital could easily grow alongside the Freedmen's Bureau.

The objections of Democrats notwithstanding, the House approved a final version of Garfield's bill by a vote of 80 to 44. Throughout the next eighteen months, education leaders worried about the bill's fate as it was sent over to the Senate. George Barnard mounted an intense lobbying campaign in favor of the House bill, penning letters to anyone whom he believed was opposed or teetering on the fence and cajoling those who favored the bill to work relentlessly for its passage. Barnard even wrote to Washington clergy whose parishioners included senators who looked on the bill with only tepid approval. They could swing in either direction when the bill came to a vote. One uncommitted senator, Republican Ira Harris of New York, was active in the Baptist Church. Knowing this, Barnard induced the minister of Harris' Washington congregation to intercede in behalf of the bill.<sup>48</sup>

Debate on the bill to open a federal office of education began in February 1867. Sen. Thomas A. Hendricks, Democrat from Indiana, fired the initial salvo against the legislation. Hendricks, future Vice President under Grover Cleveland, held that a Department of Education was superfluous and would do nothing to benefit local public schools. In fact, it would provide nothing more than a few government posts for a commissioner of education to fill. Hendricks represented a state with vast agricultural holdings. He observed that the Department of Agriculture was also a waste of money, having supplied only a few seeds and a collection of

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<sup>48</sup> Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 85.



reports that were read by only a smattering of farmers. Hendricks predicted the same fate for a Department of Education. He then resurrected an old and enduring chestnut: states' rights and a fear that a central educational agency would soon dictate matters in the local classrooms of public schools, which in his opinion were already operating to the benefit of Indiana's youth without federal intervention.

The States have nearly all now entered upon a system of common schools; and so far as I know they are arranged, well considered, and adjusted systems. The State of Indiana has a very good system. It is generally under the control of a man well qualified for the position; in all probability equal to the qualifications to the man who will be put in charge of any department in this city. Our own system is understood by the people. It is satisfactory to them. They support it; they encourage it; and it is felt in every neighborhood. It furnishes a school to every neighborhood. The system of school-books is decided upon by the proper authorities, and the whole thing is a great blessing to the people. I do not think that any supervising control in the City of Washington over these State institutions and State systems can be of any benefit. I apprehend the opposite may be the case. This bill will furnish some offices for some men. That is about all there will be of it. It will be in the end a very large expenditure of the public money, in my opinion, without an adequate return.

Democratic Senator Willard Saulsbury—a controversial, hotheaded attorney who had once brandished a pistol on the Senate floor in defiance of an order to be seated—spoke out against the bill for constitutional reasons. “Congress has no constitutional authority to enact such a measure as this; and leaving out all questions of expediency or propriety, I should place my opposition on the grounds of want of constitutional authority in Congress to pass it.”<sup>49</sup>

Despite vocal opposition by educational states'-righters, the bill to create a Department of Education was passed. Another Democrat, Charles Buckalew of Pennsylvania, attempted to

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<sup>49</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, U.S. Senate, February 27, 1867, 1893.

forestall the bill's final passage by moving to reconsider it. His motion was defeated on March 1, 1867 by a vote of 28 to 7, with 17 senators recorded absent.<sup>50</sup>

Donald Warren's granular analysis of this bill demonstrates that education was not a major concern for either Republicans or Democrats. Garfield's bill moved through the House and Senate with limited debate. For Warren, votes for and against the bill exposed complex fault lines within both parties that composed the 39<sup>th</sup> Congress: three types of Radical Republicans, "Johnson Republicans", and Democrats who at times supported Republican measures. The details of Warren's superb assessments somewhat cloud the issue that was repeated in discussions in both houses of Congress when the bill to create a Department of Education reached the floor: *States' rights lawmakers in both parties were still opposed to any form of federalist intervention in public education at the elementary and secondary levels. And they worried that a national education office would cost too much, expand in size and influence, and eventually choke off local and state-level management of the schoolhouse.*<sup>51</sup>

The next challenge for Garfield's bill was to ensure that President Andrew Johnson would sign it. Johnson was rumored to be against the bill and prepared to veto it. Having come this far to convince Congress to create a bureau for education, Barnard anxiously asked his friend, Republican Senator James Dixon of Connecticut, to persuade Johnson that the measure was harmless to the sovereignty of the states and that it promised to benefit the effort to reunite the nation. Dixon persuaded the reluctant president to sign the bill into law on March 2, 1867.

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<sup>50</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, U.S. Senate, March 1, 1867, 1950.

<sup>51</sup> Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 86-90. Warren's historical framework for analyzing the 39<sup>th</sup> Congress can be found in David H. Donald, *The Politics of Reconstruction, 1863-1867*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1965). For a later interpretation of the work of the 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, 1863-1877: America's Unfinished Revolution*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

Having triumphed in a Herculean effort in behalf of educators nationwide to establish a Department of Education, Barnard set his sights on becoming the first federal Commissioner of Education. After significant lobbying, hand-pressing, and letter-writing, Barnard overcame opposition from within the National Teachers' Association to be appointed commissioner by President Andrew Johnson.

The Department of Education got off on the wrong foot and nearly endangered future prospects of federal funding for any type of public education. From the start, Barnard's Department of Education became embroiled in political infighting, presidential meddling, and staff disputes. Barnard was not a good administrator. His health was declining, due in no small part to employee bickering. Progress in moving Southern jurisdictions to open schools for Blacks was hampered when Barnard continued to publish his time-consuming *American Journal of Education* during his first three years at the department's helm. At times he felt compelled to return to his home in Hartford, Connecticut to recover from Washington stress. Barnard's inaction over producing reports, his regular whining about staff difficulties and lack of funds to produce reports mandated by Congress, and his frequent trips to Hartford annoyed the Department's original sponsors. James A. Garfield scribbled a blunt note to Barnard in the spring of 1868 to return to the capital, defend his department, and publish the required reports. Garfield counseled Barnard that doing so would "enable the friends of education of the Dept. to save it from abolition and to defend you from the charge that is constantly being reiterated, that no good to the Nation is being accomplished by the Dept." He closed by telling Barnard, "I have great faith and hope in the future of the Dept. if it can once show its right to live."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> James A. Garfield to Henry Barnard, May 5, 1868, quoted in Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 129-130.

A few months later, Republican Rep. Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania noted that the Department of Education had been thus far mismanaged and was too idealistic in the belief that it could assist newly freed slaves in the South through education. Appropriations were renewed for Barnard's deeply flawed agency, but it was clear that what he hoped would be the crowning achievement of a long career in education had become a nightmare instead. His mismanagement threatened future federal educational appropriations.<sup>53</sup>

Rather than removing all funding, Congress demoted the Department of Education to bureau status when Barnard's successor, John Eaton, assumed the office of Commissioner. Eaton was a more able administrator who managed to produce the agency's massive report on the status of education in the United States in only eight months. Although the report was not as tightly edited as it should have been, Eaton's work at least met one of the goals of the Bureau of Education, as it was now called. Criticism flowed from Congressmen who felt their states had been misquoted, misrepresented by data, or otherwise maligned by the reports. Nonetheless, the bureau continued to be funded well into the twentieth century. Eaton's administrative skill, his detailed written reports, the collection and sharing of statistics, and voluminous correspondence with educators in the United States and overseas set a pattern of thoroughness for the bureau.

John Eaton did not remain chained to his Washington desk crunching numbers and editing reports. An ordained Presbyterian minister, he was a frequent speaker at national education conventions throughout his sixteen-year tenure (1870-1886). He preached passionately for more federal involvement in local public schools. However, he was keenly aware that his agency was only three years old, and that Congress could choke off its funding in

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<sup>53</sup> Warren, *To Enforce Education*, 98-150.

toddlerhood. Eaton safely negotiated a tightrope strung between offending Congress by calling for too much federal activism on one hand and encouraging educators to ask Congress to increase funding for his bureau on the other.

A typical example of Eaton's views on federalism in public schools is found in a speech he delivered at the National Teachers Association (NTA) in 1870, shortly after taking office. His long remarks can be summarized in five points:

1. The federal government had already set precedents for engagement in community public schools. First, they had established complete control over the school system in the District of Columbia. Second, Congress had directly funded American Indian education since 1810. Third, Congress had provided land grants to pay for public education in the territories. The central government should turn District of Columbia schools into "a model system of elementary and secondary training" for children and youth.
2. The United States "cannot preserve its character for universality without doing and being prepared to do all that may be fit to disseminate knowledge of whatever is excellent in the culture of the people." The recent profit of four million dollars from the sale and rental of federal lands had accrued in the public treasury. Waitman T. Willey, a Republican from the newly created state of West Virginia, had suggested that these profits be spread evenly among the congressional districts to support public schools.
3. The nation's educators and political leaders should be alarmed over the census of 1860, which showed that 1.5 million voters were illiterate. Illiterate voters in 17 of the 33 states outnumbered voters who could read and write. They were unable to read the founding documents or the name of the person for whom they were voting, let alone a candidate's platform. This condition was dangerous to republican ideals.
4. In the absence of direct federal aid to taxpayer supported schools, the Bureau of Education was helping to improve instruction and administration by sharing data, ideas, experiments and educational initiatives from the states, and strategies to streamline administrative processes that would render district schoolhouses more efficient and effective.
5. Congress had a duty to continue funding the collection, publication, and dissemination of statistics and articles of interest to aid localities in improving classroom instruction, planning, and school board oversight. Congress had spent \$26,500 on a *National Almanac* and \$150,000 on a medical history of the Civil War, but not enough on school publications. Such funding was imperative because far flung communities of

educators “do not know what the others are doing.”<sup>54</sup>

Following Eaton’s address, the NTA membership voted to petition Congress to increase the Bureau of Education’s annual appropriation to support ongoing research and publications that would enlighten teachers, principals, and superintendents in their work to enhance the educational experience for the nation’s young people.

## **V. “The Overwhelming Present Necessity of Instant Interference”: George F. Hoar’s 1870 Campaign for Federal Aid for Public Schools**

The Civil War and Reconstruction intensified debates over the federal government’s role in paying for and helping to regulate public education at the elementary and secondary levels. Congress debated the issue of whether or not Washington in general and Congress in particular should be involved in an institution whose regulation had traditionally been left to the states. While taking a fresh look at American society in the wake of reunification, some lawmakers believed that the time had arrived for a national school system whose objectives would be in part established by Congress. Their efforts failed and the discussion over federal power in local education shifted to the problem of racially segregated schooling.

The matter of segregated schools in readmitted states was chief among the educational issues under Congressional scrutiny during Reconstruction. Could Congress mandate that public schools be integrated? If so, could Congress extend its power and influence over local

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<sup>54</sup> The Rev. John Eaton, “The Relation of the National Government to Public Education, Address Delivered Before the National Teachers Association, Cleveland, Ohio, August 17, 1870,” (Philadelphia: Educational Gazette Publishing Co., 1871), 3-16. Sen. Willey was an ardent supporter of education, although he opposed the creation of the Freedmen’s Bureau and its school programs for freed slaves. See C. H. Ambler, *Waitman Thomas Willey*, (Huntingdon, WV: Standard Printing and Publishing Co, 1954) and L.D. Corson, “Legislative Career of Waitman T. Willey,” master’s thesis, West Virginia University, 1942.

education through additional regulation? Lawmakers on Capitol Hill regularly introduced measures to fund public education reform during Reconstruction. Their goal was to push for integrated schools in former Confederate states. As Southern states eviscerated their school systems, an alarmed Representative George F. Hoar of Massachusetts introduced legislation in 1870 to give the federal government authority to require “the establishment of a thorough and efficient system of public instruction throughout the whole country” in order “not to supersede, but to stimulate, compel, and supplement action by the states.”<sup>55</sup> Hoar hoped his bill would induce Southern states to support literacy for freedmen who had been granted citizenship and voting rights. The bill did not call for congressional grants to local schools. Instead, it *authorized the President of the United States to take over the educational system of any state whose schools failed to meet federally established criteria*. Federal agents would be dispatched to investigate each noncompliant district. The Department of the Interior would appoint local superintendents to report to its officials in Washington. States with competent school organizations would be left undisturbed.

A year later, an African-American representative from Mississippi, Legrand Perce, introduced legislation calling the federal government to sell some of its land and distribute the proceeds to state education bureaus in exchange for integrating all public schools. The House approved the bill after heated debate, but it died in the Senate. In 1879, Ambrose E. Burnside of Rhode Island wrote a similar bill that was successful in the Senate but failed in the House. Thus, Congressional money to help pay for and regulate school reforms of a national scope failed to find traction.

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<sup>55</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 41<sup>st</sup> Congress, Second Session, 1870.

Six months before John Eaton aroused the National Teachers Association to action in Cleveland, Rep. George F. Hoar of Massachusetts—a member of the radical wing of the Republican Party and ardent supporter of public institutions of teaching and learning—reinvigorated the impulse to persuade Congress to underwrite a national school system by proposing a bill to establish federal public school funding. Hoar introduced and defended the legislation, H.R. 1326, which proposed that the central government issue grants to those states where public education was found to be substandard. Although any state whose schools fell below acceptable conditions could receive federal aid, Hoar enumerated the recently restored Southern states and West Virginia as locations where it was especially needed. On February 7, 1870 he stood in the well of the House of Representatives and delivered an hour-long, complex, statistic-filled address arguing for federal monies to support public education.

Predictably, Hoar covered his political posterior by stating emphatically that the education bill had no intention of trading on states' rights. "I desire, Mr. Speaker, at the outset of this debate, to reiterate my most emphatic conviction that it would be both inexpedient and impracticable to take from the States the functions for providing for public education where they are now administered....So, while we claim and avow that it is our purpose not to interfere with any State which will discharge this great function, we also avow and acknowledge that it is our purpose not to permit any State not to do it."

With the events of the Civil War still fresh in the nation's memory and given the fact that the economy of the defeated, ransacked South still needed serious repair, Hoar was convinced that the time had come for the central power in Washington to step in and assist the weakened South's educational systems. "I desire in the few minutes I shall occupy to present to this House the overwhelming and present necessity of an instant interference of the national power with the



subject of education in a large portion of our States and constitutional power and the constitutional duty that Congress shall undertake this interference.”<sup>56</sup>

Hoar read detailed reports furnished by the Bureau of Education about Southern and Border States. The statistics and descriptions of public education in the South and in the buffer states of Maryland and Delaware were a woeful litany of overturned school systems, failed policies, destroyed schoolhouses, neglected students, and in some cases moderately successful initiatives—such as those in Georgia—that were impeded by lack of funds. The permanence of restarted programs was thrown into doubt by state economies struggling to recover from wartime destruction of mills, factories, and farms. A large segment of the Southern population was dislocated.

In state after state below the Mason-Dixon Line, Hoar quoted white hostility toward establishing any type of free school system. He summarized the depressed status of public schooling in Texas: “No school system; no school supervision; no public schools; bitter hostility in the eastern part of the State.” Regarding Tennessee, he repeated the observation of one educator who reported to the Bureau of Education that “our public press is generally hostile, often bitterly so, to any general and efficient system of popular education.” In Mississippi, an observer summarized the attitude toward public education as a mixture of slight progress amidst white rancor: “School law recently enacted, and, notwithstanding bitter hostility, on the road to success; county superintendents appointed, school tax being collected &c.; hostility to the system confined to the white inhabitants; colored people warm supporters of the system.” Hoar quoted educational leaders from North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas and Louisiana who

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<sup>56</sup> *The Congressional Globe, Third Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Congress*, (Washington, DC: Office of The Congressional Globe, 1871), February 7, 1870, 1039.

completed official reports to the Bureau of Education noting widespread white opposition to universal public schooling. Kentucky's legislature had seriously depleted public school funding, reduced the salaries of teachers and superintendents, and was shunting school taxes paid by African American residents to pay instead "for the support of colored paupers." In Georgia and Florida, modest advances were being made in public schooling, but further progress was stalled for lack of funding.<sup>57</sup>

Hoar's plan to prop up public education sounded notes that would ring familiar to Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries: the call for national school standards; accountability to federal funding agencies; and connecting public education with national defense. His proposals called for unprecedented involvement in local schools on the part of Congress and the executive branch. No member of Congress before him had presented such a robust overture.

What alarmed Hoar was the fact that so many Southern and border states were undoing their public education systems at the very moment when the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendments had guaranteed the right of every American male to participate in the operation of local, state, and federal governments. Washington needed to support public schools in cities and towns across the nation to equip the next generation—and the current cohort of illiterate adults and freedmen—to take on the responsibilities of democracy.

Hoar's legislation called for drastic federal intrusion that foreshadowed Washington activism in local schools that would play out in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. All states would be required to meet educational standards to be set by the central government. Should a state's public schools dip below expected performance levels, the President of the United States would

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<sup>57</sup> *The Congressional Globe, Third Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Congress*, February 7, 1870, 1039, 1040.

be empowered to label it a “delinquent state.” The federal government would then step in and name an acting state superintendent. The Secretary of the Interior would dispatch federal inspectors to each school district. Federal and state monies would then be combined to buy supplies, materials, and books. Schoolhouses would be built. Teachers would be hired under federal authority. All of these proposals sounded very much like the powers enumerated under the Freedmen’s Bureau, whose school systems—partially supported by federal money—were being slowly dismantled in Southern states.

Such delinquent public school conditions in the South and in the Border States called for “prompt, energetic, efficient interference of the national power.” But the powerful concept of states’ rights continued to hold sway in the arguments of opponents to any proposal that the central government assume a role in operating or paying for local schools. Hoar met this challenge head-on. He charged that for eighty years—since George Washington’s appeal to Congress for universal education— *states’ rights demagoguery had defeated all rational attempts to obtain federal money for local schools*. He argued that if Congress could erect post offices “because the postal service cannot be conducted without it,” if it had the power to construct a courthouse “because justice could not be administered without it, cannot it build a school-house and educate the citizens who are to govern the country, because the country cannot be governed by the citizens without it?” Repeating arguments made by the Revolutionary generation, by Richardson in the 1820s, by Horace Mann, and by educators at school conventions during the 1850s and 1860s, Hoar insisted that “universal public instruction is an indispensable and necessary means to ‘to form a more perfect Union.’” The history of the last ten

years shows that wherever ignorance exists there the spirit of disunion exists. Wherever light and education exist there attachment to the Union existed.”<sup>58</sup>

An important aspect of George Hoar’s assault on the walled fortress of states’ righters’ opposition to Washington support for schools was his tactic of tying education to *national defense*. Hoar broke important new ground in 1870 by making this connection. As we will see later, Hoar’s tactic would serve well both vocational educators in 1917 and supporters of the National Defense Education Act in 1958.

The Congressman from Massachusetts drew on foreign examples he knew would resonate with his fellow Representatives. Hoar mentioned Switzerland, whose military he claimed to be particularly powerful for a nation its size. He catalogued the effective education system of Prussia, which had recently defeated France in a bloody conflict. Hoar pointed out that both nations enjoyed robust, efficient military forces *because their central governments funded a national public education system and mandated the curricula to be taught*. He quoted England’s Chancellor of the Exchequer, who argued that “the victory of Prussia over France was the victory of Prussian education over French ignorance.” Hoar noted that according to Stanley Gladstone, “[Prussia] sought her strength in high intelligence. She emancipated her peasants; she established her system of national education....Undoubtedly the conduct of the campaign on the German side has given a marked triumph to the cause of systematic popular education.”

Hoar’s radical legislation never gained enough strength even to crawl onto the floor of the House for a vote. Stiff opposition came from predictable quarters: conservative Southern Democrats who bristled at the suggestion of any additional federal interference in their states’

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<sup>58</sup> *The Congressional Globe, Third Session, 41<sup>st</sup> Congress, February 7, 1870, 1040.*

affairs beyond the controversial and bitterly opposed actions of the various Reconstruction agencies that were at work in their districts. But resistance also came from Northern representatives whose conservative credentials raised their hackles in the presence of any attempt to intrude on their school districts and dictate national curricular and performance standards.

State and local pressures slowed Hoar's momentum and the bill never reached the floor of the House of Representatives. Its opponents argued that the proper method for correcting inadequate school systems and for ensuring racial integration was not direct federal *control* but federal *funding*. States could use Congressional outlays to pay for their own reform initiatives that would allow equitable education for everyone. In 1871, the National Education Association adopted a resolution calling for such federal aid.

Protests against federal money and administrative activism also came from education leaders outside Congress. James P. Wickersham, superintendent of schools in Pennsylvania, told the 1871 National Education Association conference that any "national system of compulsory education" would be a disaster. He claimed that the idea contradicted the opinions of the Revolutionary generation and invoked the fundamentalist bromide that the Constitution did not give to the central government any power over public education. Federal involvement was inconsistent with the republican principle inherited from ancient Athens in which government was to remain as close to the people as possible. Wickersham was aware that reports from Southern and Border States showed that public schooling had begun to unravel over issues of money and race. He admitted that allowing states to return to the Union without requiring their constitutions to mandate universal and free public education had been a serious error.

While opposing the radical brand of federal activism proposed by Hoar, Wickersham did not object to Washington earmarking money for states to support local public schools as long as Congress and the executive branch allowed states to use the funds as they saw fit. There was simply no “national solution” to the challenges of improving schools. Individual states knew better than Washington what improvements needed to be made. In other words, the states’ rights argument was a convenient one to use for keeping Washington’s education officials, regulations, and standards at bay. But when it came to accepting federal money, the educational states’ righters were happy to receive it with no strings attached. The NEA responded to Wickersham’s speech by enacting a resolution in favor of granting federal education money to the South, but not to Northern states.<sup>59</sup>

## **VI. Sen. Henry Blair’s Attempt to Secure Federal Funds for Public Schools**

In 1884, Sen. Henry W. Blair, a New Hampshire Republican who chaired the Senate Labor and Education Committee, introduced a bill that could potentially have satisfied the NEA’s wishes. Authored by an activist progressive who pushed to improve public education as part of a larger plan to reform American society in the wake of the Civil War, Blair’s ambitious legislation promised to infuse Southern school districts with federal grants to make up for the lack of revenues Southern state governments could generate to support public education. Blair’s plan called for states to match Washington payouts, which would have resulted in a steep increase in the amount of money spent on Southern schools.

Blair’s bill entailed four major elements. First, it aimed to eradicate the problems of anemic Southern public education by injecting large amounts of federal cash into the fiscal veins

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<sup>59</sup> Butts, *Public Education*, 150-152.

of local school systems over an eight-year period. The first year promised \$7,000,000 in aid, followed by \$10,000,000 in year two and \$15,000,000 in year three. After the third year, allotments would be increased by \$5,000,000 per year until the eighth year. In total, Blair expected his bill to provide \$77,000,000 in federal aid. Second, funds would be divided among Southern states in proportion to literacy levels as recorded in the 1880 census, rather than be distributed equally among all qualifying states. Third, the bill's funding formula would spend 75% of all federal education monies in the South. Fourth, states had to match federal payouts with their own money.

The codicil of Blair's bill that disturbed Southern lawmakers was its requirement that African Americans be treated equally with Whites in "free common schools for all (the state's) children of school age." Reflecting the New Hampshire Republican's sweeping agenda for changing American society and obliterating racism, Blair's legislation mandated that the money be used "equally for the education of all children, without distinction of race and color."<sup>60</sup>

Blair's law echoed Washington's Reconstruction-era efforts to set up and maintain a system of public schools in the South that would provide education for freedmen as well as for Whites. Still smarting from these programs, White Southern lawmakers were determined not to allow more federal intrusion into school affairs. After it passed the Senate in 1884, Southern members of The House of Representatives obstructed its passage. It cleared the Senate again in 1886 and 1888 but never made it to the House floor because of continued opposition from Southern Democrats, who dominated House leadership positions. In the complicated political arrangements of post-Reconstruction Congresses, Southern Democrats were joined by Border

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel W. Crafts, "The Black Response to the Blair Education Bill," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 37, no. 1 (February 1971), 42-43. See also Gordon B. McKinney, *Henry W. Blair's Campaign to Reform America From the Civil War to the U.S. Senate*, (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2013).

State legislators in laying Blair's bill to rest. Following ten years of debate, Blair's bill breathed its last in 1890.

The failure of the Blair Bill marked the end of attempts to secure federal funding and regulation for local schools in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It had been a Sisyphean task: every time reform-minded members of Congress and education groups rolled the stone of federal aid for schools up Capitol Hill, they saw it roll backward down the same incline. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century broke, a group of well-organized school reformers—the vocational educators—would finally roll the stone to the top of the hill and secure federal funding for local schools.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Gaining Federal Funding for Public High Schools in the Progressive Era: 1900-1917**

#### **Introduction**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, school reformers co-opted the values and crusading energy of Progressive era reformers in broader society who were working for social and economic improvements. Their timing and techniques were perfect. Coupling their mission to the Progressive train, vocational education leaders fine-tuned a message promising that practical occupational programs in public high schools would effectively and efficiently address worrisome issues about immigration, national defense, American competitiveness in international markets, industrial growth, and workforce training.

Their tactics worked. Members of Congress and President Woodrow Wilson overcame over a century of stiff states' rights opposition to pass the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, which funded and regulated local public high school vocational programs. Smith-Hughes opened the floodgates for subsequent federal funding and regulation of local public schooling that has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Persistent lobbying and clear messaging helped convince lawmakers, pundits, and many others that public education could fix social, economic, and national defense problems, and that Washington should help pay for and regulate it. Their success forever entwined federal dollars and top-down regulations written by the central government for community K-12 schools that accepted federal dollars.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Congressional Record: 64<sup>th</sup> Congress*, Sess. II, Chapter 114, 1917, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1917), 930.

This chapter explores the combination of political, economic, and social conditions in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that propelled Congress and the White House to suddenly drop opposition to federal funding public schools. The conditions under which Congress approved the unprecedented legislation included the widespread activism of reformers in the Progressive movement, the increasing federal activity in meliorating social ills beginning in the Theodore Roosevelt administration, anxiety over international economic competition, and national defense interests in the run-up to United States' entry into World War I. Under these circumstances, the Smith-Hughes Act became attractive to lawmakers and administrative school reformers as a national security measure, a mechanism for strengthening the Southern economy, and as a tool for retaining race-based education and labor configurations. Accompanying federal money were regulations, a national office armed with the authority to enforce grant conditions and accountability, and sufficiently funded to publish articles and statistics to support vocational teachers.

By passing Smith-Hughes vocational education reform legislation, Congress achieved a compromise between central control and state sovereignty in educational matters. The bill was sponsored by Southern Democrats, who had traditionally stood for state sovereignty. They wrote legislation that preserved the rights of individual states by allowing state boards of education to serve as the final arbiters of how much federal money was dispensed to each high school. States also retained control over the types of vocational training for which the money could be used, so long as the courses met federal criteria. Such a compromise made it possible for Southern states—as well as states and territories in other regions of the country—to accept federal dollars and oversight while maintaining segregated schools, state control, and race-based curricular choices.

What enabled reformers to gain this triumph that launched a pattern of increasing federal intervention in local public schools that persists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? I argue here that the answer is to be found in a perfect storm of circumstances that presented themselves at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

1. The expanding high school moved public education to the forefront of national concern.
2. The growth of cities and accompanying industrialization created an opening for vocational advocates to propose their curriculum as a cure-all for problems that accompanied urban expansion.
3. Progressivism created an environment in which municipal, state, and federal governments became involved in regulating industry, commerce, labor, sanitation, building and fire codes, and the safety of the food supply.
4. The support of two Progressive presidents, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, and a coalition of Southern Democrats in Congress.
5. The arrival of America's involvement in World War I placed public schools in the role of a tool for national security. Vocational education could provide trained workers for ramped-up war industries.

In order to begin address these issues above, it is necessary to contextualize the federal funding of local high schools through vocational education in the broader landscape of the Progressive Era and the concurrent growth of the American high school. Only then can we focus more narrowly on the politics of national school reform in the shape of Congressional actions between 1914 and 1917 that led to passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, which unleashed unprecedented federal grants to local public schools that have become so commonplace in modern times.

## **I. A Snapshot of Public High Schools at the Turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Leading up to passage of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, and before federal funding was available, the numbers of high schools and of students who attended them grew spectacularly. Throughout much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, public high schools—where they existed—were mostly the enclaves of middle and upper class students whose families could afford to do without their labor. The majority of schools were located in urban areas in the Northeast. High school enrollments jumped eight fold between 1890 and 1918, soaring from 202,963 to 1,645,171. Such enormous gains were the results of population growth in the adolescent cohort and attendance requirement laws that had passed every statehouse by the end of World War I. During that twenty-year span the number of high schools in the United States dramatically expanded, nearly quadrupling from 3,526 to 13,951. In 1890 high schools employed just over 9,000 teachers. By 1918 the teacher population jumped to 81,000.<sup>2</sup>

As the high school grew, so did the average number of days schools were open and the number of days students attended classes. In 1890, the mean number of school days stood at 138. The average pupil went to classes for 87 out of 138 days, compiling an attendance rate of 63%. By the end of the 1917-1918 school year, the mean length of the academic year reached 161 days. On average, pupils went to classes 120 days, an attendance rate of 75%. Compared to the modern average of 180 days, the school year was 25% shorter in 1890 and 10% shorter in 1918.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Marvin Lazerson and W. Norton Grubb, eds., *American Education and Vocationalism: A Documentary History, 1870-1970* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1974), 15; *U.S. Historical Census Browser*, University of Virginia, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/censusbin/cen.p1930>.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas D. Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1993), Table 14, “Average daily attendance, instructional staff, and teachers in public elementary and secondary schools: 1869–70 to 1990–91”, 46.

Several elements combined to lengthen the average school year and elevate the average attendance rate prior to passage of the Smith-Hughes Act. First, increasing numbers of states passed compulsory education laws that lengthened the school year. By 1900, 30 states had enacted minimum school attendance legislation. By 1918, all 48 states required children and youth to attend school for about half the calendar year.

Second, although increasing numbers of states passed compulsory education laws before 1900, David Tyack points out those statutory requirements fluctuated from state to state, and enforcement of them was relatively fluid and inconsistent until after about 1890 to 1900. Freeman Butts describes the U.S. Commissioner of Education's annual report for 1888-89 as a dismal litany of truancy and broken laws. Noncompliance and laissez-faire enforcement were especially troublesome in the western plains states. In Kansas, for example, 70% of the superintendents reported that the state's attendance law was "inoperative, deficient, or a dead letter."

Third, Tyack argues that before Smith-Hughes and federal funding, state laws were strengthened and school years lengthened in an effort to achieve a greater national cohesion following the collapse of Reconstruction, the presence of ongoing strains between Northern and Southern politicians, and the massive influx of new immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean region, and Asia. It was thought that national unity could be more easily achieved through consistent, free public education.

Fourth, lengthened school days and program years as well as higher attendance were the result of tightening up laws and more robust enforcement. Tyack and Butts attribute this change to increased bureaucratic control and the growth of centralized school administrations in local

districts and state governments. One of the Progressive impulses that gained favor in many regions was administrative reform. A collection of new models was adopted to ensure children and youth were attending school as required by law. These included recording accurate school data, retaining more detailed student records, hiring school counselors who visited institutions on a rotating basis, and creating state-generated financial incentives for schools whose compliance was exceptional. Schools also hired truant officers and opened special institutions for consistently truant students. Michael Katz points out that “compulsory schooling was transformed from a relatively simple statute requiring a fixed period of school attendance into a complex network of interrelated legal rules.”<sup>4</sup> Inevitably, the dramatic expansion of the school year, growth in attendance, and proliferation of high schools had implications for curriculum. In addition, industrialization, urban growth, immigration, and the drive to Americanize foreign arrivals dictated that the high school curriculum would have to change and meet the needs of diverse populations from all socioeconomic classes. Many education leaders recommended more efficient curriculum design, better use of the school day, and in the case of vocational education leaders, more pragmatic courses.

Despite expansion of the high school, lengthening of the academic year, and gains in the number of days students went to classes, attendance dropped precipitously after the completion of ninth grade. Few students earned high school diplomas, especially boys. Graduation figures show that in 1870, 2% of American teenagers had graduated from high school. By 1900, 6.4%

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<sup>4</sup> David B. Tyack, “Ways of Seeing: An Essay on the History of Compulsory Schooling,” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 46 no. 3 (August 1976 ), 355-389; Butts, *Public Education in the United States*, 181-182; Michael S. Katz, *A History of Compulsory Education Laws*, (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa, 1976), Monograph No. 75, 21. See also Claudia Goldin, “Egalitarianism and the Returns to Education during the Great Transformation of American Education,” *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 107 no. 6 (1999) pt. 2.

earned a high school diploma. From 1911 through 1918, retention rates following 9th grade remained flat. In 1911 barely 30% of students who had started high school earned a diploma. By the 1917-1918 school year— just before federal funding of public high school occupational programs was initiated—this figure had barely crept up to 33%. When compared to the entire U.S. population, this meant that only 9 out of 100 17 year-olds finished high school. As America entered World War I, a full two-thirds of 17 year-olds were getting by without a secondary diploma.<sup>5</sup>

Most pupils who completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade were females: 60% of all public high school graduates in 1910 were girls. This figure increased slightly to 63% by 1920.<sup>6</sup> In their in-depth study of girls' education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Elizabeth Hansot and David Tyack demonstrate that girls performed better in elementary school and on high school entrance exams. They also contend that girls in middle and upper classes remained in public high school longer than boys did because girls in the late Victorian and early Progressive Era appeared to have viewed the high school years as an interlude between a life controlled by parents and one controlled by the demands of their own spouses and children. High school was a “safe and productive way to spend youthful years, free from the dangers of the workplace and rich in cultural and human associations.” Middle class parents in cities increasingly viewed the adolescent period as a time of “special promise and jeopardy.”

Joan Jacobs Brumberg has discovered the existence of literature—mostly diaries—written by high school girls related to what she calls “the iconography of girlhood.” As girls

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<sup>5</sup> “The Nation’s Long and Winding Path to Graduation”, *Education Week*, <http://www.edweek.org/media/34gradrate-c1>.

<sup>6</sup> Snyder, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, Table 14, p. 46; Table 19: High school graduates, by sex and control of institution: 1869–70 to 1991–92, 55.

entered high school, many of them felt pressured by American social norms to conform to the ideal of the energetic, innocent, beautiful adolescent model of girlhood popularized in literature and extolled in middle and upper middle class society. One of the reasons girls remained in high school—and thus composed a majority of a school’s population through 12<sup>th</sup> grade graduation—was that the secondary school was a significant space for mentoring from female teachers who in many cases were not much older than the students themselves. Female teachers in their late teens and early twenties—freshly minted from normal school—often directed and advised extracurricular clubs. Book societies, poetry circles, art clubs, and the like were popular among girls and created many opportunities for adolescent girls and young women to interact. For example, in her diary written during high school in Pasadena, California, future First Lady Lou Henry (Hoover), mentioned her school female mentors far more often than her parents or sister.<sup>7</sup>

And where were all the high school boys? In an article on the disappearance of boys from secondary school rolls, F.E. DeYoe and C.H. Thurber wrote in 1900 that the percentage of boys in the high school population varied in the nation’s West, Midwest, and East regions by 38% to 45%, with Massachusetts boasting the highest percentage. By 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the percentage of boys in the secondary school population in St. Louis sagged to a dismal 18% in 1895 and rose to a high of 28% in 1898. DeYoe and Thurber warned that the percentage of males among the high school population was so depressed that “high schools are in danger of losing their coeducational nature and becoming female seminaries.”

When the authors asked superintendents and principals in an unscientific poll whether they thought vocational training in the high schools would increase male persistence, the school

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<sup>7</sup> David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Public Schools*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 143; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*, (New York: Vintage, 1998), 18-19; see also note 31, chapter 1, p. 223.



leaders replied in the affirmative by a margin of six to one. DeYoe and Thurber did not pose questions to high school boys. However, a range of school leaders attempted to find out using the new “scientific” questionnaire methods that were sweeping the educational world. It is clear from examining those inquiries that economics played a large role in boys dropping out of school. School officials also identified peer pressure as another rationale for quitting school to either roam the streets loafing or to sign on to a wage earning job. School also leaders offered another popular conception about why boys dropped out: they were more “lazy” or “ashamed not to pass,” than “mentally incapable.” But adolescent boys told a different tale. The number one reason for quitting school was dislike for schooling itself. “Services required by family” was the second most recorded reason, followed by health problems.<sup>8</sup>

The most popular subjects in secondary schools between 1890 and 1918 were in the academic track as opposed to the occupational track. English, U.S. and British history, algebra, and Latin topped the list. Vocational courses were much less popular than academic classes even after the 1917 Smith-Hughes bill provided federal funding for them. We will explore reasons for this phenomenon in a later chapter. While graduation rates expanded for both sexes between 1890 and 1918, completing a high school education continued to be a rare event in the American adolescent experience.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> F.E. DeYoe and C.H. Thurber, “Where Are All the High School Boys?” *School Review*, vol. 8 (1900), 242-243; Tyack and Hansot, *Learning Together*, 174-175.

<sup>9</sup> Snyder, *120 Years of Public Education: A Statistical Portrait*, Table 16.—Public school enrollment in grades 9 to 12, by subject: 1889–90 to fall 1981, p. 50. In a later chapter we will see that academic subjects— which were not covered by federal funds—remained more popular among high schoolers than vocational classes.

## II. Progressivism

Phenomenal growth in the number of high schools and students who attended them coincided with the rise of the Progressive movement that unfolded in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Progressive movement was an exceedingly complex and multilayered event strung across time from the 1890s until about 1920 that addressed a wide range of issues. Essentially, it was an urban reaction—especially among middle and upper-middle classes—to the excessive ways of unrestrained laissez-faire capitalism. My purpose here is not to closely exegete the many substrata of this critical initiative. Rather, it is to highlight chief characteristics as they related to Congress' sudden and enthusiastic willingness to pass legislation that funded local public education at the secondary school level for the first time through the landmark Smith-Hughes Act of 1917.

Many scholars have bravely waded into the waters of Progressivism in a quest to identify and interpret its changing currents. Describing the complexities of Progressivism is like trying to embrace fog: it can be seen, yet it remains amorphous and mobile. Progressivism can be identified by historians but not defined by simplistic statements or generalizations. There were different types of Progressive *thought*, which pervaded education, economics, philosophy, political science, history, and many other fields of study. Americans engaged in a variety of Progressive *actions*, carried out mostly by middling and upper class reformers who attempted to improve living and working conditions for marginalized men, women, and children in tenements, factories, and asylums. I have chosen to use the basic interpretive framework of the Progressive Era proposed by Richard Hofstadter to discuss the reform-minded activities and mindsets that

pulsed through American society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and helped make possible federal funding and regulatory action in local public schools for the first time in the nation's history.<sup>10</sup>

### **III. “Where is Our Mother, the State?”: Roots of Progressivism in the Populist Movement**

Hofstadter portrays Progressivism as a national phenomenon lasting from about 1900 to 1914. The era itself formed only a segment of a fifty-year period of reform-minded initiatives that stretched from 1890 through 1940, embracing Populism, Progressivism, and the New Deal. Progressivism took its cues from the frustrations of farmers and commoners that had helped birth the Populist movement, which arced between the late 1880s and mid-1890s. Its principal features involved concern for the small farmer, rural commoners, and small businesses in the face of industrial growth and the perception that Wall Street bankers and the politicians they supported had neglected the plight of the nation's agrarian population, especially those located in the West, Midwest, Southwest and parts of the South. Populism rode on the shoulders of earlier agrarian rights' movements and tapped into the frustrations of common folk everywhere who felt disregarded by a distant, powerful, and uncaring government.

Americans who identified with the Populist movement had an axe to grind. They perceived politicians to be in the pockets of industrialists, bankers, and speculators. Elected officials in Washington and in the country's growing major cities were unresponsive to needs of farmers and ranchers. Populist groundswells called for reforming the money supply, restructuring unfair lending practices that favored wealthy Eastern bankers and bankrupted

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1960). All citations refer to the paperback version. Original volume published as *The Age of Reform from Bryan to FDR*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1955).

agrarian owners, and opening more opportunities to participate in the economic growth of the 1880s and 1890s. They challenged the political and economic status quo that was leaving so many small farmers behind. Populist adherents sought to create a level field on which agrarian owners could earn a decent return on crops and cattle without having to crawl to elite bankers or shout to be heard by politicians who seemed deaf to the economic plight of agrarian society.

The Populist feeling that government had abandoned the commoner led the People's Party to publish a campaign book with the title, *Where is Our Mother, the State?* Attracting members from the grassroots farmers' organizations such as the Grange, Populism climaxed with the unsuccessful 1896 presidential bid of its chief political spokesperson, the dynamic Democratic orator William Jennings Bryan. Nonetheless, it provided inspiration for a more widespread and intensive reform initiative of political and social activism that called for federal, state, and municipal governments to repair the broken and neglected spheres of American society in the period 1900-1914.<sup>11</sup>

As Steven J. Diner has observed, Progressive urban reformers like Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, and Samuel Jones were ill-at-ease with Bryan's campaign because they identified with what they perceived to be a more orderly and rational approach to social improvement. Still, they associated themselves with the view of Bryan and other Populists that many citizens had "lost control of their lives and their government in the age of corporate

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<sup>11</sup> Rebeca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 167.

capitalism.” Like Bryan, they believed that expanding and bureaucratizing federal and state governments needed to be more activist and do more to return power to everyday Americans.<sup>12</sup>

#### **IV. The Progressive Impulse**

Progressivism bloomed in the midst of unprecedented industrial and urban growth. The expansion of factories, commercial enterprises, and corporations capable of amassing large amounts of capital swept the American population into a new era focused on mass production. Most factory and mill work was repetitive and called for little or no skill. Industrial jobs involved work patterns that emphasized output. Many jobs were dangerous or boring. As Harvey Kantor has pointed out, the enormous increase in factories and businesses— as well as the complex office bureaucracies needed to support them— contradicted early 19<sup>th</sup>–century work patterns, many of which had emphasized handwork, skill, and significant time spent in apprenticeship. Steam engines that drove belts, pulleys, and lathes changed the factory floor experience and enabled plants to produce more goods at lower cost. But lost in this transformation was the increasingly faceless common laborer.<sup>13</sup>

Enthusiasms for social reform had erupted before. The common school movement, prison improvements, and efforts to enhance public sanitation were characteristic of the American 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, Hofstadter persuasively argues that the Progressive initiative was unique when compared with earlier reform efforts because of the following traits:

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<sup>12</sup> Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 26-28.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey Kantor, “Industrialism and Vocationalism in American Education,” in Kantor and Tyack, eds., *Work, Youth, and Schooling*, 18-19.

1. Progressivism drew energy from the middle class.
2. It concentrated itself in mostly urban areas.
3. Reformers created nationwide crusades that agitated for both political and social reform.
4. The Progressive ethos found a home in both the Democratic and Republican parties.

Progressivism expressed a fresh concern for urban health and social problems caused by overcrowding, immigrant diversity, and corrupt government. In essence, Hofstadter contends that the complexion of Progressive reform in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was different because the *circumstances* were different: rapid and unheard of urban expansion, a tsunami of immigrant migration, an increasing middle class population—the fastest growing socioeconomic segment of society—and an activist press were a few of the aspects that set the ameliorative agenda apart from its ancestor movements. Its tenets of social responsibility and positive change were spread through speeches, political action, and literature, especially that of the muckraking journalist.<sup>14</sup> Given the complexities of Progressive enthusiasms and the broad scope of its agenda in the period between the 1890s and 1920, it is dangerous and irresponsible to assume that it was a monolithic force in American society. While there are certain markers that characterize the men and women who threw themselves into the tasks that historians later identified as the Progressive Era, we cannot establish a simplistic and reified set of attributes as a standard to which historical figures of that era must conform in order to qualify as a “Progressive.”

## **V. Huddling Masses: Migration to Urban Areas during the Progressive Era**

In contrast to the Populist movement that preceded and helped construct Progressivism, Progressive action was largely, although not exclusively, targeted toward salving the social

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<sup>14</sup> Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 131-133.

wounds endured by city dwellers. Factories, mills, large commercial establishments, and plants clustered around urban areas. They drew millions of Americans away from rural regions in the United States where Populism had flourished. They also attracted immigrants from impoverished agricultural villages in eastern and southern Europe to punch time clocks at the doors of increasing numbers of urban employers in America. During the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Progressive reformers began to prod local, state, and federal agencies to address the problems that accompanied such growth.

The expansion of cities in the decades surrounding the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was spectacular. Just before the outbreak of the Civil War, the nation's urban population was counted in all cities that had over 2,500 inhabitants. In 1860, this figure stood at 6,000,000 people, about one-fifth of the population. By 1900, 30,000,000 people had migrated to U.S. cities a five-fold increase over 40 years. Only 400 locations in the nation were considered urban in 1860. The number expanded to 663 by 1870, 939 in 1880, 1,348 in 1890, and 1,737 in 1900. This translated into an incredible jump of 343%. In 1860, only 9 cities boasted over 100,000 inhabitants. This number more than doubled when the U.S. Census Bureau tabulated its figures in 1880. By 1890, the Census Bureau counted 38 such cities, 420% more than at the time of the Civil War just 30 years earlier.<sup>15</sup>

Urban growth rates differed by region. In the last four decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Northeast was the most citified area in the country. In 1860, about one-third of Northeasterners lived in cities. By 1900, two-thirds of its inhabitants were living amongst the cobbled streets, clamor, smells, and new skyward stretching steel structures of the urban landscape. Across the

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<sup>15</sup> Robert G. Barrows, "Urbanizing America," in Charles W. Calhoun, ed., *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 1996), 91-94. The number of rural area dwellers mushroomed from 25,000,000 in 1860 to 46,000,000 by 1900, but its growth rate did not match that of America's cities.

same time span, North Central and Western regions saw the percentage of city dwellers among the population swell from about 15% in 1860 to 40% in 1900. The South had the lowest percentage of urbanites among their region's population. On the cusp of the Civil War, Southern urbanites composed only 10% of the inhabitants below the Mason-Dixon Line. By the time the Gilded Age faded, 18% of Southerners had a city address.

Overall, the Northeastern quadrant of the United States—stretching from the Atlantic coast to the northern half of the Mississippi River—claimed the highest concentration of city dwellers. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned, two-thirds of the region's population had moved to ever sprawling urban areas that were spreading to claim new acreage, adding suburbs and industrial areas that were removed from city centers.

Where did the new city dwellers come from? About one-half came from rural settlements in the United States while the other half emigrated out of eastern and southern European villages and towns. Why did so much growth occur in American cities in the period under consideration? Urban chronicler Raymond Mohl has observed that “the rapid urban growth of the period resulted from a tremendous release of rural population. Most of the new urbanites came from the American farm and peasant villages of the old world.”<sup>16</sup> To Mohl's observation must be added the beginnings of African American movement from South to North in a wave of decampment foreshadowing the “Great Migration” that broke out in the 1910s and extended into the 1920s.

Small rural towns and farming communities in America experienced a high birth rate in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This event combined with an expansion in the availability and

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<sup>16</sup> Raymond A. Mohl, *The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860-1920*, (Arlington Heights, IL: SR Books, 1985), 2-3. Quoted in Barrows, “Urbanizing America,” 96.



use of farm machinery, which displaced many agricultural workers. Farm failures—especially rampant in the economic downturns of the 1870s and 1890s that helped inspire the Populist Movement discussed above—sent many farm owners and laborers fleeing to the growing cities in search of work and a new life. Mohl and Robert G. Barrows, have noted that a widening gulf developed between rural and urban cultures in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Young people learned that cities offered many types of jobs—industrial, bureaucratic, and commercial—that were difficult to come by in smaller communities. Youth in the countryside who did not foresee the prospects of earning a good living flocked to cities for employment, especially in the North and Midwest. Kathy Peiss has examined the entertainment and amusement sectors of urban areas that drew girls and young women away from their small town and farming community homes to New York City. She concludes that they could earn more money, claim more free time, and enjoy a myriad of diversions from growing numbers of movie palaces, amusement parks, professional sporting events, Coney Island, and working-class dance halls than they could in the rural areas they came from.<sup>17</sup>

African American migration from Southern rural regions to the North Central and Northeastern cities was a second source of city growth. As Reconstruction played out in the 1870s, about 78,000 African Americans moved from the South to Northern urban centers. In the 1890s, 185,000 Blacks moved from South to North and the Midwest, mostly to cities. Many moved from the Deep South to urban centers along the Ohio River, such as Evansville, Indiana, or to smaller Midwestern cities such as Indianapolis. Larger cities such as Chicago and Detroit were also popular destinations for African American migrants who left the farmlands of the

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<sup>17</sup> Barrows, *Urbanizing America*, 96; Mohl, *The New City*, 19ff; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986).

South in search of a better social and economic life. At the same time, many African Americans who chose to remain in the South moved to Southern cities. In the final two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the populations of Nashville and Savannah nearly doubled, while the number of inhabitants in Atlanta grew twice as large as its post-Civil War population.<sup>18</sup>

New American city dwellers met up with a burgeoning immigrant population that came mostly from eastern and southern Europe. Vast numbers of Slavs, Poles, Russians, Austro-Hungarians, and Ukrainians left impoverished settlements that held few prospects for economic success and joined smaller numbers of Italians, Sicilians, and Greeks who sought a more promising future in America. In the 1870s, 2,600,000 immigrants passed through American ports to settle permanently. In the 1880s, U.S. economic recovery and relative political stability in Europe motivated about 5,000,000 Europeans to cross the Atlantic and make America their new home. Economic depression in the 1890s slowed immigrant flow to 3,700,000 in the 1890s. Thus, over 11,000,000 European newcomers moved through U.S. ports to resettle. Some people stayed only for a few years in order to save enough money to return home and live more comfortably than before. But the majority of people remained, and a majority of them put down roots in cities. Urban and immigration historians Alan M. Kraut and Oscar Handlin have noted that economic opportunity trumped the cultural comforts of home when immigrants decided to settle in American cities. Kraut writes that “by the 1880s, most immigrants found that cities offered them more plentiful economic opportunities than in the countryside....With few exceptions, most newcomers congregated in cities....Unlike earlier immigrants, the latest settlers soon found that their own skills and preferences, as well as the state of [the quick-paced and industrializing] American economy combined to make them urban dwellers.” Forty-one percent

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<sup>18</sup> Barrows, *Urbanizing America*, 96.

of Chicago's population in 1890 was foreign born. New York City and San Francisco boasted a population whose foreign-born cohort made up 40% of their inhabitants. In Cleveland, 37% of the city's population was born outside the United States.<sup>19</sup>

## **VI. “An Outlet for Active Faculties”: Progressivism and the Middle Class**

The migration to cities strained existing infrastructures: Housing availability, sanitation, public school facilities, health systems, and food supplies were overworked. Whatever social agencies already existed to assist incoming population groups at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were stretched to the breaking point. Graft-ridden municipal governments, often operating on influence peddling, nepotism, bribery, and party bossism, either ignored or were unequipped to address the socioeconomic bacteria that infected the lives of so many of their marginalized constituents. By contrast, the deplorable living conditions suffered by some impoverished city-dwelling constituents would be meliorated on an individual basis by a city official. Using their own money—albeit obtained sometimes through nefarious and illegal transactions—ward heelers and elected district officials might repair tenements, tidy up a local park, or make sure the streets were cleared of dead animals and filth. This was a favorite method for currying votes in city wards.<sup>20</sup>

Progressives often targeted for reform the many overcrowded urban schools whose physical plants could not cope with the explosion in the number of pupils who had to be

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<sup>19</sup> Alan M. Kraut, *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Wilmington, DE: Wiley and Sons, 2001.), 64. See also Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Barrows, *Urbanizing America*, 98.

<sup>20</sup> Bayrd Still, *Urban America: A History with Documents*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1974), 207-211.

accommodated. While some schools featured gleaming facades and up-to-the-minute classrooms, labs, gymnasiums, and auditoriums, many schools in poorer enclaves stood shoulder to shoulder with meat packing plants, dusty furniture factories, and clattering knitting mills. Many schools in poor and immigrant neighborhoods were infested with rodents and wreaked of human waste in out-of-service restrooms. Blackboards were cracked and floors creaked and sagged under the unfamiliar and unanticipated weight of extra students, desks, and chairs.

In Brooklyn, NY, for example, an 1893 report revealed horrifically overcrowded conditions. Schools built for 1,000 students hosted twice that number. Eighteen classes in one Brooklyn school contained between 90 and 100 students each; one school shoehorned 158 pupils into one classroom. Desks were few in number and poorly manufactured, with three students often sharing a unit built for two. Photos from the period show children sharing long benches and short desks. Some images portray working children sleeping while the teacher lectures under a bare, dim light bulb.

In the same year, a Cincinnati observer uncovered one classroom where “the furniture was so tightly packed that the children were obliged to squeeze their little bodies in between the desks...scarcely room enough...to expand their lungs, much less to move their limbs about freely.” Jacob Riis photographed a wild pig feasting on discarded food scraps at the door of a New York City schoolhouse.

To illustrate the plight of New York’s overstuffed classrooms, a muckraking urban newspaper published a cartoon depicting a well-dressed, feather bonneted club woman pulling back a heavy curtain to reveal “disease and death...squalor and filth in a public school. “The public schools,” announced the caption, “breed cripples and deformities.” The club woman,

dressed in middling class attire, gazed at the reader with an expression of anger mixed with determination. Her portrait captured many of the characteristics of middle and upper middle class women who witnessed the squalor of schools, streets, and tenements and tried to meliorate the conditions of those whose poverty or socioeconomic class had placed them on the edges of social concern for so long.<sup>21</sup>

The female club member whose figure towered over the congested New York City schoolhouse represented the enormous role played by middling and professional class men and women in the Progressive Era. The middle class had expanded substantially between 1870 and 1910. In 1870, it composed one-third of the U.S. population. By 1910, it had grown to 63% of the population. During those forty years, the American population doubled. So did the white-collar business and professional classes. The number of farmers and ranchers tripled. Although they were impressive gains, the middle class population outpaced all of those cohorts by growing eight fold. Hofstadter observes of the expanding middle class in the Progressive age that “a large and significant political public had emerged that was for the most part fairly well educated, genteel in its outlook, full of aspiration, and almost completely devoid of economic organization.”<sup>22</sup>

Reformers like Jane Addams spoke directly to middle and upper class young adults in an attempt to light a fire for social justice under those who had grown up in real or relative privilege. She urged educated young men and women to begin bearing personal responsibility for correcting the social evils that accompanied mass industrial growth and swelling urban populations. In 1892, Addams remarked that her generation of protected, well-fed, and “proper”

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<sup>21</sup> Otto L. Bettman, *The Good Old Days—They Were Terrible!* (New York: Random House, 1974), 162-163.

<sup>22</sup> Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 217-218.

Americans had been schooled on Protestant moral imperatives and the importance of social justice. As we will see below, the Christian social gospel movement—an element that helped shape the Progressive mindset—was already at work addressing social ills. Addams contended that most middle and upper middle class young adults had grown up in more refined neighborhoods in cities and newly sprouted suburbs distant from the plight of factory workers, the socially marginalized, and the oppressed city dwellers that governments at all levels had largely ignored. She engaged complacent youth in these socioeconomic classes to get involved and work together to solve the problems that existed in the very urban areas where they worked and lived:

We have in America a fast-growing number of cultivated young people who have no recognized outlet for their active faculties. They hear constantly of the great social maladjustment, but no way is provided for them to change it, and their uselessness hangs about them heavily. Huxley declares that the sense of usefulness is the severest shock which the human system can sustain, and that if persistently sustained, it results in atrophy of function.<sup>23</sup>

Comfortable dwellers in the middle class who followed news and opinion in the popular press saw similar exhortations in journals and newspapers. Writers and crusaders played to the long tradition of evangelical Protestant guilt, a key propellant of Progressive activism. Hofstadter goes so far as to label that sense of guilt as a “fulcrum of reform” that enabled Progressivism to shape itself into a social movement driven to change society for the better. In 1904, Florence Wilkinson captured this ethos in a poem designed to raise the consciousness and agitate the self-accusing tendencies of subscribers to the muckraking *McClure's* magazine. Referencing the poor and marginalized, she appealed to the sense of guilt and responsibility that marked ideal middle-class sensibilities:

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<sup>23</sup> Jane Addams, “The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements,” text provided by Swarthmore College and accessed at <http://www.swarthmore.edu/SocSci/rbannis1/Progs/Addams.html>

They go to a hungry grave that I may be fed....  
I warm my hands at the fires of ruining houses;  
On a dying mother's breast I sink my head;...  
O thou eternal Law, I wish this not to be.  
Nay, raise them from the dust and punish me.<sup>24</sup>

Raising people from the dust became the concern of many Progressive allies, but especially of middle and upper middle class women. Social historian Linda Rynbrandt contends that “women were responsible for the very origin of Progressive social reform.” Many middle-class women joined Progressive reform-minded clubs, many of which were connected under the national umbrella of the Federated Women's Clubs. Club members were important participants in the struggle for vocational education reform, which was only one element among a constellation of social causes that Black and White women addressed.<sup>25</sup>

I have chosen to briefly explore the energy and passion for social reform among members of the middle class through Black women's clubs because they provide a lens through which to view race, gender, and socioeconomic class that characterized the diversity of the broad Progressive movement out of which vocational education reform was born. They also open a window into the underpinnings of religiously motivated social reform that are largely neglected by school histories of this era. Black Progressive reform-minded women's clubs played an important role in understanding the vocational education transformations proposed by Nannie Helen Burroughs, whose philosophy and practical approach to occupational training we will examine in chapter 4. We begin by situating the religiously based African American women's

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<sup>24</sup> Florence Wilkinson, “The Tortured Millions,” *McClure's*, vol. 23 (June 1904), 167-168. Quoted in Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 211.

<sup>25</sup> Lynda Rynbrandt, “The ‘Ladies of the Club’ and Caroline Bartlett Crane: Affiliation and Alienation in Progressive Social Reform,” *Gender and Society*, vol. 11, no. 2 (April 1997), 203.

club in its broader social and historical context before looking at the role their members played as middle-class reformers.

As early as the 1880s, middle-class American women were discovering that it was difficult to live into the assigned social role that made them guardians of the hearth and home—a role that had increasingly solidified since the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—without getting involved in the world of politics, from which women were normally excluded. Historian Anne Firor Scott has observed that “it had come to be taken for granted in many communities that when problems were recognized, women’s associations would undertake to deal with them.” Thus, argues Scott, female Progressive activism through club membership was an extension of the normal social expectations for women. Even as they lived into the established social pattern of being nurturers of children and spouses in the home, so they were motivated to be challenging, prophetic, activist caregivers of the larger society in which their children lived and learned.<sup>26</sup>

Women’s clubs first appeared in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as the outgrowth of increases in female education and the desire of many women to continue learning in congenial, like-minded groups. Many of them were related to literary and artistic pursuits and were populated by women of the middling classes who did not need to work outside the home and had sufficient time on their hands to read, paint, sketch, perform plays, and write poetry. At times, these clubs were lambasted by critics who perceived them to be sophomoric and inwardly focused.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless,

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<sup>26</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 152, quoted in Rynbrandt, “Ladies of the Club”, 203. For a full discussion of the origins and ideals of the “separate spheres” ideology for women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s history,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 75 (1988), 9-39. See also Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993) and Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*, (New York: The Free Press, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Their Own Voices: Women’s Study Clubs 1860-1910*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 122-133.



women who saw that it was increasingly difficult in the industrial and urban era of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to properly raise children and guard the home adopted the club structure as a new model for *outwardly* focused activism. An association of community-minded women was an acceptable platform from which to launch assaults on the harmful elements that were obstructing the health and welfare of mothers, children, and youth in all socioeconomic classes. Their concerns centered on such issues as sanitation, education, health, nutrition, and the safety of the food supply.

Women's clubs with Progressive reform agendas sprang up nationwide and became popular outlets for mothers and single women alike. In 1900, the General Federation of Women's Clubs boasted over 150,000 members whose local organizations had opted to strengthen their resources by joining the Federation. In Illinois alone, 35 new women's clubs affiliated themselves with the Federation between 1893—the Federation's founding year—and 1915.<sup>28</sup>

Originally created to provide recreational and cultural outlets, during the Progressive Era they organized into activist phalanxes. Club women banded together to establish public libraries and privately operated schools, health and nutrition clinics, orphanages and settlement houses. They also addressed issues that resulted from rapid industrialization, including the harmful effects of child labor and unsanitary food manufacturing processes and plants.

African American women's clubs burgeoned and organized into national groups after being shunned by their White counterparts in clubs across the United States. Many of them adopted names from the pantheon of accomplished and activist African American women. In

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<sup>28</sup> Sandra Opdycke, ed., *The Routledge Historical Atlas of Women in America*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 77.

Illinois, the Sojourner Truth Club (Braidwood, 1914), the Phyllis Wheatley Woman's Club (Chicago, 1896), and the Ida B. Wells Club (Chicago, 1893) were among the many whose activism and defiance of White exclusion were embodied in club names.<sup>29</sup> In 1895, the first National Conference of Colored Women (NCCW) conference was held in Boston and elected an anti-lynching president, Mary Church Terrell. In 1896, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) was organized when the National Federation of Afro-American Women, headquartered in Boston and the National League of Colored Women, centered in Washington, DC, joined forces to create the largest and most influential non-church organization of African American women's clubs in the nation. National club organizer Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin observed that women's clubs were founded not "for race work alone, but for work along the lines that make for Black women's progress."<sup>30</sup> Such progress included educational advancement, of which vocational education in public and private high schools was a key component.

Largely unnoticed by historians is the existence of Protestant African American women's clubs, many of which joined forces with the National Association of Colored Women. Their programs reflected Black middle class faith and civic values, including hard work, self-help, independence, and Protestant theology. The NACW, which welcomed both religious and secular groups, adopted a constitution at its 1896 founding. Article II of the document noted that "the object of this Association shall be by the help of God to secure harmony of action and cooperation among all women of the highest plane, home, moral, and civic life."

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<sup>29</sup> Opdycke, *Women in America*, 77.

<sup>30</sup> Karen A. Johnson: *Uplifting the Women and the Race: The Educational Philosophies and Social Activism of Anna Julia Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 141.

The organizational skill of African American women's largest umbrella group came from leaders who received their training in local Black church ministries. In 1900, Fannie Barrier Williams, a Baptist public school teacher and social activist from Chicago, wrote that "the training which enabled colored women to organize and successfully carry on club work was originally obtained in church work....The meaning of unity of effort for the common good, the development of social sympathies grew into women's consciousness through the privileges of church work."<sup>31</sup>

Mary Church Terrell was a major figure in the African American women's club movement. Grounded in Protestant thought and values at the high school attached to Antioch College in Ohio, her Progressive credentials were established when she attended Oberlin College in the same state. During the period when she earned her bachelor's (1884) and master's (1886) degrees, Terrell fell under the influence of a mild form of Christian perfectionism preached by the evangelical minister Charles Grandison Finney. At that time, Oberlin was moving gradually from the evangelical perspective weighted largely toward individual salvation to a nascent Progressivism that focused on *social* salvation and progress. Oberlin historian John Barnard writes that the college's students were experiencing a "social awakening" built on a theological perspective of seeking transformation not only of the individual's character but also "structural changes in society."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America," (1900), in *Can I get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women: An Anthology*, ed. Marcia Y. Riggs, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 118.

<sup>32</sup> John Barnard, *From Evangelicalism to Progressivism at Oberlin College, 1866-1917*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 3.

Terrell graduated from Oberlin with Anna Julia Cooper, another activist in the African American women's club movement whose views on vocational and academic high school education will be profiled in chapter four. After marrying an attorney who would later become a judge in Washington, DC, she went on to teach at M Street High School in the nation's capital. She became a fixture in Washington's African American community throughout her active years of club work and equally supported academic and vocational education for African American youth at the secondary level.

Passing on middle class moral values was important to Terrell, especially those that were connected to the concept of public propriety.<sup>33</sup> Marcia Riggs has observed that "Terrell's understanding of the impact of moral development upon how black people would be perceived and received by the larger society is a reflection of how her thought and work also embodied the features of the ideology for racial advancement at the time—the belief that inclusion in American society was contingent on black people's ability to attain 'respectability' according to middle-class norms and values." Such respectability included the values of self-support, making personal progress toward higher socioeconomic achievement, the ethic of hard work, and Christian religion.<sup>34</sup>

Never neglecting her Baptist roots, Terrell's activism for social justice in behalf of children, youth, and adults in the African American community was grounded in the Social Gospel movement, which had begun at the close of the Civil War in 1865 and endured as a

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<sup>33</sup> On middle class values related to gender, see Stephanie Coontz, *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of Families 1600-1900*, (New York: Verson, 1988) and *Marriage, A History: from Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*, (New York: Viking Books, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs, "Africa American Children, 'The Hope of the Race,'" Mary Church Terrell, the Social Gospel, and the Work of the Black Women's Club Movement," in Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 381.

strong component of Progressive action until about 1920. So powerful and ubiquitous was the Social Gospel movement that Richard Hofstadter described it as “a phase in the history of Protestant conscience, a latter-day Protestant revival.”<sup>35</sup>

Ronald C. Wright, Jr.’s extensive study of the Social Gospel impulse reveals that there were extensive connections between Black religious institutions and social reform groups that took on the challenges of improving the conditions of African Americans through campaigns meant to “uplift” the race. In chapter four, we will examine in depth the example of Nannie Helen Burroughs as a middle-class African American Progressive Baptist reformer who used her religious club connections to establish a vocational school for African American girls and young women. We will also relate her experiences and views to those of W.E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington.<sup>36</sup>

Terrell and other Social Gospel prophets responded to problems associated with industrial and urban growth using a faith-based approach: poverty, crime, exploitation of labor, deplorable ghetto conditions, and disease were social ills that they believed should be eradicated from American life.

The salvation of the entire society—not simply of individuals—was the objective of Social Gospellers in the Progressive movement. We will see in chapter four that such salvific activity was often concentrated in education, especially of the *vocational* variety. Unlike some conservative evangelical Christians who viewed social ills as the result of individual sin, Social

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<sup>35</sup> Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 152; Ronald C. Wright, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reforms and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), xxiii-xxix.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald C. Wright, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reforms and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), xxiii-xxix.

Gospel activists believed that poverty, unemployment, and the like were the results of larger social and economic forces that were in many instances beyond the control of victims who were swept up in a tidal wave of rapid industrialization, urban growth, and immigration. Social Gospel adherents believed that the problem lay not with the poor but with poverty itself. They came to the perspective that social ills were systemic. They understood that Christianity's founder, Jesus of Nazareth, spoke more times about the interconnections of poverty, social justice, and the right use of money, than on any other topic. Social Gospelers employed theology and the latest information and techniques found in the new social sciences, including the developing area of "scientific" education, which would come to characterize the vocational movement as will be described in detail in chapter four. White has written that African American club women within the Social Gospel movement used the latest techniques in sociology, education, and psychology that were emerging around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Terrell and Ida B. Wells-Barnett were among many national and local leaders who blended these with Social Gospel tenets in their ongoing work of Protestant-based Progressive reform.<sup>37</sup>

Terrell was also influenced by the gospels of African American racial solidarity, self-help, group economics as a means to achieve "race progress," and the moral development of children. To achieve these goals, Terrell advised the adult community to care for, guide, and protect children. She also insisted that education was a lifelong process and that many adults needed to be trained to be adequate caregivers, protectors, and teachers.

As for everyday schooling, Terrell's Progressive Social Gospel, Baptist, and Oberlin College roots fed her commitment to the principle that African American club women should not

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<sup>37</sup> Barnard, *Evangelicalism to Progressivism*, 76-77; White, *Liberty and Justice for All*, xxvi.

simply meet for mutual enlightenment: they should also band together to attack social injustices and build up the children and youth of the community by providing “practical charity.” Her vision of practical charity encouraged local clubs to open a range of educational institutions: daycare centers, kindergartens, mothers’ congresses, as well as academic and vocational education schools. Terrell believed that practical vocational training at the high school level in domestic science would strengthen the employability of African American girls and young women, as would her colleague Nannie Helen Burroughs. Occupational preparation in school should reinforce what African American club women were doing. She wrote that “we are showing women how fatal it will be to their highest, best interests of their children if the Negro does not soon build up a reputation for reliability and *proficiency*.” She worked to ensure that these values would be passed along to a new generation through vocational education.<sup>38</sup>

## **VII. Federal Activism in the Progressive Period: Setting the Stage for Funding Vocational Education**

Progressive club women were not the only ones committed to social advancement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The central government was become active in this mission as well. One of the elements that set the stage for federal funding of local schools to finally pass Congress in 1917 was the fact that Washington had been growing increasingly active in the affairs of business during the Progressive Era. Federal activism greased the skids for Washington’s funding of local schools. Since the early decades of the republic, the federal government had been relatively small. The central government’s power to intercede and regulate business had been limited. Industrial and corporate entities expanded in an era when there were few government regulations, little oversight, minute bureaucracies, and few federal agents to enforce

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<sup>38</sup> Riggs, “The Hope of the Race,” 381. Italics added.

whatever laws were on the books related to corporate entities. Progressive observers were frightened at the hulking size of some corporations whose magnitude dwarfed state governments and the federal apparatus in Washington. In 1888, Charles William Eliot penned an essay on “The Working of the American Democracy” in which he pointed out the difference between a large company and the government of Massachusetts. A railroad enterprise headquartered in Boston boasted 18,000 workers, took in about \$40,000,000 annually, and paid its highest chief executive a salary of \$35,000. The government of Massachusetts was composed of only 6,000 people, drew in about \$7,000,000 in taxes and fees, and paid a maximum salary of \$6,500, about one-fifth the salary of the private railroad magnate<sup>39</sup>.

Capital was overwhelming government, and some lawmakers were calling for increased federal regulation of giant corporations. Sen. Robert La Follette in 1908 completed research showing that only one-hundred men controlled the vast business holdings in the United States. La Follette demonstrated that the firm of J.P. Morgan alone held posts on 341 corporate boards of directors in 112 companies with holdings of \$22,245,000,000. Hofstadter notes that “into the midst of this system of diffused [federal] power and unorganized [federal] strength the great corporations and investment houses had now thrust themselves, giant units commanding vast resources and quite capable of buying up political support on a wholesale basis just as they had bought their other supplies.”<sup>40</sup>

Progressive-minded legislators passed a collection of regulatory acts designed to rein in corporate excesses, sometimes in response to muckraking books and articles in journals. A cursory list of federal activist legislation includes the following:

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<sup>39</sup> Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 231

<sup>40</sup> Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 231.



Newlands Reclamation Act (1902):	Money from the sale of federal lands was used to pay for dams and irrigation projects.
Elkins Act (1903):	Outlawed the use of rebates by railroads and other shipping enterprises.
Pure Food and Drug Act (1906/1911):	Required companies to properly label ingredients used in packaged foods.
Meat Inspection Act (1906):	Meat processors were made subject to federal inspection and required to use quality meat and healthy packing practices.
Hepburn Act (1906):	Enhanced the Interstate Commerce Commission and permitted federal agencies To establish maximum shipping rates.
Federal Reserve Act (1913):	Established 12 regional Federal Reserve banks that were empowered to issue new currency and lend money to member banks at the prime interest rate, which was set by the Federal Reserve Board.
Clayton anti-Trust Act (1914):	Strengthened the Sherman Anti-Trust act making it illegal to create a monopoly by any method and exempted trade unions from anti-trust legislation.

The push for national school reform to be paid for by the central government surely benefited from the activist attitude that was beginning to characterize the missions of Capitol Hill and the White House.

Concern for healing social ills and curbing illegal acts of corporate greed was not confined to the middle class, neither was it restricted to the professor's study nor to the classrooms of teachers who saw the needs of students and tried to meet them. The Progressive impulse made its way into the White House and the halls of Congress, where federalist

intervention in local schools would soon become a topic of keen interest and support. The cause of vocational reform made its way into the political agendas of two presidents during the Progressive Era: Republican Theodore Roosevelt and Democrat Woodrow Wilson. These important figures demonstrate that vocational reform—like Progressivism itself— claimed adherents in both political parties. That Roosevelt, a Northern aristocrat and Wilson, the Southern scion of a middle class minister, embraced vocational reform also shows that advocacy for educational change united both Northern and Southern politicians in a rare display of mutual support. Theodore Roosevelt opened the White House door to vocational education’s supporters, and Woodrow Wilson pushed Congress to pay for what would be the first federally funded school reform initiative in our nation’s history.

### **VIII. Theodore Roosevelt: Strenuous Supporter of Vocational Education**

During his presidency, Theodore Roosevelt was aware of the growth in the American public high school and demonstrated the Progressive outlook that characterized the opening decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After discussing his support for vocational education, we will examine his Progressive background that inspired a concern for vocationalism.

From 1901 to 1909, he saw national high school enrollments grow by 53%, from 551, to 841,000. As he knew, public high schools remained the enclave largely of the white collar middling and upper classes and featured a traditional curriculum designed to prepare students for college. Concerned that dropout rates remained high, Roosevelt expressed keen interest in high school education and was convinced that vocational education courses would increase enrollments beyond eighth grade. In 1906, he devoted a significant section of his Annual Message to Congress to vocationalism. In 1907, he signed on as a charter member of the

National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education (NSPIE), a broad coalition of educators, business leaders, and union heads who advocated federal aid for occupational training courses in the nation's high schools. The NSPIE's heavy lobbying efforts would help pass federal funding of public high schools through the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, whose passage will be discussed below. By aligning himself with this activist group of Progressive educational reformers, Roosevelt was signing on to the campaign to secure the central government's newly proposed role as a player in local school districts.

The Rough Rider supported pragmatic vocational education as a way to boost high school retention rates and to equip young people to participate in the national economy. At Clark University in June 1905, the President Roosevelt extolled the virtues of industrial education and the need for vocational training in the nation's high schools. He told graduates that the "high ideals" of Germany—one of the United States' chief economic and industrial competitors—had been applied in their bicameral system of academic and vocational high schools in such a way that their military and industrial complex had greatly benefited and made them the envy of many nations. Speaking in October 1905 at Florida Baptist College, an African American institution in Jacksonville, he told students that the United States needed its schools to prepare people for the professions as well as for the farms and the "mechanical trades." At the Alabama state capitol three days later, the president praised the state's educational efforts in the context of providing public schools that could boost the South's agricultural and industrial base. In Richmond, Virginia he again drew attention to the contributions that education needed to make in order to buttress the nation's industrial might.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Address at the Graduating Exercises of the Collegiate Department of Clark University, Worcester, Mass., June 21, 1905", 391-396; "Address at the Florida Baptist College, Jacksonville, Fla., October 21, 1905, in *Presidential Addresses and State Papers of Theodore Roosevelt*, Part Four, (New York: P.F. Collier, 1905),

In Roosevelt's annual message to Congress in December 1906, he made over two dozen references to education. He praised the pragmatic vocational classes that were being taught for African Americans at Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes. A few paragraphs later, the president articulated clear and enthusiastic support of vocational education to be paid for by individual states. He stated his belief that although vocational instruction in the high school curriculum was a needed reform that was critical to the nation's economy, Congress was not yet able to help pay for it. Nonetheless, Roosevelt observed that the central government was developing and paying for occupational education courses in the public schools of Washington, DC. These schools, he observed, were designed in part to serve as models for school districts across the nation to emulate using their own state and local funding sources.

It is not possible, for instance, for the National Government to take the lead in technical industrial education, to see that the public school system of this country develops on all its technical, industrial, scientific, and commercial sides. This must be left primarily to the several States. Nevertheless, the National Government has control of the schools of the District of Columbia, and it should see that these schools promote and encourage the fullest development of the scholars in both commercial and industrial training.

Theodore Roosevelt was clearly committed to using the nation's public schools—particularly the growing trend of pragmatic high school occupational education—to bolster the United States' economy and its foreign trade, as this section of his 1906 message to Congress shows:

The commercial training should in one of its branches deal with foreign trade. The industrial training is even more important. It should be one of our prime objects as a Nation, so far as feasible, constantly to work toward putting the mechanic, the wageworker who works with his hands, on a higher plane of efficiency and

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512; "Address at the Capital Building, Montgomery, Ala., October 24, 1905," 529; "Address at the Luncheon at Richmond, Virginia, October 18, 1905", 468.

reward, so as to increase his effectiveness in the economic world, and the dignity, the remuneration, and the power of his position in the social world. Unfortunately, at present the effect of some of the work in the public schools is in the exactly opposite direction. If boys and girls are trained merely in literary accomplishments, to the total exclusion of industrial, manual, and technical training, the tendency is to unfit them for industrial work and to make them reluctant to go into it, or unfitted to do well if they do go into it. This is a tendency which should be strenuously combated. Our industrial development depends largely upon technical education, including in this term all industrial education, from that which fits a man to be a good mechanic, a good carpenter, or blacksmith, to that which fits a man to do the greatest engineering feat. The skilled mechanic, the skilled workman, can best become such by technical industrial education.<sup>42</sup>

In 1908, Roosevelt again encouraged Congress to support industrial education but did not mention federal funding for it. He reinforced his support for the nation's schools and urged congress to increase the budget of the National Bureau of Education to enable it to collect the data it needed to assist the states in strengthening their public programs of teaching and learning.<sup>43</sup>

In summary, Theodore Roosevelt supported the national school reform movement that had organized to push for vocational education as an alternative track to the purely academic curriculum in American high schools. Steering carefully through the shoals of states' rights, he acknowledged that the federal government could not pay for vocational programs in local schools. However, he observed that Congress would fund an exemplary occupational curriculum in District of Columbia schools, which would serve as a template for states and localities to emulate in establishing their own programs. Finally, Roosevelt linked education not only to the

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<sup>42</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Sixth Annual Message to Congress", December 3, 1906, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

<sup>43</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Eighth Annual Message to Congress," December 9, 1908, section on Education, The Miller Center, University of Virginia, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3780>.

formation of character and the acquisition of knowledge but also to the American economy. He saw schooling as a means for strengthening the nation's international trade and domestic financial status. In chapter 5 and the conclusion, we will hear these themes echoed in the National Defense Education Act, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), and in speeches of presidents and policymakers in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

## **IX. The “Schoolmaster in Politics”: Woodrow Wilson’s Support for Federally Funded Vocational Education**

Between the Roosevelt and Wilson administrations, presidential support for vocational education waned. During William Howard Taft’s 1908 presidential campaign, the Republican Party platform made no mention of education at all. His campaign biographers, Oscar King Davis and President Theodore Roosevelt, produced a 400-page book detailing Taft’s life and political views. Nowhere did they explain his perspective or concern for public education. A detailed examination of Taft’s four annual messages to Congress reveals only one mention of schooling in reference to the U.S. Navy training program for recruits.<sup>44</sup>

The tangled election of 1912 brought to the White House a Democrat, Woodrow Wilson, President of Princeton University.<sup>45</sup> The “Schoolmaster in Politics” turned away from his earlier disdain of Progressive agendas and the government's role in funding reform and began to embrace Progressivism. Always interested in the role of education in the lives of individuals and society at large, Woodrow Wilson accomplished a great deal for vocational education by successfully pushing federal funding for local secondary schools for the first time. Taking the concerns of Theodore Roosevelt for industrial and agricultural vocational education one step

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<sup>44</sup> Oscar King Davis and Theodore Roosevelt, *William Howard Taft, The Man of the Hour, His Biography and His Views on the Questions of To-Day*, (Philadelphia, PA: P.W. Ziegler Co., 1908).

<sup>45</sup> For a thorough discussion of the 1912 election, see James Chace, *1912 Wilson, Roosevelt, Taft, and Debs—The Election that Changed the Country*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

further into pragmatic action, Wilson established a special Congressional commission to investigate the nation's need for practical training in the high school curriculum, and did not object when the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act established a powerful, independent Federal Board for Vocational Education. Wilson even agreed with the overwhelming majority of Congress to allow federal funds to pay for local schooling in occupational subjects.

Before coming to the White House, Wilson differed drastically from Roosevelt regarding the government's role in reform, including public school reform. Wilson was a Southerner, and a trained professional scholar. Unlike Roosevelt, who called for individual states to support vocational education in their schools, Wilson advocated *federal* aid for local public schools.

Unlike Roosevelt, Wilson was suspicious of the central government's powers that had grown since the Civil War. At Johns Hopkins University, Wilson had written a dissertation called *Congressional Government*, in which he expressed his disapproval of the intensifying powers of Congress. He was especially opposed to the powers given to permanent Congressional committees whose membership was determined by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.<sup>46</sup>

Arthur S. Link and Trygve Throntveit have exegeted Wilson's political turnaround from a conservative states' rights anti-interventionist and free-market Democrat into a Progressive politician. Both scholars have noted Wilson's realization that his intellectual embrace of these concepts would not lead to success in his increasing taste for practical politics and running for public office. Wilson had read the tea leaves of the Democratic Party and correctly perceived a pattern of increasing power for Progressives. He concluded that there was no use in resisting the

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<sup>46</sup> Ruiz, "Ideological Convergence," 167.

reform impulses that were coursing through the nation in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and gaining new footholds in the Democratic Party.<sup>47</sup>

Steven J. Diner maintains that the election of 1912 “provided a mandate for activist government,” a condition that favored federal grants to local public high schools for vocational training classes. By the time of his election to the presidency in 1912, Wilson was ready to enact a wave of reform laws that contradicted his earlier commitments and revealed his new Progressive politics. Labeled the New Freedom, the president was establishing an activism that would characterize his overt support for federal intervention in local public schools through passage of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act. His commitment to such support was not conceived in a vacuum. Wilson’s conviction that the federal government should help pay for occupational training in local schools reflected his faith in federal intervention in other areas. In 1913 and 1914, he convinced Progressives in both parties to create the Federal Reserve and to pass the Clayton Anti-Trust Act, which outlawed business strategies that were thought to stifle trade and hurt consumers. He also successfully challenged the hegemony of bankers and other lenders over credit. Wilson’s Progressive credentials were strengthened in 1915 by passage of child labor laws, farm credits, a pay act for government employees, and a more equitable income tax schedule. His ambitious agenda for 1916 led to a number of Progressive initiatives in Congress: the Rural Credits Act of farmers, federal child labor laws, an increase in the federal income tax for wealthy Americans, an income tax on large inheritances, laws to pay for highways in various states, and the Adamson Act to standardize an eight-hour workday for railroad employees.

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<sup>47</sup> Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Road to the White House*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), 123; Trygve Throntveit, “‘Common Counsel’: Woodrow Wilson’s Pragmatic Progressivism, 1885-1913”, in John Milton Cooper, ed., *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace*, (Princeton, NJ: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008), 25-56.



It was in this activist environment that Wilson and his Congressional supporters proposed and won federal aid for education in local high schools through vocational education in the 1917 Smith Hughes Act. Federal aid for education unfolded in the context of Progressivism and an administration whose president had radically changed his views on the intensity of federal intervention in relation to local needs. Wilson and Congress demonstrated something they had not shown before: the federal government has a legitimate role under the “general welfare” clause to support local public schooling and to attach regulations and accountability standards to its grants of money.<sup>48</sup>

It is difficult to assess Wilson’s motives in pushing for federally funded local vocational education in the nation’s high schools. His papers contain no references to vocational education. Letters to, from, and about his friend and supporter Sen. Hoke Smith—so-sponsor of the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act— address topics that have nothing to do with education, vocational or otherwise. One can only offer conjectures based on the political situation at the time Wilson signed the bill in 1917. In doing so, *it seems clear that Wilson was using the public schools as a tool to strengthen the national defense.*

In early 1917, the United States stood on the cusp of entering World War I. At that time, Congress and Wilson were considering passage of the law that would open up federal funding for vocational training in the nation’s public high schools with the aim of equipping the nation’s farms and factories with more skilled workers. American farms had already been growing food for the federal government to sell to Great Britain, France, and other allied partners in the struggle against Germany. The nation’s industries were making and selling war materiel to the

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<sup>48</sup> Diner, *A New Age*, 223-225.

enemies of Germany. On February 3, 1917, two weeks before Wilson signed the Smith-Hughes Act, Imperial Germany had announced that its submarines would attack all shipping—whether sailing under a neutral flag or engaged in declared war—that approached the ports of Great Britain and Ireland, the western ports of the European continent, or the Mediterranean harbors of nations that were aligned against Germany. Ships of neutral nations, including the United States, were being sunk. Sailors and passengers were dying. Wilson announced that “the present German submarine warfare against commerce is warfare against mankind.” The United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. The infamous Zimmerman Telegram of January 1917 revealed Germany’s promise to return United States territory to Mexico in exchange for its joining the German-led Central Powers. The United States declared war on Germany on April 6. In such a conflicted international context, Wilson and vocational education advocates viewed federal money for occupational education as even more urgent.<sup>49</sup>

## **X. “An Uphill Work”: Securing Federal Funds for Schools Through the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act**

### **Senator Hoke Smith**

It was in the atmosphere of increasing federal activism and the war that had broken out across the face of Europe that Woodrow Wilson successfully urged Congress to establish the Commission on National Funding for Vocational Education in early 1914. To lead the commission and conduct its hearings, he reached out to a Progressive Democrat from his native state of Georgia, Sen. Hoke Smith, Chair of the permanent Senate Committee on Education and Labor. Smith was a former Atlanta newspaper editor, Governor of Georgia, and a Progressive—

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<sup>49</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “Message to Congress,” in Morris Edmund Speare and Walter Blake Norris, eds., *World War Issues and Ideals*, (New York: Ginn and Co., 1918), 5.

except on the issue of race relations—who was committed to bolstering industry and agriculture in his home state and throughout the South. To accomplish this goal, Smith advocated unprecedented federal funding for local high schools to establish vocational education curricular initiatives that were sweeping the world of educational reform. His goal was to persuade Washington to help pay for occupational training in local high school classrooms while honoring states' rights to maintain racially segregated public schools.

Hoke Smith was the leading advocate in Congress for vocational school reform. An ardent supporter of educational change with ties to the industrial and agrarian communities in Georgia, Smith was an early Wilson supporter during the 1912 presidential campaign. Like many Southern Progressive Democrats, Smith felt that the South had helped to elect one of its own sons to the White House. As a former member of the Atlanta Board of Education, he was committed to reforming the South's educational system to meet the challenges of the modern American economy. As a white leader who believed in Jim Crowism, Smith also supported vocational education for African American youth based on the model that most prominent Whites—and some people of color—approved of: Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, a school whose vocational education program will be discussed in chapter four.

Although Smith was committed to strengthening the Southern economy—industrially and agriculturally—and to school reform, he remained dedicated to keeping one aspect of Southern high schools the same: segregation by race. He envisioned a bill that would allow states the power to disperse federal monies for occupational classes among local high schools in amounts that individual state boards of education saw fit to share. Sociologist Regina Werum has demonstrated that following passage of Smith-Hughes, African American high schools in the South were normally given federal grant money from state boards of vocational education to

support a narrow set of courses in agricultural occupations and the domestic sciences.

Meanwhile, state boards funneled federal grant money to all-White schools to pay for instruction in more advanced occupations: radio technology, mechanical repairs, machinist skills, and the like. Thus, Smith's agenda was to use federal money to train African Americans in vocational high school courses for the jobs that White society had reserved for them under the Jim Crow establishment. They fulfilled racial expectations and provided little promise for socioeconomic advancement for Black students. Through the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act that provided money to local schools for the first time on a national basis, Hoke Smith was able to accomplish three important objectives:

1. Obtain federal aid for his state's schools;
2. Maintain states' rights in dispersing grant money to whichever schools state vocational education boards so desired in the quantities they saw fit;
3. Use federal funds to retain the racial status quo in the South.<sup>50</sup>

Like Wilson and Roosevelt, as Governor of Georgia in 1907, Smith exhibited his Progressive tendencies by working for bills to curb largely unregulated corporations in the state and by promoting election reforms. Smith was only one of a range of Southern reformers. Historian Edward Ayers has observed that "the men who led the Southern states in the first decade of the twentieth century,...were a diverse lot in temperament and image,... What they had in common was a willingness to use the power of the state government in more active ways

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<sup>50</sup> Regina Werum, "Political Process in the Pre-desegregation South: Race and Gender Stratification in Federal Vocational Programs, 1917-1936", Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1995.

than it had been used before.”<sup>51</sup> In his second gubernatorial inauguration speech in 1911, Smith called for an *activist* state government while encouraging the Georgia legislature to back Progressive initiatives such as anti-lobbying regulations and the creation of bureaus to oversee labor and the construction of roads. In the same speech, Smith renewed his advocacy for agricultural development and public education. The *Atlanta Journal* described him as a Progressive member of the Democratic Party who had arrived “in the thick of a nationwide movement toward Democratic principles” that would remove “outworn customs,” and move the state and nation away from “old abuses [so] that industrial and social developments may proceed unhampered.”<sup>52</sup>

After being appointed to the United States Senate by the Georgia General Assembly in 1911, Smith successfully worked for passage of the Smith-Lever Bill, a measure that used matching federal dollars to help pay for a national agricultural extension program. Courses for farmers were aimed at increasing yields using the latest scientific advancements in agronomy, crop rotation, planting, fertilizing, and harvesting.

In addition to Smith’s support of Wilson in the 1912 election, his long advocacy for vocational education, background as a school board member, efforts to reform Atlanta city schools, and experience as chair of the Senate education committee made him Woodrow Wilson’s choice to spearhead a bill that would fund vocational education in local public high schools. With Wilson’s strong backing, Smith won Senate and House approval in 1914 to create the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education, a group Wilson had lobbied for since

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<sup>51</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 413.

<sup>52</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, August 11, September 16, 1910, quoted in Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 206.

his inauguration in 1913. Its members were composed entirely of White politicians and educators who stood behind the idea that the nation's high schools needed modernizing reforms, and that vocational education was the medication for healing ailing public education and for meliorating the conditions of aimless youth in dead-end jobs. In the eyes of Wilson, Smith, and the Commission members, it was time for the federal government to step up and help pay for local public schooling, but only of the pragmatic occupational type.<sup>53</sup>

The Commission was given only a few months to investigate the status of the American public high school, to assess the need for vocational training among high school youth, and to recommend what Congress should do to support occupational courses in local schools. In the spring of 1914 Smith's Commission sponsored hearings to gauge support for federal funding of pragmatic courses, which some public high schools were already offering—most notably in Massachusetts—through state-funded programs.

The hearings led the Commission to recommend that Congress fund local public schools in the practical subjects. A bill was drawn up by Charles S. Prosser, executive secretary for the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education (NSPIE) and one of Smith's chief allies in vocational school reform. The legislation came to be known as the Smith-Hughes Act and was passed by a large majority in early 1917 after several failed attempts.

The provisions of the bill will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter. For now, it is important to note that Smith-Hughes called for matching annual federal grants to the states to promote high school training in agriculture, industrial arts, and domestic science. The federal

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<sup>53</sup> In addition to Smith, Commission members included Sen. Carroll S. Page (R-VT), Rep. Dudley M. Hughes (D-GA), Rep. S.D. Fess (R-OH), John A. Lap, Florence Marshall, Agnes Nestor, Charles H. Winston, and Charles A. Prosser, executive secretary of the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education.

share of grant money would begin at \$1,700,000 in 1918 and expand yearly until 1926, at which time Congress could extend the law if it chose to do so, or allow it to lapse into history. Grants would enable school districts to hire men and women who had worked in an approved practical field, equip them with teaching skills they needed to step into the classroom as full-time instructors, and help pay their salaries. No funding could be used to pay teachers in academic subjects. Federal largesse, however, came at a price: a system of regulations and established lines of accountability for schools that accepted federal aid was created, and each state that received federal grants would be required to set up a state board of vocational education. A National Board for Vocational Education would be established to oversee the entire initiative in all the states. Smith-Hughes won support from the National Association of Manufacturers, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the recently created National Association for the Promotion of Industrial Education, a highly organized and influential vocational reform group that included many professional educators, business leaders, union representatives, and politicians, including Theodore Roosevelt. Even labor signed on.

## **XI. The Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education**

The Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education conducted hearings in April 1914, three months before the outbreak of World War I and just prior to Woodrow Wilson's initiatives to prepare the United States to support the Allied war effort. It was already customary in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for Congressional commissions to spike the witness pool with people who were favorable to the program under discussion. Only rarely did anyone appear before the Commission who opposed federal financial aid and regulatory involvement in local schools.

The Commission's hearings provide a look into the issues that concerned politicians and educators as they discussed federal funding for local schools. Much of the testimony centered on the need for American public high schools to expose students to practical training. Witnesses often cited the importance of education in nurturing skills for labor and the economy, thus tying public schooling to the American economy. Unfriendly witnesses, such as John Dewey or M.E. Miles, head of industrial education for the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) might have brought up strenuous objections in 1914. Neither of these men had qualms with Congress paying for education. Their opposition sprang from concerns that the brand of vocationalism Congress was proposing was too narrowly conceived (Dewey) and from anxiety of the NAM that occupational instructors might be required to have had prior classroom experience (Miles).<sup>54</sup>

A summary of the testimony of friendly witnesses reads like a litany of Progressive values, with the addition of national defense:

1. The need for school reform to address vocational, social, and economic values and issues; the commitment to using measurable test results to determine the vocational aptitude of individual students;
2. The natural fit between schooling and sustaining American prowess in commerce and national defense;
3. The call for federal activism in local schools through funding and regulation to prepare students to transition into living in the complex modern industrial society.

On April 20, 1914 National Education Association representative D.W. Springer testified that the NEA was aware of the complexity of modern society and had passed an occupational training resolution in 1911. The resolution stated that "our public schools should make ample

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<sup>54</sup> A fuller picture of Dewey's opposition to narrowly conceived vocational training in public high schools will be treated in chapter four. For more on Miles' disappointment with the Commission, see *The Elementary School Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1 (September 1914), 6.



provision for instructing the youth of the land in the more important occupations in which our people are engaged,” and parents and teachers should create ways to help young people discover “what vocation every child is adapted to pursue.” He then read into the record a 1912 NEA resolution describing the relationship between public education, national defense, and the American economy:

The United States in order to protect its population, by maintaining its vigor and morality; to change its raw materials into an output of finished product; to make it possible to fight, not with armored cruisers, but with brain and skilled workmanship; and to maintain its commercial prestige, demands some form of vocational education.<sup>55</sup>

Continuing to express the NEA’s support for federal funding of vocational education, Springer argued that Congressional aid must be tied to *measurable performance standards*. Otherwise, federal overseers would have no objective way to tell whether the grants were working as they were intended. The NEA, he said, had already voted that “such grants to such local communities and to such states be dependent upon *actual results* secured in such local communities and states.”<sup>56</sup>

The strongest statements concerning the link between public schooling and the national economy came from Wilson’s Secretary of Commerce, William Cox Redfield. Before being elected to Congress as a Progressive Democrat from New York, Redfield had served as a commissioner of public works in Brooklyn before embarking on a steady climb into the prosperous world of New York business. Redfield was altogether behind the concept of federal

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<sup>55</sup> *Hearings Before the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education*, Vol. II, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1914), 126.

<sup>56</sup> *Hearings*, Vol. II, 127. Italics added.

activism in local public education through vocational curricula and a firm believer in the public school's role in preparing young people participate in the American economy. "I regard this whole question of vocational education...as being the single, most serious subject affecting American life which is under consideration today." He argued that the states already had plenty of revenue to spend on general education that was used to train students for white collar professions. Most children, he stated, were leaving school too young and heading into the "blind alley of life." He warned the Commission that youth were entering a "cold, hard business world, unfit for the competition" and untrained for work. School was a whetting stone to sharpen students' work skills: "On the factory side, it would be a God-send when an employer could employ men who know how to work, who know why they work that way, and know what to do and why it is done. Today, they often cannot."

Redfield hammered away at the administration's point that public education should develop skills and abilities that would serve the nation and keep people off of public assistance. Schools had a duty to make each boy and girl self-sufficient. In Redfield's view, untrained workers were a "curse, and work all sorts of harm." Using a military simile, he judged that undeveloped skills were akin to a commander whose men did not know how to handle a weapon. More than anything else, the United States needed a well-trained workforce and the public school system was the natural place to equip young people for the adult world of work in a free market economy. Redfield pointed out that "in each State every boy and girl in this country should come to know how to do some one simple act of self-support thoroughly well." Under the banner of vocational education school reform, public education would usher in a "social and industrial millennium...all at once." Without federally funded vocational training in the high schools, the United States would continue to see "a whole lot of human wreckage." As a

Progressive Democrat, Redfield was committed to healing the human wreckage of aimless youth laboring without purpose or prospect for advancement in a job that inefficiently used their talent. Secretary Redfield proposed that federal aid for job training classes would revolutionize the public education system, align it with contemporary national economic needs, and provide students with brighter prospects for the future. He summarized his views in five points:

1. Vocational training would stabilize students' futures in the workforce.
2. Students would be instructed that manual work had a dignity that it would lack without proper vocational training.
3. Public educators and their high school graduates would win "the respect of capital"—which they presumably did not enjoy already—because schools would turn out laborers whose work would be of higher quality.
4. The current public school curriculum was incomplete and has left "a want that hangs over our industrial efficiency."
5. The federal government was the only agency that could step in with enough power and money to rectify public education's problem of connecting learning with practical results and—lest states' righters object—states should be given "general latitude" to work out the details in such a manner that each state's occupational program would fit its particular regional needs.

In a final flourish, Redfield reminded the Commission—and by extension, Congress itself—that federal aid for public schools was *in keeping with federal activism as it had been enacted over the previous decade during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt*. Money had been dispensed to the states for infrastructure—roads, bridges, and rail lines—and the states had gladly accepted it. They were more prepared to receive federal largesse for "things that were

obvious” to the eye, such as a new highway interchange, but not for something as serious as public education.<sup>57</sup>

As it had many times in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and throughout Congressional deliberations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the issue of states’ rights appeared as a sacred cow that could trample on Wilson’s push to fund public education below the university level. The Commission and its favorable witnesses needed to broach the topic in public and affirm that the central government’s financial support would in no way tread on the rights of individual states. Money would be awarded in line with the Smith-Hughes Act’s guidelines to ensure that the public’s tax money was being spent properly. States would be able to dispense funds to individual districts to meet local occupational needs as long as they were used for vocational purposes. Philander Claxton, the U. S. Commissioner of Education, testified before Smith’s commission that he saw no conflict whatsoever between federal activism and state authority in matters of public education funding. The U.S. Office of Education was already publishing scores of bulletins to aid local schools. The office’s ideas about who should teach, what should be taught, and how schoolhouses should be administered had already been widely adapted in the nation’s public schoolhouses.<sup>58</sup>

Charles Prosser, Commission Member, author of the Smith-Hughes Act, and head of the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, took careful pains to assure witnesses and members of Congress that “there is no thought of imposing on the State any type of schools. Under the Smith-Hughes proposal, states would be “left free under a contractual relationship to agree upon plans and procedures for the work of the State....Such a plan would

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<sup>57</sup> *Hearings*, Vol. II, 38-50.

<sup>58</sup> *Hearings*, Vol. II, 10-17.

not prevent that State from securing the type of school, course of study, and form of instructions which, in the opinion of the people of that State, best meet their demands.” States could control the vocational curriculum as long as it conformed to federal grant regulations.<sup>59</sup>

Sen. Carroll Page, a Republican from Vermont who had long been interested in federal largesse for vocational education in public schools, defended Prosser’s viewpoint. States would determine their own needs and design occupational curricula by “mak[ing] their own plans and tak[ing] initiative.” State proposals for using federal money would be submitted to the U.S. Commissioner of Education’s office for approval and alignment with the law’s stipulations.

## **XII. “Just a Leading Wedge”: Opposition to Federal Funding for Vocational Education**

The only witness who agitated vociferously for *protecting* states’ rights in public education was Frank L. McVey, President of the University of Kentucky, Progressive Republican, and economics scholar. McVey thought the vocational reform bandwagon was rumbling too fast through the nation’s education community and the Congress. He argued that the Smith-Hughes measure would open up a Pandora’s Box of additional funding for education in the states that would erode local control of the schoolhouse. Speaking as an economist, he contended that educators would not be satisfied with \$1,000,000 or with \$7,000,000, or even with \$10,000,000. A taste of Washington money would lead educators in the states to agitate for more funding to pay for all types of misguided projects. Federal dollars for public schools would grow “something like the national debt.” He pointed to bills Congress passed to fund agricultural, mechanical, and technical universities. Federal handouts to public schools would “increase and increase just as under the Morrill Bill and the Lever Bill.” Spiraling education

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<sup>59</sup> *Hearings*, Vol. II, 133.

grants would in turn lead to higher income taxes and would inspire “an inadequate result from the experiment.”

McVey was convinced that the Smith-Hughes Act, modest though it proposed to be, was the first sign that the sky was falling on locally controlled public school systems. The act, McVey asserted, was only the first blow in Washington’s campaign to pry open the door to community-based schools and establish their authority over local school boards and state officials. He was a Progressive who believed in restrained government activism and remained suspicious of too much federalism. “Vocational education is just a leading wedge in the whole educational system to control it through federal authority,” he warned. Doing away with state authority over the schoolhouse—a tradition that had existed since the days of Washington and Jefferson—would be the inevitable consequence. “[I]t is only a question of time until the federal government will be compelled, . . . to centralize” the administration of basic education in Washington. “I don’t think I need to tell you who are assembled here that the tendency of the Federal Government toward constant centralization is a very marked feature of present-day history.”

The states’ rights issue over federal aid to education was finally resolved in the language of the Smith-Hughes Act itself. As we will discover later, Hoke Smith and Dudley Hughes were able to craft a bill that enabled individual states to divide the money as they saw fit. This move allowed Southern states to design vocational curricula along racial lines and to keep their schools segregated.

## Chapter Three

### The Rise of Manual Training and Vocational Education: 1876-1936

#### Introduction

This chapter reviews key events leading to the federal government's decision to fund a national public school reform program—vocational education—for the first time and to increase funding for it through the 1930s despite vigorous opposition. The 1917 Smith-Hughes Act marked a turning point in federal engagement in local schools. It initiated federal involvement in public education below the university level. Beginning with vocational education, Washington's activism in regulating and directing local school affairs intensified throughout the 20th century in such initiatives as the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA) and the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In the 21st century it culminated in national reform programs such as the No Child Left Behind Act and Race to the Top.

The vocational education reform movement established patterns that played out in future national efforts to improve schools through federal funding and regulation. Vocationalism established an enduring paradigm for school reform that featured three new visions for the purpose of public education:

1. The goal of public education is to cultivate *human capital* by training youth to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from the nation's free market economy.
2. The duty of public schools is to help *strengthen national security* and technological superiority on the world stage.
3. One of the legitimate responsibilities of the federal government is to assist states and communities in *funding, reforming, and regulating* local public schools for the benefit of the nation at large.

Recasting schools as training grounds for future workers and technocrats proved to be popular among Washington politicians, state and local school boards, professional organizations, and other educational stakeholders. Vocationalism featured a deliberate campaign to convince Congress to pay for schooling on a national scale and to write regulations that public schools were required to meet in order to qualify for funding.

Salient examples of attempts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to reform public education on a national scale below the university level are briefly reviewed first, followed by an account of the calls for reforming public schools to include a radically new curricular ingredient: vocational education. Proposals for changing the high school curriculum led up to the 1917 Smith-Hughes bill.

## **National School Reform Efforts in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **I. Efforts to Fund the Common School Movement**

National initiatives to transform public schools had been pursued in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, long before the Smith-Hughes Act. However, as Freeman Butts has observed, most efforts were the products of “the pluralistic state governments” and did not represent the attempts of a “cohesive national government.” Before the Civil War and Reconstruction, Jacksonian democracy favored robust local and state action in such matters as public education rather than federal involvement. As state legislatures revised their constitutions in the 1840s and 1850s, nearly all of them inserted *state* responsibility for providing schools that would be free, uniform, and universal. Individual states established increasingly centralized control through state school boards, often over the protests of local officials.

Champions of the common school movement in many states prodded elected officials to support free instruction. Spokespersons for universal free education published numerous reports



and journal articles pushing for it to be funded by individual states and controlled by state-level agencies. Advocates crisscrossed state boundaries to drum up support for standardized common schools as institutions for increasing literacy, strengthening morality, and cultivating informed civic involvement and national pride. They addressed audiences in Lyceum auditoriums, organized groups to promote the common school to taxpaying voters, and courted state politicians. Groups such as the American Institute of Instruction staged conferences and built networks of communication.

A number of congressional initiatives to pay for local schooling emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but federal involvement and money to support universal education did not materialize. As we saw in chapter 1, members of Congress introduced legislation that would have funded public education below the college level beginning in the 1820s. Twenty such bills were proposed between 1821 and 1854, although only a very few progressed to the stage of open debate. These efforts were repeatedly tabled or referred to committees where they languished and eventually died. One minor exception occurred under the Surplus Revenue Deposit Act of 1836. Facing a federal budget surplus, Congress allotted extra funds to the states but they did not stipulate how the money was to be used. Some states applied their share of the one-time distribution to support public schools, but this action was a historical hiccup and was not practiced by all the states. The issue of federal payments and regulation for public schools below the university level lay dormant until Reconstruction, when Congress debated the legality of school segregation and considered intervention in Southern schools. Between 1881 and 1891, six bills to provide federal outlays for public education at the elementary and secondary levels were proposed, all of which suffered the same fate as their antebellum ancestors.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Freeman Butts, *Public Education in the United States, From Revolution to Reform*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978), 80f. For a complete review of bills introduced in Congress to pay for local schools, see

## II. Freedmen's Schools

There was one exception to repeated Congressional failures to secure *permanent* financial aid for local education: the Freedmen's School initiative. During the Civil War, the federal government established and helped pay for local schools for former slaves—children, youth, and adults alike— in regions of the South that were occupied by federal troops. After the Freedmen's Bureau was created in 1865, Congress appropriated money through the Bureau to rent buildings, help pay for books and transportation for teachers, and oversee the administration of schools. Congressional outlays allowed the Bureau to publish its own textbooks, pamphlets, and tracts for freed slaves to read in their classrooms. These texts emphasized morality, religious values, and forbearance toward former masters.<sup>2</sup> Congress also appropriated money for federal troops to protect instructors and students against violent antagonists who opposed African American literacy.

Although this reform effort was partially funded and overseen by Washington, it was not a *nationwide* initiative. Freedmen's schools were restricted to the South. Further, the majority of funding for freedmen's schools came from non-government sources: Northern philanthropic associations and African Americans themselves raised money to maintain facilities, pay teachers, and purchase books and materials. Congressional grants to Freedmen's schools were fleeting. Federal monies dried up following the weakening of the Freedmen's Bureau in 1870.<sup>3</sup>

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*Federal Aid for Education: A History of Proposals Which Have Received Consideration by the Congress of the United States, 1789-1960*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Morris, *Freedmen's Schools and Textbooks: Black Education in the South, 1861-1870*, (Brooklyn, NY: AMS Press, 1980); *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Amanda Claybaugh, "Public Education and the Welfare State: The Case of the Freedmen's Schools", *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities*, vol. 2 (December 20, 2010), <http://occasion.stanford.edu/node/45>; Robert C. Morris, *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

### **III. A National Effort to Reform the High School Curriculum**

In 1893, the National Education Association embarked on a nationwide campaign to standardize the hodge-podge of curriculums that were offered in American high schools. As new students with a broader set of academic abilities, interests, and challenges filled the classrooms of the nation's growing number of secondary schools, the NEA sought to strengthen commitments to intellectual rigor in secondary education by emphasizing traditional academics. The NEA's Committee of Ten on Secondary-School Studies was composed of elite educators, who reasserted the concept that "four years of strong and effective training" was the public high school's main purpose. Charles W. Eliot of Harvard University chaired the group, which included five college presidents, U.S. Commissioner of Education William T. Harris, higher education administrators, and one high school principal.

The committee created what they considered to approximate the ideal high school curriculum to prepare youth for college studies: a robust academic plan designed not only to prepare youth for higher learning but for practical everyday life as well. The notion of conforming the school curriculum to meet the needs of daily life was not new. The reform elements in the new curriculum consisted of "electives" and the introduction of "modern" subjects. Ancient languages and mathematics remained the cornerstone of the high school, but modern courses—English, French, or German language, history, and science—were introduced to help secondary education dovetail with contemporary changes in school populations and American society in general. The committee understood that many parents could not afford to keep their children in high school through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Its members realized that not every student was bound for college. Still, the Committee of Ten believed that the curriculum reform would

prepare even those who would not finish high school or attend college with a basic mental framework for dealing effectively with everyday life at home and in the workplace.

As the Committee of Ten's revisions spread to high schools across the country, Congress stood on the sidelines. There would be no federal funding to help pay for the NEA reforms, to defray the costs for implementing the new curriculum, to subsidize the training and hiring of teachers for classes in the "modern" subjects, or to underwrite expanding facilities to accommodate additional classrooms for them to be taught in.

### **The Drive for Federal Involvement in School Reform**

As reviewed in chapter two, the campaign for federal involvement in public education dates to the period of the early republic. Crusades for the central government to support schools intensified in the 1870s as the manual training movement gained national attention. As manual training became increasingly professionalized, it morphed into what its leaders called "vocational education" at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Vocational supporters worked diligently to introduce it into the mainstream local high school curriculum and sustain it with federal financial aid.

Recent historians trace the evolution of manual training to a set of significant transformations in American society.<sup>4</sup> The apprentice system that had dominated trade training since colonial times was disappearing, a development that alarmed business, labor, and education leaders. The growth of large factories, task specialization, expanding groups of workers in mills

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<sup>4</sup> For general works that unfold the narrative of industrial education's rise in public schools, see Berenice M. Fisher, *Industrial Education: American Ideals and Institutions* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1967). Charles Alpheus Bennett's two-volume work, *History of Manual and Industrial Education* (Peoria: Ars Press, 1926 and 1937) is a classic work representing the genre that viewed industrial education as an incarnation of democracy and free choice. Good revisionist histories include Herbert M. Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, Arthur G. Wirth, *Education in the Technological Society: The Vocational-Liberal Studies Controversy in the Early Twentieth Century* and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Education Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: New York: Basic Books, 1976).

and plants, and the concentration of dispersed industries into mass production facilities swelled the number of apprentices and overwhelmed the labor market. As a result, apprentice programs deteriorated in quality, and by the late 19th century they were out of step with the new industrial age. As factories needed more employees, expanding school systems became attractive to business leaders as institutions for training future workers. In John Dewey's words, "the public school was the willing pack-horse of our social system."<sup>5</sup>

As the workplace changed, some policymakers argued for alterations in the public high school that would bend its course offerings to the needs of industry. Reformers challenged the existing high school curriculum of classical subjects and book-based learning. Some educators called for a new curriculum to serve a growing urban proletariat of immigrant and native working class youth. In an era when many students dropped out to find work at age 14 or younger, reformers viewed the high school as an impractical, inefficient institution that failed to meet the needs of all its learners by concentrating its energies on those who planned to attend college. Critics argued that students who expressed no interest in higher learning were being neglected. In 1893 Thomas Vickers, school superintendent in Portsmouth, Ohio, spoke for this cohort when he observed that opposition to public education came from those who believed secondary schools "might be made to serve a better and more generally useful purpose and...therefore ought to be differently organized."<sup>6</sup>

As factories, businesses, and the labor force expanded in the last quarter of the 19th century, the forces of manual training reform gathered momentum and inspired two major

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<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, "The Schools and Social Preparedness," *New Republic* 6 (May 6, 1916): 15.

<sup>6</sup> Howard R.D. Gordon, *The History of Vocational Education in America*, 2nd. ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2003), 1-8; Janice Weiss, "The Advent of Education for Clerical work in the High School: A Reconsideration of the Historiography of Vocationalism," *Teachers College Record* vol. 83, no.1 (Summer 1982), 615, quoting Thomas Vickers, "The High School and its Enemies," *School Review* 1, no. 2 (February 1893), 84.

achievements: The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, which provided unprecedented federal funding for local schools to pay specifically for vocational training, and the 1918 National Education Association (NEA) publication, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, a manifesto that distilled arguments for socially efficient and goal-oriented public secondary schools. The *Cardinal Principles* helped secure the place of the “comprehensive” high school that combined academic and vocational courses.

## **I. Retooling the School: Manual Training, 1876-1906**

The push to fasten manual training—later called vocational education— onto the existing academic-oriented public school curriculum began in the wake of the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Nearly 9 million people—the equivalent of about twenty percent of the U.S. population—traveled to the fair and witnessed an unprecedented display of machines. Americans were fascinated by what mechanized factory equipment could produce. Fittingly, Machinery Hall sat at the center of the fairgrounds. It housed the colossal 1,500 horsepower Corliss engine, the largest machine to be produced in the 19th century and the first exhibit visitors saw as they entered the fair. The Philadelphia exposition marked an occasion for the United States to flex its growing industrial muscles and to claim a new role on the global stage of manufacturing. Cranked to a chuffing start by President Ulysses S. Grant, the Corliss engine whirled for the duration of the Centennial Exposition as the symbol of a new age dominated by large-scale factory work and mass consumption.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time the Centennial fair marked a turning point in America’s industrial

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<sup>7</sup> A note about terminology is helpful here. “Manual training” was used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to describe mostly trade-based courses that were infused with moral concepts and used to “reform” working-class, immigrant, American Indian, black, and minority populations. The Hampton Institute and Carlisle Indian School were noteworthy examples, as was the “reform school” movement. The term “vocational training” was not widely used until the first decade of the 20th century when professional vocationalists took hold of the manual training movement and dropped the morality angle.

prowess, it also served as a turning point in public high school reform. The Philadelphia fairgrounds inspired the beginning of a movement away from the one-track-serves-all academic curriculum and the introduction of a parallel set of courses involving manual training and, later, vocational education.

Among the tourists at the Centennial was John D. Runkle, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Runkle was awed by spinning engines, new technologies, and the nascent consumer culture that factory-made goods were helping to create. A mathematician, he was by 1876 already a critic of the dominant role played by academics in the high school curriculum. Studying the classics, he asserted, could not possibly appeal to all students equally. He was concerned about the steep drop-off in high school enrollments that occurred after the age of 14, especially among boys. Runkle arrived in Philadelphia convinced that a program of manual training would keep potential drop-outs in high school and equip them for adult work in industry. For several years, he had searched in vain to locate a suitable program that would leverage the interest of young boys who were more interested in woodwork, tinkering with machines, and metal crafting than in Latin, Greek, and Shakespeare. Runkle's epiphany occurred as he stood in the fair's Russian pavilion examining the products of an accelerated vocational teaching method used by Victor Della Vos in St. Petersburg, where he trained large groups of students in graded exercises at the Imperial Technical School. After examining "three series of models—one of chipping and filing, one of forging, and one of machine-tool work," he exclaimed that "the problem I had been seeking to solve was clear to my mind; a plain distinction between a mechanic art and its application in some special trade became apparent."

Losing no time, Runkle opened a School of Mechanical Arts at M.I.T in 1877 that featured both an industrial and an academic curriculum for high school students. It soon became

a gateway to enrollment at M.I.T. The school's motto, "Arts, not trades; instruction, not construction," conveyed his conviction that manual training was broadly educative and not merely a narrow program for training ranks of laboring-class factory workers. Its quick success spurred Runkle to urge the Massachusetts Board of Education to introduce manual training in high schools and make it a requirement for all students several hours each week. Classical schooling alone, he argued, fell short of its proclaimed goal to imbue youth with "high culture" while simultaneously training them for success in society.<sup>8</sup>

In June 1879 Runkle's ally, Calvin M. Woodward, a professor at Washington University's O'Fallon Polytechnic Institute, launched the St. Louis Manual Training School. It was open to boys age 14-17 who presented "a certificate of good moral character signed by a former teacher." Courses included English grammar and writing, mathematics—algebra, geometry, and trigonometry—and mechanical drawing, "the shorthand language of modern science." A critical course in the curriculum was "The Management of Steam," the oxygen of the Industrial Age.

Within a decade, the new school became a pipeline into O'Fallon's undergraduate tracks in engineering. Woodward described its three objectives for: To train O'Fallon recruits in the proper use of hand tools, a skill he thought had atrophied; to resurrect the tradition of the proud craftsman; and to strengthen students' moral fiber through manual shop work. Driven by his enthusiasm for manual training and a penchant for hyperbole, Woodward described modern workers as "young Vulcans," well-trained "mechanics, engineers, and manufacturers" doing battle with the "clerks, book-keepers, salesmen, poor lawyers, murderous doctors, whining preachers, penny-a-liners, (and) hardened school-keepers." In a period when the masculinity of

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<sup>8</sup> John D. Runkle, "The Manual Element in Education," *Forty-First Annual Report of the Board of Education*, (Boston, MA: Rand, Avery and Co., 1882), 185-218. See also pp. 5-7.



“soft” professionals was being questioned, Woodward saw their increasing numbers as a threat to the nobility of muscular tool work.<sup>9</sup>

Woodward’s school expanded alongside his efforts to introduce manual training into the nation’s public high schools. Although Runkle was nationally appreciated as an important voice in the growing movement, Woodward became its chief promoter. Throughout the 1880s he seemed to be everywhere educators gathered, presenting papers, cajoling NEA conventioners, and debating opponents. The timing of Woodward’s crusade coincided with the enlarging of secondary education itself as outlined above in chapter two. This development assured him a broad hearing, especially in the nation’s urban centers where educational experimentation flourished. In speeches and articles, Woodward pronounced the standard curriculum outdated, impractical, and unsuited for the industrial age, claiming that it educated only a small proportion of America’s expanding youth population for the realities of adult life. Although high schools prepared learners for the “so-called learned professions,” Woodward asserted that they undemocratically ignored the “productive, toiling classes” who were the backbone of American industry. Tradition-bound secondary schools were teaching students the art of reflection on classical and European literature, the finer points of history and the sciences, but they were not teaching skills for working in factories, mills, and farms. Bored with book learning, students who were not academically oriented were dropping out in large numbers after age 14 in order to go to work.

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<sup>9</sup> Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 6, quoting Calvin M. Woodward, “Manual Training in General Education,” *Education* vol. 5 (July 1885): 612-622.

### **III. The Core Claims of Manual Training Advocates: Economic Gain, Student Retention, and Moral Melioration**

Woodward's solution involved the creation of a manual high school curriculum in which industrial courses would be taught in tandem with the traditional high school studies. Enrollees in shop, mechanical drawing, and related courses would continue to study the three R's, but the bulk of students' time would be spent on manual arts. Throughout the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, his approach to reforming the high school system garnered support from a broad spectrum of educators and was touted as a panacea that would solve a range of socio-economic and educational problems facing the United States.

First, Woodward and a growing cohort of supporters argued that pragmatic courses would meliorate economic concerns that arose in the build-up of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial network. They would satisfy the clamor of manufacturers for a well-trained workforce to rival the superbly prepared labor pool of Europe and give American business an edge in the competitive international marketplace. Students would be readied for work through classes in mathematics, mechanical drafting, tool and die-making, and a range of other manufacturing skills. Additionally, occupational training would smooth out the ups-and-downs of destructive economic panics that since the 1830s had plagued a virtually unbridled capitalist system. Practical classes for high school students—largely absent from the classical curriculum that dominated secondary education at the time—would link educational experience directly with vocations that learners would enter after high school, thereby boosting their earnings potential. Economic rationales for improving public education continue to drive calls for instructional change in 21st-century school dialogues in what Paul Tough has termed America's obsession

with “24/7 school reform.”<sup>10</sup>

Second, manual training enthusiasts concluded that their program would lower the dropout rate among working class and immigrant youth who, they believed, were bored with traditional high school academics and saw limited practical purpose in pursuing them. Manual arts would attract a broader cross-section of pupils and incentivize them to stay in high school beyond the age of 14 when most students dropped out either to go to work or, failing to be hired, enter a life of shiftlessness and crime. Manual advocates like Woodward and Runkle made a valid point: In 1900, only 6.4% of 17 year-olds graduated from high school. To place this figure in perspective, the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate in public schools in 2009 reached 75.5%.<sup>11</sup>

Third, manual training’s champions were convinced their curriculum would elevate what Anglos believed was the low status of moral behavior in people of color, children of working class parents, and the offspring of newly arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe, Asia, the Pacific Rim, and Ireland.

Tool training, they argued, could serve as an amulet against youthful immorality and a life of wasted opportunities. Many Americans had long been concerned about groups they considered to stand in need of moral elevation: American Indians, African Americans, Asian

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<sup>10</sup> Linkages between education and economics abound in modern times. The Access Newspaper Archive lists nearly 5,000 articles on school reform alone between 2000 and 2010. *The New York Times* published 1,400 articles on education between 2000 and 2007. Paul Tough, “24/7 School Reform,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 5, 2008; Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining the Education*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010). For detailed expositions of Republican and Democratic positions on school reform, see *We Believe in America: The Republican Platform 2012*, [www.gopconvention2012.com](http://www.gopconvention2012.com), pp. 31-39; *Moving America Forward: Democratic National Platform 2012*, <http://assets.dstatic.org/dnc-platform/2012-National-Platform>, p. 5; Herbert M. Kliebard, *Schooled for Work: Vocationalism and the American Curriculum, 1876-1946*, (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1999), 20-25.

<sup>11</sup> *The Condition of Education*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2011), Indicator 32, “Public High School Graduation Rates”, 80-81; Christopher T. Cross, *Political Education: National Policy Comes of Age*, (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2004), 1.

immigrants from the Philippines, Japan, China, and Korea, the impoverished, adolescent “delinquents,” and newcomers from Eastern Europe. White Americans often expected manual courses to imbue these groups with values of hard work, self-reliance, and self-improvement. Between the end of the Civil War and 1900, manual training for freed slaves was a high priority for Northern white reformers. Teaching job skills was seen as a way to socialize African Americans into white society, render them industrious, and assist them in finding employment within the existing racial framework. Samuel Chapman Armstrong’s Hampton Institute was created to achieve these goals. His work inspired the growth of similar schools, including Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute and the central government-supported Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Reformers aimed to bring these groups more into line with mainstream Anglo values. John Westerhoff has shown that the values prized by manual training supporters—hard work, self-sufficiency, punctuality, and cleanliness—were widely disseminated throughout 19<sup>th</sup>-century schools in texts such as *McGuffey’s Reader*. Joseph Kett has noted that the ethics of manual labor appear to have been established as a “counterforce to the mad scramble for wealth” in the late 19th century, a balancing element for the softness of “overcivilization” that was thought to plague American society at the time.<sup>12</sup>

Woodward’s claims for manual training’s potential to solve socio-economic and educational problems led to a national crusade that converted many school principals and district superintendents to his way of thinking. By 1888, separate public manual training schools had opened in Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Toledo, Minneapolis, and other sizeable cities.

Although they were not as integrated into existing academic high schools as Woodward would

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<sup>12</sup> Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 13-21; see also David Wallace Adams, *American Indians and the Boarding School Experience: 1875-1928*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1995); Joseph H. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790-Present*, (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 164; John H. Westerhoff, III, *McGuffey and His Readers: Piety, Morality, and Education in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978).

have liked, he noted that they helped stanch the flow of adolescents from the high school. Besides, he argued, these schools provided working-class youth with free alternatives for to the tuition-charging industrial and commercial institutions already being operated by private manufacturers and profit-minded educators. In some urban areas manual training was finding a place in existing high schools. Such successes convinced Woodward that occupational courses appealed to youth who had no plans for college. By 1890, he asserted they had lowered the dropout rate and benefited industry.<sup>13</sup>

#### **IV. Manual Training and Forming Human Capital: An Antidote to Economic Depression**

The arguments that Woodward, Runkle and the moralists pressed were not enough to convince the majority of school leaders that manual training should be grafted onto the high school curriculum. Seeking to win them over, manual training advocates found traction in a more convincing perspective: America's fears over its roller-coaster economy and its ability to compete with Europe in international markets. Connections between education at the elementary and secondary level and economics had already been made by Horace Mann as early as 1842. He argued that communities should invest more in common schools because important moral, knowledge, and economic dividends would accrue to individuals and the community at large. He contended that schooling would improve knowledge and build morality, but he went further.

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<sup>13</sup> Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 3-12. Dropout rates fell between 1890 -1900 for a range of reasons, including compulsory attendance laws and rising numbers of vocational courses offered in secondary schools. See also Weiss, "The Advent of Education for Clerical Work," 617, Theodore R.Sizer, *Secondary Schools at the Turn of the Century* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1964), and Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 27-29.

Knowing full well that his audience was composed mostly of middle and upper class business leaders, he announced that “it is also the most prolific parent of material riches.”<sup>14</sup>

National Education Association reports from 1880 through World War I demonstrate that manual and vocational education advocates developed a powerful economic rationale for their agenda. The NEA’s *Proceedings* bristled with articles describing the ability of industrial education to hone America’s competitive edge and assuage panics and depressions that plagued the U.S. economy throughout the 19th century. At its 1880 meeting, just as the nation was recovering from the Long Depression of 1873-1879, the NEA’s Industrial Department heard Purdue University president E.E. White warn that without manual courses “the American manufacturer will be at the mercy of the skilled labor of Europe,” whose technical high schools were turning out highly trained workers. Over the next half century, White’s argument successfully tapped into widespread anxiety that American business lagged behind European firms in manufacturing, especially those in Germany. Training youth in manual courses through already-established high school systems would be an effective strategy to avoid future economic recessions. The shift from the school’s purpose of developing intellectual capital to the goal of nurturing what would later be known as “human capital” will be discussed in chapter four.<sup>15</sup>

At the turn of the 20th century, White’s economic rationale and the rapid growth of industry helped create an unusual coalition of groups that favored manual training in public schools. These groups—business, labor unions, and educators—were often antagonists.

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<sup>14</sup> Maris Vinovskis, "Horace Mann on the Economic Productivity of Education," *New England Quarterly*, vol. 43 (1970), 562, 550-71, quoted in Tyack, "Ways of Seeing," 378.

<sup>15</sup> E.E. White, "Technical Training in American Schools," *The Addresses and Journal of the Proceedings of the National Education Association, Session of the Year 1880* (Salem, OH: National Education Association), 222. The American economy was gripped by panics and depressive cycles. By most counts, no fewer than nine panics or depressions occurred between 1819 and 1893, an average of one every 8 years. An excellent work that examines waves of economic crisis is Charles P. Kindleberger and Robert Aliber, *Manias, Panics and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*, 5th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons, 2005).

Business and manufacturing constituencies reasoned that vocational training would sharpen America's competitive economic advantage and reduce in-house training costs. Labor unions initially worried that vocational courses in public schools would attract too many pupils, overwhelm the labor market, provide "scab" laborers, and drive down wages. Eventually, however, they argued that such courses would raise standards of living for workers and enhance their upward economic mobility. In 1906, big business and organized labor joined professional educators to form the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education (NSPIE).<sup>16</sup> This new organization, under the leadership of Charles Prosser, grew into a formidable lobby in behalf of the vocational cause. By the time the United States entered World War I in 1917, the economic arguments of vocationalists through the NSPIE inspired most public high schools to offer a vocational curriculum integrated with academic classes under one roof. The industrial education movement added new bureaucracies, raised new spokespersons to national prominence, created intensive training programs, and established a cadre of professional teachers, giving birth to an enthusiastic professionalized movement that historian Marvin Lazerson has labeled "vocationalism."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For mutations of White's economic argument spread across in the NEA records see for example, the NEA *Proceedings*, "Adaptation of the Schools to industry and Efficiency (1908: 65-78); C.W. Eliot, "Value During Education of the Life Career Motive (1910: 133-141), F.P. Fish, "'Vocational and Industrial School," (1910: 363-369); "Harmonizing Vocational and Cultural education: Symposium" (1914:375-386); H. L. Sumner, "Vocational Education: Its Social Relationships" (1914: 572-577); E.O. Holland, "What the Schools Can Do to Meet the Demands of Both industry and General Science" (1913: 707-710); John H. Haaren, "Use of the Factory and Office Buildings in New York City for Vocational Education" (1914: 602-607).

<sup>17</sup> The term "vocationalism" was not contemporary to the early 20th century curriculum debate. Marvin Lazerson is thought to be the first historian to attach this moniker to the vocational education movement as it critiqued the American school system. See Marvin Lazerson, *Origins of the Urban Public School: Public Education in Massachusetts, 1870-1915* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). The term was subsequently picked up by other educational historians, including Harvey Kantor and David Tyack in *Work, Youth, and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on American Education* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982) and John L. Rury, *Education and Women's Work: Female Schooling and the Division of Labor in Urban America, 1870-1939* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991). See Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 248, note 3.

#### **IV. Moving from “Manual Training” to “Vocational Education”**

Around the turn of the 20th century, manual training morphed into “vocational education,” with “vocational efficiency” and federal funding as its new causes. In contrast to manual training, vocationalism boasted a fresh new look: scientific testing and student assessment, teacher professionalism, and a bureaucratized central organization that turned out unrelenting pro-vocational publicity and engaged in effective political arm-twisting. The vocational school reform movement flourished in the age of Progressivism when heightened industrial and commercial activity, increased immigration, and changes in America’s racial configurations ushered in far-reaching efforts to improve American society.

In educational circles, Progressivism assumed an array of shapes. Educators’ initiatives were extensions of growing campaigns to redress problems in American society in general. As we saw in chapter two, Progressive impulses began just before the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued until the aftermath of World War I. In the case of manual training and vocational education, Progressive leaders and policymakers within the school community generally aligned themselves either with groups of social meliorists or groups of “social efficiency” advocates. Both groups saw shortcomings in America’s social fabric and wanted to improve the lot of marginalized populations. Meliorists and efficiency-minded experts alike agreed that the rapidly expanding public school system was a critical social agency, ready-made institution that could be used to address challenging societal issues. Eventually, the social efficiency wing of Progressive education carried the day by successfully introducing vocationalism into the high school curriculum as an accompaniment to—and sometimes a replacement for—traditional courses and by convincing the federal government to help pay for it.



## **V. The Douglas Commission Report**

A key catalyst in the transformation of manual training to vocational education was a report issued in Massachusetts in 1906. The Douglas Commission Report was the product of an intensive investigation into the needs of students and the status of education in the state. A panel of Progressive reform-minded experts who were sincerely committed to addressing the needs of the working poor carried out the study. The commission observed that manual training as it was then practiced in Massachusetts high schools and the academic curricula then in use throughout the state were inadequate to the needs of an industrializing society. After seeing nearly twenty-five years of service in many of the state's secondary schools, the manual programs designed by John D. Runkle and his disciples were outdated and warranted a complete overhaul. The purely academic track that characterized secondary education also needed to be reworked. Sociologist Susan M. Kingsbury, the report's author, summarized the findings in five key points:

1. The public school was out of step with the "modern industrial and social conditions" and remained overly committed to an outdated classical curriculum.
2. The dropout problem was acute. Over 25,000 children in the state were either laboring in mills and factories or simply "idle." More than 80% never finished elementary school, 50% dropped out after seventh grade, and 25% had not completed sixth grade despite the presence of a state law mandating school attendance to at least age 14.
3. Students, rather than parents, tended to make the decision to leave school at an early age, except among immigrant families. "It is the dissatisfaction of the child which takes him from school," combined with "ignorance on the part of the parent which permits him to enter the mill," Kingsbury asserted.
4. The once expansive number of apprenticeships in plants and mills had dwindled to practically none. Most youth who found work after leaving school were trapped in dead-end jobs with little or no possibility for promotion or wage enhancement.
5. Labor unions across Massachusetts were suspicious and opposed to manual training classes that were supported by taxpayer dollars. Workers feared that high schools would turn out an overabundance of young trained graduates who would glut the labor market and reduce wages. Alternatively, Kingsbury noted, unions supported technical schools that equipped workers who were already in the labor force with new skills that

would make them more valuable to their employers and lead either to job advancement or higher pay.

The Douglas Commission concluded that classes in specific occupations offered at the high school level would enhance work opportunities for boys and girls alike and would benefit the state's industries. The experts recommended that for some learners, the humanistic curriculum should be supplanted by narrowly conceived vocational courses.<sup>18</sup>

The report gave the manual training movement a boost and helped professionalize this aspect of public education. Massachusetts quickly passed legislation that mandated vocational training classes in every public high school. Other states followed Massachusetts' example, including New York (1909), Wisconsin (1911), Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Virginia (1913).

## **VI. Support from President Theodore Roosevelt**

Another boost to vocational school reform came less than a year after publication of the Douglas Commission Report. In his 1907 annual address to Congress, President Theodore Roosevelt shared unbridled enthusiasm for vocational education, helping to place the movement's cause on the national political stage. No national school reform effort had ever enjoyed a personal endorsement from a sitting president. Roosevelt called for public high schools to add vocational training classes to the traditional curriculum that prepared youth for the professions. He argued that farmers and "mechanics" should be placed on the same social plane with doctors and lawyers. He called for high schools to offer technical training in urban areas and agricultural courses in rural regions. Speaking before Congress, Roosevelt argued that

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<sup>18</sup> *Report of the Massachusetts Commission on Industrial and Technical Education*, (Boston: Massachusetts Commission on Industrial and Technological Education, 1906). See also Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 33ff.

Our school system is gravely defective in so far as it puts a premium upon mere literary training and tends therefore to train the boy away from the farm and the workshop. Nothing is more needed than the best type of industrial school, the school for mechanical industries in the city, the school for practically teaching agriculture in the country. The calling of the skilled tiller of the soil, the calling of the skilled mechanic, should alike be recognized as professions, just as emphatically as the callings of lawyer, doctor, merchant, or clerk. The schools recognize this fact and it should equally be recognized in popular opinion. The young man who has the farsightedness and courage to recognize it and to get over the idea that it makes a difference whether what he earns is called salary or wages, and who refuses to enter the crowded field of the so-called professions, and takes to constructive industry instead, is reasonably sure of an ample reward in earnings, in health, in opportunity to marry early, and to establish a home with a fair amount of freedom from worry. It should be one of our prime objects to put both the farmer and the mechanic on a higher plane of efficiency and reward, so as to increase their effectiveness in the economic world, and therefore the dignity, the remuneration, and the power of their positions in the social world.<sup>19</sup>

At a 1908 White House reception for NEA officials and public school teachers, Roosevelt reiterated his support for a strong curriculum of vocational training in public high schools. He connected education with skills for labor and the economy by urging instructors to “teach the boy and girl that their business is to earn their own livelihood.” Taking advantage of the opportunity to study practical skills was necessary to avoid the “shame and scandal of not being self-dependent.” In this context, the best way to fulfill the president’s goal for schooling was to install *practical* courses alongside the long-established humanistic curriculum. “I want to see our education directed more and more toward training boys and girls back to the farm and the shop,” he proclaimed. Roosevelt—who had carefully cultivated a synthetic public image of himself as a hardy rancher and adventurer who had labored with his hands out west, and who sought to mask an earlier, softer life of book-learning—advised the assembled teachers that

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<sup>19</sup> Norma J Walters, *The Acts, Economic and Political Conditions and Committee Work that Led to the Passage of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917*, (Auburn, AL: Auburn University Center for Vocational and Adult Education, 1986); Theodore Roosevelt, Address to Congress, December 3, 1907, *Congressional Record*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1907), 7476ff.

“work with the hands is as honorable as work with the head.”<sup>20</sup>

## **Professionalizing Vocational Training**

### **I. Vocational Guidance and Empirical Testing**

As Theodore Roosevelt assumed the presidency following the assassination of William McKinley in 1901, longstanding manual training leaders were retiring from the scene. A younger group of enthusiasts took their place and pushed the movement in new directions. The new leadership was efficiency-minded and determined to connect public education with the need to produce trained workers who would enhance the nation’s international competitiveness and retain the existing social strata.

New education leaders professionalized manual training by applying emerging science-based empirical testing and educational psychology to the already-existing notion that young people needed a practical education that shaped them for the realities of modern society and work. Vocational leaders affirmed that the nascent “science” of education provided measurable instruments for directing social progress, which included matching youth with future occupations and training them accordingly. Scientific, efficient vocational testing and guidance embraced the new adolescent psychology of G. Stanley Hall, the work of pioneering educational psychologist Edward L. Thorndike, Harvard’s industrial psychologist Hugo Munsterberg, and the empirical intelligence testing of Binet and Simon. Taken together, they were considered the “best practices” of the day.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Address at the Reception at the White House,” *Journal of the Proceedings of the National Education Association, Proceedings and Addresses of the Forty-Sixth Annual Meeting, June 29-July 3, 1908*, (Winona, MN: Secretary’s Office, National Education Association, 1908), 212-214.

<sup>21</sup> David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 16ff.

Vocationalists also co-opted ideas outside of education. Most notably, they adopted two contemporary concepts that attained gospel-status popularity: first, the efficiency-minded industrial labor processes proposed by Frederick Winslow Taylor's popular 1911 volume, *Principles of Scientific Management* and second, Taylorism, which laid the groundwork human capital theory. Factory-inspired terms to describe the vocational education initiative—and schooling in general—grew common among efficiency-minded Progressive educators. There was talk of students as “products,” mastery of subjects as “output,” and school buildings as “physical plants.” Schools were viewed as assembly lines with “units” of instruction, a perspective popularized by John Franklin Bobbitt in dozens of articles and books on the new “scientific” approach to curriculum design, which relied on concrete outcomes that could be described and measured like the results of a scientific experiment in a laboratory.<sup>22</sup>

Equipped with a refreshed vision grounded in scientific approaches and empirical measurements, vocationalists set out to install their professionalized version of manual training as a pragmatic and discreet alternative to the traditional high school curriculum of the early 1900s. They went so far as to advocate a separate system of public vocational high schools for youth ages 14-17.

The leading lights of the new vocational education school reform movement were Progressive efficiency enthusiasts. Like their predecessors, many of them came from university ranks. Charles A. Prosser earned his Ph.D. from Columbia University with a dissertation on the mechanical arts school in Boston. George D. Strayer taught education at Columbia and was a forceful advocate for school efficiency and effective administration. Harvard president Charles

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<sup>22</sup> Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1911). Among Bobbitt's more notable works are *The Curriculum*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1918); *Curriculum-Making in Los Angeles*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1922).

W. Eliot had been an opponent of vocationalism who converted to vocationalism as occupational training expanded. David Snedden earned his Ph.D. from Columbia and taught educational psychology there after writing a dissertation on employing manual training as a tool to rehabilitate boys in reform schools.<sup>23</sup> They and others pumped out an unrelenting message of pragmatic education as the medicine for many of America's socio-economic maladies. Occupational training in high schools would medicate the ills of dead-end jobs, youth delinquency, and high dropout rates. It would soothe feverish angst over America's competitiveness in the international marketplace. Vocational classes would calm the rash of worried industrialists who worried that trained workers would not be available in sufficient numbers.

The crisp message of efficient, practical vocational training and guidance in the high schools seemed logical and easy to understand. It promised to equip workers at taxpayer expense in an already established institution. Results could be measured empirically through vocational guidance and testing using numbers that politicians, school boards, parents, and other stakeholders could see and evaluate for themselves. Connecting the public school with industrial, workforce, and market-driven needs resonated with many politicians and educators because it was based on "scientific" aptitude inventories combined with assurances from educational experts from leading universities that occupational training would increase job prospects for youth and enhance productivity for employers.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Charles A. Prosser, "A Study of the Boston Mechanic Arts High School, Being a Report to the Boston School Committee," Ph.D. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1915. For a review of Strayer's efficiency methods see George D. Strayer, *The Classroom Teacher at Work in American Schools*, (New York: American Book Co., 1920) and *School Building Problems*, (New York: Columbia University, Teachers College, 1927); David Snedden, "Administration and Educational Work of American Juvenile Reform Schools," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1907.

<sup>24</sup> Wirth, *Education in a Technological Society*,

Not every Progressive educator was on board with the vocational efficiency aspect of the movement. John Dewey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jane Addams, George S. Counts and other Progressive social meliorists favored practical training for youth, but they opposed the narrowly conceived vocational efficiency approach that involved testing students and channeling them into practical courses linked to specific occupations. Between 1900 and World War I, Dewey and William C. Bagley argued that scientific vocationalism would create a class system in which blue-collar workers, middle-class managers, and the wealthy classes would be permanently separated. Dewey feared that vocational testing and tracking would lead teachers and guidance counselors to make decisions *for* youth instead of empowering youth to make their own democratic choices about future careers. He argued that “the democracy which proclaims equality of opportunity as its ideal requires an education in which learning and social application, ideas and practice, work and recognition of the meaning of what is done, are united from the beginning and for all.”<sup>31</sup>

Bagley noted that narrowing the high school curriculum to purely vocational goals would strengthen class distinctions already present in American society. Jane Addams, an early supporter of vocational education, worried that narrow efficiency-minded training that was designed to fit students to fill the needs of factory owners would leave youth unaware of their place in the whole system of production. She fought for teaching them the meaning of work, the history of occupations, and workers’ roles in them.<sup>32</sup> But such arguments never widely resonated with politicians or the public. They were too subtle for many people and seemed more difficult to swallow than the vocationalists’ more easily digestible view that vocational education would solve a range of concrete socio-economic problems by rendering society better and more efficient. Matching youth with their vocational “calling” seemed an obvious way to improve the

social order in a period of perceived crisis.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Triumph of Vocational School Reformers**

Vocational education appealed not only to many Progressive educators and social meliorists; it also attracted a broad, unusual, and sometimes uneasy coalition of supporters from politics, labor, management, business, and agriculture. This group was critical in securing federal funding and national acceptance for vocationalism. With the united efforts of these unlikely bedfellows, vocationalists accomplished two feats that the manual training movement had not done: they established a nationwide, highly organized and efficiently-run organization to promote the installation of efficiency-minded vocational education in America's high schools, and they won federal funds for local vocational curriculums.

#### **I. The National Society for the Promotion of Vocational Education (NSPIE)**

Six months after the publication of the 1906 Douglas Commission report, an unlikely coalition of manufacturers, labor leaders, and educators joined forces in New York City to launch the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, co-chaired by the city's Director of Arts and Manual Training, James P. Heaney, and Charles R. Richards, professor of manual training at Teachers College. The organizers' purpose was straightforward: to reform public education by challenging the hegemony of general education in public schools, to spread vocational education into every school district in the country, and to seek federal money to pay for teachers, training, facilities, and equipment. In the months following their organizational meeting, NSPIE members contacted representatives of each constituency, telling them that public schools must increase vocational training to meet the nation's industrial needs and



inviting them to participate in the association's first public meeting. President Theodore Roosevelt, John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Samuel Gompers were among its charter members. President Woodrow Wilson pledged his support for the organization in 1914.

At the NSPIE's 1907 convention, over 250 representatives showed up. They came from the National Association of Manufacturers—which had pushed for public vocational schooling since 1885—the NEA, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and social reform groups. Transcending the education community, such broad representation indicated industrial training's prominence in the nation's conscience. The delegates' agenda highlighted familiar anxieties: industrial inefficiency, foreign commercial competition, boom-and-bust economic cycles, the fate of working class people, and the failure of public schools to address pressing social issues. Nearly everyone agreed that public vocational high school curricula would go a long way toward solving these persistent problems.

Conventioneers heard dissenting voices from American Federation of Labor (AFL) members and social reformers. Jane Addams of Chicago's Hull House spoke in favor of public funding for vocational training, but she asserted that industrial education's chief aim should be to enhance the lives of workers, not simply to earn money. Acknowledging manufacturers' goal to improve industrial efficiency, she challenged conference participants to “enter a new field, to see what may be accomplished for industry by cultivating the workman himself.” Well-rounded and contented workers, she claimed, would lead to improved technical skills and increased productivity. But in 1907 and thereafter, Addams remained a minority voice drowned out by a chorus of “social efficiency” advocates, professional vocationalists, and businesspeople clamoring for local, state, and federal governments to fund new vocational curricula in public

schools.<sup>25</sup>

The NSPIE spent the period 1907-1912 ironing out conflicts among its constituent groups and assertively promoting industrial education across the country. In 1908 the society scored a major coup when Harvard president Charles W. Eliot publicly announced that he had converted to supporting a dual system of public schooling that offered parallel curriculums of liberal and vocational studies. The venerable educator—one of the foremost defenders of general education and respected chair of the NEA’s “Committee of Ten” manifesto that attempted to standardize the humanistic high school curriculum on a national scale in 1893—rose before 450 applauding NSPIE conventioners and called for the “dual system” of separate academic and vocational high schools. He advised schools that the time had come to use empirical inventories to “sort” students among academic and vocational curricula at an early age based on “their evident and probable destinies.” Anticipating criticism that this would be undemocratic, Eliot argued that modern occupational tests simply revealed what *nature* had given students and presented them with a democratic choice between vocational and general education.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to Eliot, a long list of educators from state offices, universities and normal colleges filled the society’s ranks with capable, well-connected leaders who gave the organization an intramural flavor. Henry S. Pritchett, President of M.I.T., Nicholas Murray Butler, a longtime educational policy broker and President of Columbia University, and David Snedden, Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts (soon to be on the faculty at Teachers College), were among the luminaries who advanced the NSPIE agenda. Giants of commerce, industry and labor assumed leadership alongside these educators. Frederick Fish, president of

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<sup>25</sup> Jane Addams, speech before the 1907 NSPIE convention, NSPIE *Bulletin* no. 1 (1907): 7.

<sup>26</sup> Charles W. Eliot, address before the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, *Industrial Education Magazine* vol. 9 (1908): 344. See also Wirth, *Education in a Technological Society*, 102-104.

AT&T, M.W. Alexander, head of General Electric, and Samuel Gompers of the AFL became active promoters. Not surprisingly, the nation's foremost industrial management expert, Frederick W. Taylor, took his place among the pantheon of experts recruited by NSPIE leaders.

Despite an impressive membership list the NSPIE lacked a credentialed full-time administrator to organize and promote their agenda in Washington and the capitals of individual states. In 1912 they found their man in Charles Prosser. Prosser was a dynamo, skilled lobbyist, and holder of a Ph.D. from Teachers College. Having served as Snedden's assistant for vocational education in Massachusetts, he was comfortable with politicians and confidently at ease communicating to them the straightforward message that high school occupational programs and internships in local businesses would feed the need for trained workers. Prosser pushed the NSPIE to new heights of influence by encouraging the widespread use of tests and measurements and by securing federal funding for local public schools below the university level for the first time in the nation's history.

Influenced by David Snedden's social efficiency approach to education and inspired by the new craze for quantitative testing, Prosser announced that the NSPIE was "swinging around to the idea that it is to be the mission of the schools of the future to select by testing and training—to adjust boys and girls for life." Vocational education's sorting mechanisms would no longer depend on the uncertain and inconsistent judgments of teachers, but on tests and inventories, including Binet and Simon's general intelligence test and those based on Edwin Thorndike's recently released *Theory of Mental and Social Measurements*. Vocationalists argued that these instruments would remove wasteful guessing from the guidance system, connect pupils with their intended occupation, keep them in school beyond age 14, and eventually reduce the

inefficient job-swapping that industrialists abhorred.<sup>27</sup> From 1912 to the mid-1920s, a range of occupational inventories and measurements were introduced into public schools. The most prominent examples were the *MacQuarrie Test for Mechanical Aptitudes* (1925) and the *O'Rourke Mechanical Aptitude Test* (1926).

Prosser concluded that the vocational curriculum could not be entrusted to general educators and that liberal and vocational schools should be separate. Only those specifically trained to administer “real” occupational courses were qualified. Vocational mathematics and science classes needed to be instructed by professionals in those fields, not by generalist teachers from the academic side of schooling. Credentialed teachers in America’s high schools were in no mood to openly accept tradesmen as equals on the faculty, and they bristled at the suggestion that they should receive equal pay.<sup>28</sup>

Charles Prosser’s greatest triumph as executive secretary of the NSPIE was to secure unprecedented federal funding for vocational programs through the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917. The provisions of the bill embodied his philosophy of education and conveyed it into thousands of high schools around the country. Passed by Congress and eagerly signed by President Woodrow Wilson on the cusp of America’s industrial escalation for entry into World War I, Smith-Hughes distributed federal money to each state with restrictions that Prosser himself helped write.

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<sup>27</sup> Wirth, *Education in a Technological Society*, 102-104. Henry Ford was so disgusted with constant worker turnover that he famously raised laborers’ wages to an unheard of \$5.00 per day in 1914. His goal was to retain hires. The revolving door of workers meant slow-downs or complete shutdowns of production lines while new workers were trained. Training costs themselves were significant. Some historians consider Ford’s wage scheme to have been hypocritical and pure bluff. See Keith Sward, *The Legend of Henry Ford*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Co., 1948).

<sup>28</sup> Wirth, *Education in a Technological Society*, 164-165.

## II. Congressional Joint Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education

In 1914, President Woodrow Wilson petitioned Congress to create a joint commission to study the possibility of providing federal aid to vocational education in local high schools. Having approved Wilson's petition, Congress appointed Sen. Hoke Smith, a Georgia Democrat, as its chair. Sen. Carroll S. Page (R-VT), and Representatives Dudley Hughes (D-GA) and Simeon D. Fess, a Republican educator from Ohio, completed the congressional contingent. Other members came from organized labor, trade schools, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Charles A. Prosser was appointed to the commission to represent the NSPIE and its vocational education boosters.<sup>29</sup>

For six months, the commission heard testimony from expert witnesses. When members polled school leaders in the nation's cities, the majority of them voiced their support for federal outlays to pay for vocational courses in local high schools. Douglas MacArthur was one notable witness. He represented the Secretary of War and reported on the military's vocational training program. MacArthur was conversant with the debates over vocational school reform. He stated that the U.S. Army was using occupational training as a lure to attract recruits. He and the Secretary approved of vocational education in civilian schools. D. W. Springer, Secretary of the National Education Association, delivered testimony that communicated the NEA's enthusiastic support for a bill authorizing the federal government to pay for high school vocational classes. As might be expected of a congressional commission established by pro-vocational members, witnesses' testimony for the novel concept of Washington paying for local school programs was overwhelmingly positive.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Report of the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education*, vol. I, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1914), 9; Barlow, *History of Industrial Education*, 59.

<sup>30</sup> *Report of the Commission on National Aid*, vol. II, 110-130.

In its two-volume report, the Wilson-appointed commission members highlighted seven issues:

1. The need for vocational education programs to meet pressing industrial and national security needs;
2. The clamor for federal money to pay states to administer vocational education in public school system;
3. The variety of occupational subjects that should qualify for federal grants;
4. Federal agencies that should oversee the use of grants;
5. The extent to which federal aid should be given;
6. The conditions for qualifying for aid;
7. Legislative proposals to enact unprecedented federal aid to local public schools.

The commission's report found high levels of support for the school reform initiative among the American public. It argued that national aid was necessary because the problems facing industry and commerce—and potentially national security—were too large to be addressed by individual states and local communities. The answer to the nation's pressing need for training a capable workforce to meet the needs the commission identified was directly connected to the “general welfare” of the nation and to the federal government's unique ability to address overwhelming problems of national scope.<sup>31</sup>

### **III. The 1917 Smith-Hughes Act: First Federal Funding for Local Public Schools**

As discussed in Chapter 1, the recommendations laid down by the National Commission on Vocational Education's report inspired the original 1917 Smith-Hughes Act, which provided \$1,660,000 in vocational education funds to the states for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1918.

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<sup>31</sup> *Report of the Commission on National Aid*, see vol. I.

Congress mandated increases in annual payments every year until 1926, when they would reach \$7,167,000. After that year, outlays were to be permanently stabilized at that level. The bill provided perpetual aid to vocational education in local public high schools and became the launching pad for all such federal funding laws between the wars.

Sen. Hoke Smith and Rep. Dudley M. Hughes, Democrats from Georgia with ties to agribusiness and commitments to segregated schooling and labor, sponsored the bill. Matching federal money was earmarked to pay salaries for teachers in agricultural, industrial, and home economics classes in local public high schools. The act was the culmination of intense lobbying by the aforementioned coalition of business, industry, labor, and professional vocational educators, coupled with political maneuvering by Smith and Hughes themselves. President Woodrow Wilson enthusiastically signed the bill on February 17, 1917 after it passed Congress with bi-partisan support. There was no Senate opposition and little resistance in the House of Representatives. Republicans and Democrats alike claimed credit for the bill prior to the 1918 election cycle.

The chief argument against the measure centered on the whether the federal government could constitutionally involve itself in school systems operated by the states. In chapter 1 it was noted that this view dated back at least to Congressional debates held in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Arguing against federal funding for state-sponsored schooling in 1917, Congressman Walsh of Massachusetts sarcastically noted, “What a spectacle is presented when States will brazenly admit that they neglect their duty in regard to educational matters, but are willing to fulfill them if Uncle Sam will bear the expense.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Harry Zeitlin, “Federal Relations to American Education,” Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1958, 28. See also *Congressional Record*, 64th Congress, 2nd Session (1917), 54: 771-772, 1081; Arthur F. McClure, James Riley Chrisman, and Perry Mock, *Education for Work: The Historical Evolution of Vocational and Distributive Education in America* (Cranberry, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1985), 42-43.

Two aspects in the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act are important to point out. Formulas for computing the amount of matching funds for each state favored *agricultural* interests over those of urban and industrial areas. For example, salaries for regional supervisors could be paid out of matching federal dollars *only* in the area of agricultural training. States could not use federal money to pay salaries of regional supervisors who directed vocational programs in industrial or domestic arts. This provision, as we will see later, was the result of maneuvering by Southern Democrats who represented white agricultural constituencies and supported racial division of education and labor in Southern society.<sup>33</sup>

Smith-Hughes also permitted each state to decide which schools to fund and how much federal grant money they would receive. Learning a political lesson from sharp debates over the 1914 Smith-Lever Act—which provided matching federal funds for agricultural and technical colleges and established the Cooperative Extension Service for farmers—the controversial issue of equal federal funding for white and African American schools was raised. Southern Democrats overcame opposition and equal distribution was omitted from the final bill.<sup>34</sup>

#### **IV. The Federal Bureau for Vocational Education: The Nation's School Board**

The bill established the Federal Bureau for Vocational Education (FBVE), which historian Larry Cuban termed the “first national school board.” The board was appointed and answered to no one except Congress. Its authority bypassed the U.S. Office of Education, which had been established as a sub-group within the Department of the Interior in 1867 as a clearing

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<sup>33</sup> McClure, et al, *Education for Work*, 60-65; Werum, “Sectionalism and Racial Politics,” 402

<sup>34</sup> During debate on the 1914 Smith-Lever bill, which provided federal funds for agricultural colleges and extension programs, heated discussion occurred over Southern opposition to equal funding for black agricultural colleges. Southern Democrats turned away Northern arguments using states' rights doctrine. See *Congressional Record*, 63rd Congress (1914), 51: 2290, 2929-48, 3031-45, 3115-27; Zeitlin, 12.



house for gathering and distributing educational statistics and informative articles. Hiring bureaucrats almost exclusively from the realm of efficiency-minded vocational education created an intramural tone and insular ethos.

The rationale for populating the FBVE was clear. Prosser believed the generalists and the NEA members who dominated the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) were ill-equipped to preside over vocational matters. He wanted them to have *no control* over curriculum, teacher training and, importantly, Smith-Hughes allotments to the states. Continuing the heavy involvement of non-professional educators in establishing industrial and agricultural training in public schools, the new board's members included the Secretaries of Commerce, Labor, and Agriculture, as well as three representatives from labor, manufacturing and business. To assuage the NEA, one representative from the USOE was given a chair on the board.

In a final stroke of hubris, Prosser maneuvered himself to become the FBVE's first Director. Prosser's control over the federal agency that dispensed money to state administrators of industrial and agricultural schooling, coupled with his leadership of the NSPIE, gave him unparalleled influence over vocationalism's direction in public education.

Prosser and the FBVE exercised almost absolute power over the Smith-Hughes initiative. States were required to submit their vocational education proposals to the board for approval. Circumventing the authority of the legislative and executive branches, its bureaucrats independently interpreted the Smith-Hughes Act and successive vocational funding legislation through the 1920s. They wrote and enforced regulations based on the act's provisions, published bulletins for teachers and superintendents, disbursed money to individual states, and evaluated local and state programs. Rarely has a federal education agency enjoyed as much independence, or been as insular, as the FBVE. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, never a friend to

vocationalists, ended its independence and severely curtailed its number of staff as a cost-cutting measure in Depression-ridden 1933. The board became a shadow of its former self, subsumed under the Office of Education where it languished throughout the 1930s.

## **V. Reacting to Federally Funded Vocational Training in Local Schools: Testing and Vocational Guidance**

### **“A Guide, a Rudder, and a Plan”: Vocational Guidance and Tracking Students through Standardized Tests**

Reactions to Smith-Hughes were positive for the most part and helped generate phenomenal growth in the field of occupational education throughout the country. Vindicated by Congressional action, vocational guidance experts were infused with renewed energy and commitment to their work. But their work had been controversial: Evidence shows that vocational guidance counselors in high schools used testing to channel working-class and minority students into occupations that would retain the social status quo. It is imperative to review briefly the background of vocational guidance and testing in the opening decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before addressing how the NEA and parents of high school students reacted to the new involvement of the central government in their local schools.

Vocational guidance had begun as a Progressive humanitarian impulse under the leadership of Frank Parsons in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the decade following the advent of federal money to support high school vocational classes, the counseling movement grew increasingly professional, relying more and more on allegedly scientific tests produced by educational psychologists and dedicated to shaping students to take their place in American society based on what Herbert Kliebard termed “the requirements of the prevailing social

order.”<sup>35</sup>

The Vocational Guidance Association (VGA), founded in 1913 and reconstituted in 1920 after an internal split, enthusiastically applauded Smith-Hughes as an opportunity to strengthen its membership and extend service to the nation’s high school students. The VGA set out to further professionalize the field by setting new standards and guidelines for its members, including the introduction of certification courses. Since its founding, the organization had employed scientific approaches to education and the concept of efficiency as its mantra. Frank Parsons had passed on to the movement his commitment to elevating the field of vocational guidance by converting it into a scientifically-based pursuit designed to do away with “the haphazard way in which young men and women drift into employments, with little or no regard to adaptability and without adequate preparation, or any definite aim or well-conceived plan to insure success.”<sup>36</sup>

Spurred by the advent of Congressional money for and federal regulatory engagement with local high schools, the vocational guidance community developed new tests calculated to assist teachers and counselors in their duties. Intelligence testing had been conducted since the introduction of the Binet-Simon inventory in 1904. However, widespread intelligence testing did not become popular until about 1920, just as the Vocational Guidance Association was reorganizing and gearing up to equip schools to counsel the tide of students they expected to be trained under the new federally funded Smith-Hughes classes. Under VGA leadership, the *MacQuarrie Test for Mechanical Aptitudes* (1925) and the *O’Rourke Mechanical Aptitude Test* (1926) became the most prominent inventories used in high schools. The Army occupational

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<sup>35</sup> Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 169.

<sup>36</sup> Frank Parsons, *Choosing a Vocation*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908), 9; quoted in Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 165.

tests that were performed on 250,000 soldiers during World War I and the work of Harvard psychologist Hugo Munsterberg served as sources for these instruments. Munsterberg's *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency* (1913) had been prompted by the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor.<sup>37</sup>

The appearance of federally funded vocational classes provoked further scholarship in vocational guidance that did not always support the field's faith in empirical inventories. Counselors in the first two decades had relied on *instinct* to sort learners into vocational tracks. By the mid-1920s, however, "scientific" measurements of intellect and occupational aptitude were replacing guesswork. As a supplemental tool to the MacQuarrie and O'Rourke tests, psychologist Clark L. Hull developed statistical correlations that school counselors could use to forecast vocational futures for students. Relying on a wide range of industrial time-studies and intelligence batteries, Hull published *Aptitude Testing* (1928) as a textbook for occupational and general education counselors at the high school and college levels. Hull concluded that it was exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to predict students' vocational directions and assign them to classes to fit the picture produced by aptitude testing. His personal disillusion with the study's findings, however, did not deter the Vocational Guidance Association and its constituents from pursuing additional methods to forecast vocational aptitude.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> The Binet-Simon tests were refined by psychologists including H.H. Goddard and Lewis M. Terman between 1904 and America's entry into World War I in 1917. The military establishment hired psychologist Robert M. Yerkes to carry out the Army Alpha and Beta inventories among enlistees to quantify their mental capabilities. Yerkes and his associates concluded that a range of intelligence levels existed among the recruits, which helped lead to the scientific notion that specific vocations required certain amounts of cognitive ability. Hugo Munsterberg, the Harvard psychologist who pioneered the pursuit of a scientific approach to measuring vocational aptitude, was a disciple of Frederick Winslow Taylor's industrial efficiency work. Munsterberg's 1913 opus, *Industrial Psychology*, added a layer of professional gloss to the emerging vocational guidance movement that developed under Frank Parsons' leadership. See C.S. Yoakum and Robert M. Yerkes, *Army Mental Testing* (New York: Holt Co., 1920) and Robert M. Yerkes, "Psychological Examining in the United States Army," *Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 15, (1921).

<sup>38</sup> Clark L. Hull, *Aptitude Testing*, (Yonkers, NY: World Book Co., 1928); Kliebard, *Schooled to Work*, 168. For an in-depth review of Hull's volume, see *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 2 (April 1930), 334-336.

The vocational guidance movement attracted comments from reformers in an array of fields. Ida Tarbell encouraged the new group to support “dignifying and elevating domestic industries” among high school girls. The leader of the National Child Labor Committee, Owen Lovejoy, urged schools not to permit industry to dictate the types of workers it needed. He warned that allowing local business leaders and factory owners to prescribe classifications of laborers for training in high schools would give them *de facto* control over the vocational curriculum. Like Lovejoy, George Herbert Mead warned against vocational education becoming the handmaiden of business and industry. He suggested that vocational courses should connect public schools more closely with the needs of the community, including business and manufacturing. Educator Frank Leavitt hoped the VGA would examine which industries were “good” for youth participation and blacklist those that were dangerous or promised little possibility of advancement.<sup>39</sup>

## **VI. The Triumph Continues: The 1929 George-Reed Act**

A decade after the Smith-Hughes Act, funding for vocational education was extended beyond the original legislation by two lawmakers representing opposite regions of the country and serving on opposing sides of the congressional aisle. First-term Sen. Walter F. George, another Georgia Democrat who represented Southern agrarian interests, sponsored a bill that added extra federal funds above Smith-Hughes for agricultural and home economics curricula in public high schools. The bill’s sponsor in the House of Representatives was Daniel A. Reed, a conservative Republican from rural New York with a deep commitment to preserving America’s ideology of the small family-owned farm. Reed was alarmed that rural youth were leaving the

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<sup>39</sup> Wirth, *Education in a Technological Society*, 111ff.

fields and taking jobs in urban areas. His goal was to use federal dollars to support high school agricultural classes that would keep them down on the farm.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike Smith-Hughes, the George-Reed Act restricted additional federal outlays above the ongoing Smith-Hughes allocations to *farming and home economics courses only*. This limitation exposed an irony in early federal funding for vocational training. Although business courses were by far the most popular vocational classes in the nation's public high schools, neither Smith-Hughes nor George-Reed allowed local districts to use matching federal funds to pay for them. New funding for *industrial* arts programs was left out of the bill. The new law, signed by President Calvin Coolidge in February 1929, allocated \$500,000 every year exclusively to agricultural and domestic arts training and allowed annual increases of \$500,000 through 1934.

An additional departure from Smith-Hughes involving how federal matching funds were dispersed to the states is worth noting here. In the original 1917 legislation, amounts per state were meted out according to each state's *total rural* population. The George-Reed Act, however, stipulated that new federal dollars were to be given on the basis of each state's *total farm* population as reflected in the most recent U.S. Census. This difference underscored the influence of agricultural interests supported by Sen. George and Rep. Reed. Another element in the bill required Washington to provide George-Reed monies only if the federal government could afford them. As Arthur F. McClure has observed, "Smith-Hughes was to be continual support for vocational education; George-Reed was a shot in the arm."<sup>41</sup> George and Reed made sure that the shot in the arm favored agriculture over industrial and home economics courses.

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<sup>40</sup> Peter B. Bulkely, "Daniel Reed: A Study in Conservatism," (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, 1972), 89-91.

<sup>41</sup> McClure, et al, *Education for Work*, 81.

## **VII. Vocational Aid Persists: The 1934 George-Ellzey Bill**

Although the George-Reed Act was a temporary measure scheduled to expire in 1934, vocational courses, unlike general education, continued to enjoy privileged attention from Congress beyond that year. Between 1929 and 1934, as the nation sank into the Great Depression, a string of efforts to prolong the George-Reed Act beyond 1934 were unsuccessful. Early in that year, however, Sen. Walter F. George again sponsored a bill to extend it. This time, yet another southern Democrat with agricultural connections joined him: first-term Rep. Russell Ellzey of Mississippi. Ellzey had been an agricultural teacher and school superintendent before being elected to the House. Together they steered a bill through Congress that provided additional funding for vocational education, successfully moving the expiration date of George-Reed past 1934. President Franklin D. Roosevelt—perennially annoyed by the “schoolmen,” as he termed them—held his prejudices in check and signed the George-Ellzey bill into law in May 1934. Roosevelt approved the legislation despite serious doubts about federal support for local schools and a dislike for the education lobby.<sup>42</sup>

The George-Ellzey bill was the third major political triumph for vocational educators and their friends in Congress in less than twenty years. Overcoming political and economic barriers, vocationalists managed to wring an incredible 500% increase in the George-Reed Act’s matching funds for high school agricultural education classes in a period when the number of American farms was decreasing. President Roosevelt opposed the bill because of his efforts to economize and present a balanced federal budget in 1934. Vocationalists and their congressional supporters steamrolled over FDR’s opposition: under the new George-Ellzey Act, the annual appropriation

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<sup>42</sup> For a thorough discussion of FDR’s impatience with professional educators, see Zeitlin, “Federal Relations.”

soared from \$500,000—as set by the 1927 George-Reed Act—to \$3,000,000 per year for the fiscal years 1935, 1936, and 1937. This feat was accomplished despite the United States having to face the worst economic downturn in its history.

The distribution of George-Ellzey funds also differed from those of the 1927 George-Reed Act and favored agricultural vocational classes. It is somewhat complex but worth reviewing briefly. Agricultural training money was to be allocated on the basis of each state's *farm* population. Home economics dollars were to be disbursed in relation to a state's *rural* population. *Nonfarm* population was the basis for computing federal funds for each state's industrial and trade education programs. Federal regulations for George-Ellzey were nearly identical to those in the Smith-Hughes Act, which had spawned a robust set of guidelines for spending matching federal dollars. As in earlier vocational spending laws, the bill did not require federal dollars to be divided equally among black and white schools.<sup>43</sup>

### **VIII. The 1936 George-Deen Act**

The fourth and final piece of vocational training legislation to pass Congress before World War II was the 1936 George-Deen Act. The perennial champion of federal aid to vocational education, Sen. Walter F. George, co-sponsored the bill with Rep. Braswell Deen, a fellow Georgia Democrat. Like George, Reed, and Ellzey, Braswell Deen was engaged in extensive farming and cattle production. He had been president of South Georgia Junior College and a school district superintendent. As the nation's farmers struggled to cope with the ravages of the Dust Bowl and failures in the agricultural economy, members of Congress and President Roosevelt reacted positively to the request for more money to go to agricultural vocational

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<sup>43</sup> McClure, et al, *Education for Work*, 81-83.



courses in high schools than to industrial arts. The George-Deen Act provided \$14,483,000 of matching funds over and above the \$7,000,000 already available under the annual Smith-Hughes Act for the period 1937-1942.

For the first time, an extension of the Smith-Hughes bill enabled funding for what the government termed “distributive education,” a coded term for high school retail and business education classes. Business educators lauded the \$1,200,000 earmarked for such training while teachers’ colleges and school districts cheered the inclusion of \$1,000,000 for additional training for vocational instructors. Still, the majority of federal money was distributed to agricultural vocational education.

Not everyone was happy with the new bill’s details. President Roosevelt, who supported the bill, knew that vocational educators and their Congressional supporters had outmaneuvered him again, this time in terms of the amount of funding in the bill. Working to rein in federal spending as the Great Depression cut a deeper channel in the nation’s fragile economy, and simultaneously attempting to limit the political influence of the “schoolmen,” the president’s budget recommended only \$4,000,000 for George-Deen, about one-third of Congress’ original request. Throughout 1937, however, FDR watched almost helplessly as Congress, led by Southern Democrats whose votes he needed to support New Deal initiatives, overcame his objections and added just over \$10,000,000 to his suggested appropriation. On the day he signed the bill in August 1937, the president paused to give what *Time* magazine called a “tongue-lashing” to the educational lobby that had larded the bill with extra nonrelated appropriations. “Much of the apparent demand for the immediate extension of the vocational education program under the George-Deen Act appears to have been stimulated by the active lobby of vocational teachers, supervisors, and administrative officers...who are interested in the emoluments paid in

part from federal funds....Evidence was read onto the records...indicating that much of the impetus behind this movement emanated from a single interested source.” In mentioning “a single interested source,” Roosevelt was alluding to the American Vocational Association, the successor to the old NSPIE. Their director, Lindley Dennis, denied involvement of the AVA’s Washington headquarters in the legislation and credited instead the lobbying effort of the group’s 15,000 members in school districts and state offices.<sup>44</sup>

Between 1917 and 1937, vocational education leaders successfully sold their national school reform initiative to Congress and several administrations. Following this triumph, policymakers secured a significant increase in Washington’s commitment to their reform agenda. Led largely by Southern Democrats, Congress retained the right of individual states to distribute federal grants among school districts as they saw fit, which enabled Southern states to spend more Smith-Hughes money on white high schools than on African American institutions.

Politicians with ties to agriculture and education designed the calculus of Smith-Hughes funding formulas to favor agricultural high school vocational classes over industrial, commercial, homemaking, and technical training programs. Half of the money appropriated under Smith-Hughes went to agriculture classes, with 40% reserved for trades and industrial arts, and a mere 10% for domestic arts. Under George-Reed, new federal money above Smith-Hughes allotments was split evenly between agricultural and industrial high school training. Not until the 1934 George-Ellzey and 1937 George-Deen Acts was federal grant money allocated evenly among agriculture, industrial, and domestic arts classes.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Time*, vol. XXX, no. 8 (Aug. 23, 1937); McClure, et al, 82-86; U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Education, *Statement for the Administration of Policies of Vocational Education*, Bulletin No., (Rev. February 1937, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1937), 67.

<sup>45</sup> Gilman Udell, *Laws Referring to Vocational Education and Agricultural Extension Work*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1958), quoted in Regina Werum, “Sectionalism and Racial Politics: Federal Vocational Policies and Programs in the Predesegregation South,” *Social Science History* vol. 23 no. 3 (Fall 1997), 408.

## **IX. Creating a New High School: Vocationalism, The National Education Association and the 1918 *Cardinal Principles* Report**

The nation's leading professional educators' organization, The National Education Association, reacted to the Smith-Hughes Act by publishing in 1918 what came to be known as the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*. A project of the agency's Bureau of Education, *Cardinal Principles* forever changed the makeup of the American high school and represented yet another triumph for vocational school reformers. The NEA had involved itself in vocational studies since the late 1870s. By the time Smith-Hughes was enacted, the NEA had established a Commission on Vocational Education and Vocational Guidance (1912) and a Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (1913). These initiatives represented the NEA's admission that not only was the nation's public secondary education system in disarray, vocationalists who pushed to reform it were winning the battle for school reform. The NEA agreed that Charles W. Eliot's 1893 "Committee of Ten" report—which supported the status quo academic high school—had failed to establish a standardized public school curriculum that appealed to all socio-economic classes. NEA leadership also realized that administrators had failed to adequately address enormous social changes that had occurred in the preceding two decades.<sup>46</sup>

These admissions, together with the expanding power base and popularity of vocationalism, led the NEA to suggest that academics and vocationalism could occupy the same curriculum. The *Cardinal Principles* was a product of NEA's blue-ribbon Committee on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, which had been established in 1910 to examine the pros

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<sup>46</sup> U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, *Bulletin No. 35: Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education: A Report of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, Appointed by the National Education Association*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918).

and cons of the occupational reform movement. The report presented a new blueprint for reforming the high school curriculum. Its authors spurned the notion of a separate vocational school system. Instead, the committee called for what it termed a “comprehensive” high school, which would offer a varied curriculum that included traditional academics and new-wave vocational tracks in the same institution. The educational philosophy embedded in the committee’s recommendations influenced the development of secondary school curriculum throughout the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The document proposed seven “principles” that every secondary school should employ in planning curriculum. Administrators were encouraged to consider classes in health, mastery of basic knowledge and intellectual processes, full participation in home life, vocational awareness, citizenship, appropriate use of leisure time, and ethical behavior.<sup>47</sup> In adopting these concepts to classroom instruction, the authors were keen that public schools be efficient. In a compressed document of only 35 pages, calls for efficiency appeared a dozen times, with the first mention coming in the report’s second paragraph.<sup>48</sup>

*Cardinal Principles* transformed the NEA’s traditional conception of the high school. No longer would it serve as a vestibule before college. Rather, the curriculum would emphasize meeting the “real needs” of students. It would provide a modernized education for all learners by supplying more course choices that would reflect the democratic ideals of individual choice and equality. No longer would humanistic academics be afforded a higher rank than vocational courses. Following the seven principles outlined in the report would result in the transformation of the high school curriculum to meet equally the demands of academically oriented pupils and

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<sup>47</sup> *Cardinal Principles*, 11-16.

<sup>48</sup> *Cardinal Principles*,

those bound for practical vocations. Youth from all socio-economic strata would benefit. The report's authors deftly included the tenets of the social efficiency wing of the progressive school reform without taking them to extreme lengths. At the same time, they retained the traditional academic aspects of secondary education.

The vocational educators who had pushed for federal funding received *Cardinal Principles* with mixed feelings. They were pleased to see the Committee recommend that every high school sponsor an active department of occupational training. "An effective program of vocational guidance in the secondary school is essential," the report's authors concluded. The relationship between occupation and community, "producer and consumer", and between worker and employer should be thoroughly explored in the classroom.

However happy efficiency-minded vocationalists were with the committee's reorganization of secondary schooling, they were disappointed that the report did not recommend a dual system of academic and vocational high schools. Vocational boosters had long hoped that the NEA and state departments of education would agree to establish separate occupational high schools. Instead, NEA officials proposed a comprehensive school in which students of all needs, aspirations, and social classes would mingle under the same roof. The offending passage appeared on page 16:

This commission holds that education is essentially a *unitary* and continuous process, and that each of the [seven] objectives...must be recognized throughout the entire extent of secondary education....Furthermore, it is only as the pupil sees his vocation in relation to his citizenship and his citizenship in the light of his vocation that he will be prepared for effective membership in an industrial democracy. Consequently, this commission enters its protest against any and all plans, however well intended, which are in danger of divorcing vocation and social-civic education. It stands squarely for the infusion of vocation with the spirit of service and for the vitalization of culture by genuine contact with the world's work.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Cardinal Principles*, 16. Emphasis added.

By educating all high school students in one institution, diverse socio-economic groups would be tethered together in a democratic community of learning whose curriculum would merge the best of vocational and liberal education and carry universal appeal.<sup>50</sup>

*Cardinal Principles* created a new rift in the social efficiency wing of the vocational education community. Blue-stockings vocationalists, including David Snedden and Charles Prosser, were aghast that industrial training was placed on a par with the six other principles. This was especially the case because Snedden's disciple in the movement, Clarence Kingsley, chaired the committee that produced the report. Snedden doubted that its membership was even interested in vocational education despite the fact that nearly all of its 26 members came from the vocationalist network that had campaigned for federal funding. Snedden sniffed that not even the comprehensive high school could ensure an equal education for all, nor could it remove either the *de facto* or *de jure* segregation by socio-economic class, race, or ethnicity, that pervaded many American high schools at the time. As Henry Parkinson has argued, the elements of social class and race continued to influence the effectiveness of high school education in the wake of the "Cardinal Principles."<sup>51</sup>

The passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, the launch of an independent Federal Board for Vocational Education, and the proclamations of the NEA sounded by the *Cardinal Principles* report—all of which occurred rapidly in 1917-1918—were the results of a debate over the direction and purpose of educational reform that had been bubbling for several decades. That debate would continue well into the Great Depression. Between 1900 and 1935, the national

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<sup>50</sup> *Cardinal Principles*, 24-25.

<sup>51</sup> Henry Parkinson, *The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education, 1865-1965* (New York: Random House, 1968). David Snedden's social efficiency approach to vocational education is discussed below.

debate intensified over vocational education as a school reform. It reflected philosophical tugs-of-war that were already present between two groups of progressive education reform. Both sides conceded that public education needed to progress beyond outdated rote-memory and passive learning pedagogies. They agreed that schools needed to transform themselves to better serve modern society. They also acknowledged that schools must address new technologies and industrial growth. They disagreed, however, on how to reconfigure the school's curriculum to meet these needs. The challenge was to determine whether the priorities of the industrial and technological age could co-exist with the principles of democracy.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Outside the Statehouse: National Debates in the School Community Over Vocational Education, 1893-1936**

#### **Introduction**

Attempts to retool the nation's schools have traditionally involved friction between complex collections of opinions and options. The philosophical and pedagogical debates over reforming the school through vocational training were no different. Vocationalism's merits and pitfalls were hashed out in a national forum that attracted more intense and energetic attention from a wider collection of voices than had earlier school reform debates. As the twentieth century broke, conflict over the role of vocational courses in the traditional liberal curriculum took the form of public disagreements among education leaders, administrators, and politicians in conferences, journals, books, popular magazines, and speeches. The discourse examined in this chapter exposed philosophical and pedagogical fault lines between nationally appreciated reform-minded leaders in vocational and general education that opened up in the late 19th century and dominated school reform until the mid-1930s. As Katy Lee Greenwood has pointed out, the national discussion over school reform through manual training and vocational education splintered into several factions.<sup>1</sup>

Disagreements between policymakers centered on the core purpose of public education itself:

1. Should high schools focus on humanist goals that nurtured youth in preparation for all of life's challenges or, as the handmaiden of the growing economy, industrial base, and national security, should it focus on narrow,

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<sup>1</sup> Katy Lee Brown Greenwood, "A Philosophic Rationale for Vocational Education: Contributions of Charles A. Prosser and his Contemporaries from 1900 to 1917," Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1978.



concrete, and measurable objectives? Was there a middle way that blended both purposes?

2. What should the high school curriculum teach, and who should control its design?

3. What must schools do to prepare youth for adult roles? And who should pay for it? Local communities? Individual states? The federal government? A combination of these agencies? <sup>2</sup>

One group of Progressive reformers that pushed for school transformation grounded itself in philosophies of social efficiency. They embraced the idea that schools were called to be pragmatic institutions designed to equip youth to play their part in the American economy. From their influential positions on Capitol Hill, a cadre of Southern politicians, including Sen. Hoke Smith and Rep. Dudley Hughes—both committed to strengthening the South’s economy—supported this flank in the debate, which called for federal monies to support vocationalism in public high schools. Woodrow Wilson also supported Congressional financing of local public education that squared with the goals of the vocational reform movement. Wilson had two concerns that he thought local schools could address: America’s competitiveness in international markets and national security. David Tyack has labeled the pragmatic wing of educational reformers “administrative progressives.” In the struggle for control of national school reform, they rallied to the concepts of efficient utilitarianism.

Countering the administrative progressives was a coalition David Tyack has labeled the “pedagogical progressives.” David Snedden labeled them “aspirationists,” a tag that conjured up images of misty-eyed idealism and unrealistic hopefulness for the possibilities of American

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<sup>2</sup> The term “social efficiency” appears to have been coined by Irish sociologist Benjamin Kidd, a disciple of the thinking of Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer, in his 1894 publication, *Social Evolution*. The phrase appears 24 times in this volume. In the Preface, Kidd observes that the mettle of Western Civilization’s “social efficiency” was about to undergo an unprecedented test as society grew more industrialized and complex. See Benjamin Kidd, *Social Efficiency*, (New York: MacMillan and Co., 1894).

public education. John Dewey and W.E.B. DuBois were vocal members of this wing. They and their followers pressed for a curriculum emphasizing the arts, literature, language, sciences, mathematics, and vocational courses for all students regardless of race, socio-economic class, or ability. They argued against creating a “dual system” that would separate pupils in the academic curriculum from those who took narrowly-conceived vocational courses.<sup>3</sup> For this faction of school reform debaters, economics and national security were not the main purposes of education. Instead, they emphasized a broad pedagogy in elementary and secondary schools that would build community, strengthen genuine democracy, and impart needed skills and concepts that related not only to one’s future occupation, but to all of life.

An important aspect of the national debate over vocational reform involved the “Wizard of Tuskegee,” Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Anna Julia Cooper, and Nannie Helen Burroughs. Washington argued that African American youth must accept the reality of the racist society in which they lived and train for jobs that would provide them with an entrée into the racially segregated post-Reconstruction Southern economy.

W.E.B. DuBois opposed Washington’s strategy. He argued that the education of African Americans need not be constrained by pure vocational training. DuBois called high school teachers to expose youth to the broadest education possible in order to prepare them to claim their political and economic rights and to throw off the oppression, injustice, and inhumanity that characterized Anglo society’s treatment of African Americans and other minority populations.

The philosophical debate over vocational reform in the schools climaxed with the passage of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act and the 1918 publication of *Cardinal Principles*. As David F.

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<sup>3</sup> David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 182ff. See especially 196-197.

Larabee noted, “[b]oth documents reflected key elements of the social vision that Snedden espoused and Dewey detested, a vision that has characterized schooling in the U.S. ever since.” The pedagogical rift between the disciples of Booker T. Washington and those committed to W.E.B. DuBois widened between 1903—when DuBois published a frank rebuttal of Washington’s views— and Washington’s death in 1915.<sup>4</sup>

# **I. “There is No Information Stored up in the Plow”: Late 19th Century Opposition to Vocational School Reform**

General educators in the late 19th century resisted the manual training movement’s thrust, foreshadowing more intensive debates that would play out into the 1930s and sounding themes that would be heard in calls for public school reforms in the 1950s and beyond. Some antagonists contended that manual courses could not convey the intellectual content necessary for adult life, and they should therefore be conducted outside the high school. At the 1882 NEA convention, Albert P. Marble, Superintendent of Schools in Worcester, Massachusetts, spoke for many liberal educators by noting that “one of the things boys and girls ought to learn in (public) schools is how to get information from books. There is no information stored up in the plow, hoe handle, (or) steam engine.” Manual training “belongs outside and ought to be attended to outside” the high school. Marble proposed a clear divide: high schools were intended for developing intellectual capital, and occupational courses needed to be sequestered in separate

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<sup>4</sup> David F. Larabee, “How Dewey Lost: The Victory of David Snedden and Social Efficiency in the Reform of American Education,” paper read at conference on “Pragmatism as the Reticule of Modernization: Concepts, Contexts, Critiques,” Centro Stefano Franscini, Monte Verita, Ascona, Switzerland, September, 2008; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois: A Biography of Race, 1868-1919*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 122ff.

public institutions that would enhance practical skills for future adult work that would potentially raise the learner's income.<sup>5</sup>

Human and intellectual forms of capital were not the only concepts to echo across the meeting rooms of NEA conferences and state education conventions. Some arguments against universally available manual training coalesced around race, ethnicity and morality. Many opponents pressed for manual curricula to be aimed primarily at African Americans, American Indians and Asians, since these groups were apparently incapable of mastering academic subjects and were more suited for hand work. Manual training in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was linked to building morality among students and was a key feature in the reform school movement's effort to correct wayward youth. These associations tinged manual training's reputation. Some academically-oriented educators insisted that such pragmatic instruction was not fit for public secondary schools and should remain within the walls of correctional institutions.

Traditionalists tended to view the academic curriculum as a way to preserve Anglo-American culture in the face of mass immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. Nell Irvin Painter describes the post-Reconstruction era through 1920 as a time of "Anglo-Saxon chauvinism" when many white Americans "renounced their tradition (of) Anglophobia ... to proclaim the natural kindredness of the English-speaking people and the natural superiority of Anglo-Saxons." The rise of these sentiments coincided with the swelling tide of nationalism that was celebrated at the Centennial in Philadelphia in 1876 and helped launch an era of American imperial adventures. Some liberal educators believed teaching manual skills took time away from the intellectual training necessary to retain "the special gifts of Anglo-Saxons," including a

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in *United States Bureau of Education Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Years 1893-94*, Vol. I (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1894), 887.

sense of fair play, honest toil, appreciation for democracy and civil liberties, and “the genius of self-government.” William T. Harris—celebrated Superintendent of St. Louis Schools and U.S. Commissioner of Education—saw only a limited role for manual courses among Anglo-Saxons. But for minorities, working classes, and non-Anglo newcomers, high school courses in shop, metalworking, homemaking skills, and agriculture could be useful in communicating ideals of self-reliance, respect for authority, and the brand of hard work that would lead to better wages that would enhance the learner’s earning potential.<sup>6</sup>

Harris’s opposition to manual training among Anglos was muscular. A product of Andover Academy and Yale, he earned a national reputation while manning the helm of St. Louis’ urban school system. Harris’ standing in the education community catapulted him into the office of U.S. Commissioner of Education, a position he held from 1889 to 1906. “The Conservator,” as Merle Curti labels him, Harris was a complex and contradictory figure. He straddled the line between preserving the classical curriculum while welcoming the new science as well as emerging ideas about pedagogy and curricular change. Steeped in Hegelian thought—with its emphasis on dichotomies and on the “higher” planes of spirituality and reflection over the “lower” senses—he was simultaneously an unflinching advocate for industrial capitalism and American imperialism. Despite effusive praise for American business, his support for the types of manual training in public schools that might strengthen America’s commercial sector remained weak. Harris fretted that it emphasized handwork over the mental and spiritual disciplines of everyday life. In rapidly changing times, he felt that public school curricula must highlight the Western classics in order to reinforce the moral and intellectual foundations of

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<sup>6</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 149-151. Painter notes that the largest immigrant groups in the period 1899-1924 were, in order, Southern Italians, Jews (mostly from Eastern Europe), Polish, German, and English. See Painter, xxxii-xxxiii, quoting Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 528-529.

democracy and citizenship. For Harris, manual training was not the long-lasting economic panacea that school reformers proclaimed it to be, but was instead a reformist fad bereft of intellectual rigor and incapable of fortifying values that were crucial to sustaining the Anglo-American way of life.<sup>7</sup>

The manual training movement ignited a wave of curriculum redefinition and clarification among the traditional “school men.” Concerned over the hodge-podge of curricula that began to appear in rapidly the spreading high school system, and anxious that manual training might threaten the classical curriculum, the NEA tapped Harvard president Charles W. Eliot to chair a commission to write guidelines for high school planners. He was already a venerable spokesperson for the superiority of the academic curriculum over manual training. In 1893, Eliot’s “Committee of Ten” produced a curricular template in an effort to standardize the academic experience and make it easier for colleges to assess applicants’ work. Still viewing secondary schools as gateways to the halls of higher education, Eliot’s report suggested retaining the general academic curriculum, along with English and the sciences. The Committee acknowledged the need for manual education but argued against mainstreaming it with the regular curriculum. The lone dissenter on the Committee was high school Principal Oscar D. Robinson. As the only member who actually worked in secondary education—where he had built a resume of practical front-line experience— Robinson asserted that students came “from all (social) classes” and the vast majority had no plans to attend college. Eliot turned the criticism away by repeating the traditionalist trope: manual classes could not train the intellect.

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<sup>7</sup> For detailed exegesis of Harris’ educational philosophy, and the changes it underwent across his long career, see Peter M. Collins, *The Philosophy of Education of William Torrey Harris in the Annual Reports* (University Press of America, 2007). Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of America’s Educators*, 310-347. Almost all of the significant scholarship on Harris was published in the 1930s and little scholarly attention appears to have paid to his work since then.

In the wake of Eliot's landmark report, opposition to connecting manual and commercial education with academics continued among rank-and-file educators well into the 20th century. Wisconsin's education superintendent warned local schools against caving in to public pressures for practical high school courses in the absence of sufficient funding. Chicago's 1901 annual school report observed that "[s]ome of the high school principals have not welcomed [commercial] studies with much warmth of interest." Massachusetts' State Board of Education recorded that teachers' "prejudices are all the other way, and [they] do not always conceal their disgust at such plebeian tastes." Philadelphia's teachers had largely accepted vocational courses by 1900 but refused to integrate commercial classes because they would attract "an inferior class" of students.<sup>8</sup>

## **II. "The Age of Faith is Ending, and the Age of Science is Dawning": Vocational Education Philosophy of David Snedden**

In the years prior to World War I and the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917, David Snedden built a reputation as a respected educator who was committed to professionalizing the vocation of teaching. He served as Commissioner of Education in California, a post he also held in Massachusetts from 1909 to 1916 in league with Charles Prosser. By the time he joined the faculty of Teachers College as professor of educational sociology in 1916, Snedden had served as a school administrator, superintendent, and teacher. His "front-line" credentials served him well as the chief spokesperson for the social efficiency branch of Progressive school reform. His position at Teachers College provided a prominent

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<sup>8</sup> Janice Weiss, "The Advent of Education for Clerical Work in the High School: A Reconsideration of the Historiography of Vocationalism," *Teachers College Record* vol. 83, no. 1 (Summer 1982), 613.

pulpit from which to preach the gospel of socially efficient vocationalism as *the* school reform America needed for modern times.

Herbert Spencer, Edward A. Ross, the popular writings of Benjamin Kidd, and Frederick Taylor's scientific management concepts for industry—popularly called “time study”—inspired Snedden's progressive educational philosophy of efficiency for the benefit of society. He applied their ideas to reforming the high school, whose traditional curriculum he found inefficient, undemocratic and, in a left-handed reference to the ideas of pedagogical Progressives, too “mystical.” Snedden couched his philosophy of education in images and arguments that people and politicians could understand and that made sense for the industrial age. He believed the school should be a well-oiled machine capable of turning out quality “products” in the form of students who were properly shaped to assume their destined roles in society and to advance the frontiers of human progress. This picture of streamlined, focused teaching and learning bespoke well-organized, effective, and practical schooling as the key to squaring the requirements of modern industrial society with the needs and abilities of students.

Snedden's first muse, Herbert Spencer, had also viewed education in a pragmatic manner. Writing in 1860, Spencer noted that educational goals should be set according to “those activities which directly minister to self-preservation...which are involved in the maintenance of proper social and political relations; and [to] those miscellaneous activities which make up the leisure part of life devoted to the gratification of the tastes and feelings.” Chief among Spencer's



questions about education was, “What knowledge is of most worth?” This inquiry drove the pragmatic Progressive educators who crusaded for vocational training in public high schools.<sup>9</sup>

Sociologist Edward A. Ross was another source of inspiration for Snedden. Ross examined the concept of social control as exercised through government, culture, political groups, art, and religion. Religion, he argued, was losing its influence in setting American social norms. In its place Ross observed “an almost worldwide drift *from religion toward education* as the method of indirect social restraint.” Taking a cue from Spencer, Ross asserted that the school’s chief priority was to communicate useful knowledge and skills to students and society at large. This conception of public education would become clearly discernible in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century discourse over the role of public schooling.<sup>10</sup>

The work of Irish sociologist Benjamin Kidd, a disciple of Spencer, Charles Darwin and Karl Marx, gained a favorable hearing in America in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century before fading from favor in the run-up to the 1914 outbreak of World War I. Kidd appears to have been the first thinker to use the term “social efficiency” in his writings. The second American edition of his work, *Social Evolution*, found its way into many American libraries and helped spread social efficiency’s acceptance as a framework for conceptualizing school reform among administrative progressives like Snedden. *Social Evolution* rode a wave of popularity in the United States and was reprinted seven times in nine months between November 1894 and August 1895. Surveying Western society’s increasing industrialization and commercialization, Kidd argued that “no one who engages in a serious study of the period of transition through which our

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (New York: Appleton, 1860), 13-14, quoted in Wirth, *Technological Society*, 145-146; quoted in Michael Appel, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1900), Preface.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1906, reprint of 1901 version), 176, quoted in Wirth, *Technological Society*, 147. Emphasis added.

Western civilization is passing at the present time can resist the conclusion that we are rapidly approaching a time when we shall be face to face with political and social problems, graver in character and more far-reaching in extent than any which have been hitherto encountered.” Social efficiency was both the key to solving large-scale flaws in modern society and a helpmate for what Kidd believed to be inevitable human progress.<sup>11</sup>

The reputation of Frederick W. Taylor, the nation’s foremost industrial efficiency expert, was peaking during Snedden’s tenure as Commissioner of Education in Massachusetts (1909-1916). Taylor applied the ideas of social efficiency to industrial processes as a way to bring massive production lines under better control. In *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Taylor argued that “the principal object of scientific management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employee.” As manufacturing processes grew increasingly complex, Taylor urged managers to incentivize workers to be better and faster producers by breaking complicated procedures into smaller, more manageable operations. Uppermost in his mind was the “task idea,” in which work was planned by a manager in advance. In this scheme, “each man receives...complete written instructions, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing his work....and the exact time allowed for doing it.”<sup>12</sup> Taylor’s approach severed the production line into discreet jobs, which disengaged workers from the overall manufacturing process. Each worker’s movements in performing a particular job were timed and analyzed before a blueprint for accomplishing the specific task at hand on the assembly line was designed and implemented.

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<sup>11</sup> Kidd, *Social Evolution*, viii-ix. For a complete treatment of Benjamin Kidd, including a historiographic appendix see D.P. Crook, *Benjamin Kidd, Portrait of a Social Darwinist*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935, 1959)reprint of 1911 original edition), 1, 33, 39

As Thomas Fallace has pointed out, David Snedden and his followers proposed that public schools engineer an efficient, pragmatic process by which schools would undertake “a study of the existing social world and a cataloging of the specific skills each student would need to fulfill the role in which they best fit. Any extraneous learning that did not align specifically with a real-world occupation...was considered unnecessary and needed to be removed. All learning was to be immediately relevant and utilitarian.” Snedden strongly favored a dual system of schools: one set of institutions for students whom educators deemed best suited for vocational training, and a parallel institution to be populated by students whom school leaders believed were best fit for academic pursuits.<sup>13</sup>

Shaped by Spencer, Ross, Kidd, and Taylor, Snedden introduced his proposal to apply efficiency principles to schooling at the 1914 NEA convention. In his address to conventioners, Snedden mentioned efficiency 18 times, insisting that modern society and the public demanded it. He proclaimed that general education and vocational education were *fundamentally different* “as regards the means and methods of instruction as well as the administrative agencies which are intimately related to means and methods of instruction.” Education must be designed and carried out scientifically and curricula must “equip a young person for a recognized calling.” Liberal education models were fuzzy and outdated, the results of mystical “custom, crude psychological analysis, and vague aspirations after culture and social efficiency.” Educators from the academic side of schooling, and pedagogical progressives such as John Dewey, had no means to measure the effectiveness of a liberal education on high school graduates. Drawing a line between liberal and vocational studies, Snedden asserted that “education which trains [a

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas D. Fallace, *Dewey and the Dilemma of Race: An Intellectual History, 1895-1922*, (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2011), 89. See also Fallace and Victoria Fantozi, “Was There Really a Social Efficiency Doctrine? The Uses and Abuses of an Idea in Educational History”, *Educational Researcher*, vol. 42 (April 13, 2013), 142-150.

student] to be a producer is vocational. That education which trains him to be a good utilizer, in the social sense of the term, is liberal education.” Being “a producer” was Snedden-speak for skills development. The nation had been given significant human resources, and proper use of them required public schools to identify and develop them lest they be wasted. Because their aims were vastly divergent and created different “products,”—utilizers and producers—vocational and academic schooling should occupy separate institutions and be governed by different school boards. Snedden feared that “considerable blending” of both types of instruction in one schoolhouse would prove harmful to general and vocational education alike.<sup>14</sup>

Utilitarian. Scientific. Efficient. Economically-oriented. These terms defined Snedden’s brand of school reform. They were digestible concepts that the public and its politicians could easily grasp. There was no mystery, no straining to understand complexities such as those advanced in the arguments of John Dewey and W.E.B. DuBois. Traditional academic schooling was simply antediluvian and pre-scientific. Like a coughing, outdated, and overdriven engine, the classical high school educational system needed a complete overhaul. Echoing Edwin A. Ross, Snedden preached to the NEA that the “ages of faith are coming to an end and the age of science is drawing on. The public is forcing the demand for a more purposeful, a more scientific, and a more efficient liberal education in the schools.” It is important to note here that Snedden was not advocating the complete overthrow of intellectual training through academics. He wanted it to be more productive and vocational education was the missing curricular ingredient that could ramp up public education’s output, matching it to the needs of the student and the American economy. In Snedden’s opinion, the times and the American people called for vocational schools to shed “as completely as possible...the academic, and should reproduce as

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<sup>14</sup> David Snedden, “Fundamental Differences between Liberal and Vocational Education,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 7, no.1 (Spring 1977): 43, 45, 48. Emphasis mine.

fully as possible the atmosphere of economic endeavor in the field for which (the school) trains.”<sup>15</sup>

Snedden’s philosophy squared with that of another administrative progressive, John Franklin Bobbitt, the nation’s leading advocate of the “scientific curriculum” approach to high school planning. Bobbitt’s star rose in 1912, just as the age’s largest and most impressive and scientifically advanced machine, *Titanic*, was sinking. In that year he published “The Elimination of Waste in Education,” in which he borrowed terms directly from Taylor’s industrial management vocabulary. He hailed the Gary, Indiana school district’s model of efficient use of the “plant” (school) by its “educational engineer” (Superintendent Gary Wirt). Bobbitt’s plan called for administrators to give students more flexibility in choosing courses. This approach would create a more democratic school system because students could register only for classes deemed useful according to their own needs and empirically measured abilities, rather than being forced into the traditional book-learning tracks.

Bobbitt suggested that scientifically devised tests emerging from the new field of educational psychology be used to predict each student’s vocational capabilities and to indicate a probable career path. The result would be a more efficiently organized educational experience that would inspire individual occupational success as well as social and economic progress for the nation. In Bobbitt’s lexicon students were “raw material,” and graduates morphed into “finished products.” Terms such as “gains and losses,” inputs and outputs, and the “bottom line” filled his writings, just as they did in popular business and industrial journals of the day. In *How to Make a Curriculum* (1918), Bobbitt outlined a simple framework for an efficient curriculum design that, he said, any school planner could follow:

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<sup>15</sup> Snedden, “Fundamental Differences,” 151, 160.

“Step 1: Divide life into major activities;

Step 2: Analyze each major activity into specific activities. This process is to continue until he, the curriculum discoverer, has found the quite specific activities that are to be performed;

Step 3: The activities once discovered, one can then see the objectives of education.”<sup>16</sup>

Like Snedden, Bobbitt did not view the school as a tool for direct social melioration. He believed that “its responsibility is to help the growing individual continuously and consistently to hold to the type of human living which is the best practical one for him. This should automatically result in an enormous improvement in society in general. But this improvement is not a thing directly aimed at. It is only a by-product.”<sup>17</sup>

Snedden’s positions on utilitarian and socially efficient education grew increasingly extreme after passage of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act and the publication in 1918 of the National Education Association’s “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education” report.<sup>18</sup> His philosophy for redesigning vocational—and ultimately general— education carried trace elements of Taylor’s time-and-motion studies, which were increasingly applied in factories and offices. In books and articles in the 1920s, Snedden went so far as to distill the educational enterprise into a series of sub-processes and learning units. He proposed that each vocation be taught to students

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<sup>16</sup> Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958* (New York: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1987), 97-99.

<sup>17</sup> John Franklin Bobbitt, “The Orientation of the Curriculum Makers”, in Harold Rugg (ed.), *The Foundations and Technique of Curriculum Construction* (Twenty-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part Science of Curriculum Making, “*The School Review*, vol. 75, no. 1, Seventy-fifth Anniversary Issue (Spring, 1967), 34; II (Bloomington, Ill.: Public School Publishing Co., 1926), 9, quoted in Elliot W. Eisner, “Franklin Bobbitt and the ‘Bobbitt, “The Orientation of the Curriculum Maker,” 54. His prolific writings on school surveys and efficiency are too numerous to list here. As examples, see “The Actual Objectives of the Present-Day High School, *The School Review*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Apr., 1921) 256-272; “The Efficiency of the Consolidated Rural School”, *The Elementary School Teacher*, vol. 12, no. 4 (Dec., 1911), 169-175; “The School Survey: Finding Standards of Current Practice with Which to Measure One's Own Schools,” *The Elementary School Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Sep., 1914), 41-54; and “The Plan of Measuring Educational Efficiency in Bay City *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 5 (Jan., 1918), pp. 343-356.

<sup>18</sup> The Cardinal Principles Report was the National Education Association’s reaction to the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act. It will be discussed below.

in specialized schools. They would dot public education's landscape with separate institutions devoted to teaching skills in plumbing, bricklaying, domestic arts, clerking, and the like. To ensure efficient teaching and learning, administrators would engage in scientific curriculum management to reduce complex occupational skills to their essential elements.

In a 1921 volume, *Sociological Determination of Objectives in Education*, Snedden repeated his 1914 argument that the ability to create—"production"—and the ability to consume—"utilization"—were the two major tasks of adulthood. One was either a producer or a consumer. To prepare high school pupils for the next stage of life, educational tasks should be broken down into manageable units (which he termed "peths") whose outcomes could be empirically measured. This process, which Snedden labeled "strand analysis," mirrored the ideal economizing manufacturing process described by Frederick Taylor. Each task—whether on a farm, in a factory, at a cobbler's bench, or over a stovetop in the modern home kitchen—was composed of many "strands." Segmenting them would create a competent curriculum for teaching learners to master a specific skill. Resembling an assembly line, Snedden's vocational high school curriculum atomized tasks into "pieces of learning" to be "handled, studied, valued, and adjusted into large composites." He applied the same process to academic courses. Learning a language, mastering the form and meaning of a Shakespearean sonnet, or analyzing a novel was made more efficient by breaking the task down into a series of manageable moves.<sup>19</sup>

Snedden's position stood in stark contrast to the pedagogical Progressives. He attacked the school reform philosophy represented by Dewey, Counts, and their allies. He asserted that the 1918 "Cardinal Principles" report was only a "partially successful" answer to the challenges

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<sup>19</sup> Larabee, "How Dewey Lost," 15, quoting Snedden, "Planning Curriculum Research II," *School and Society* 22, no. 558 (1925): 287-288; "Junior High School Offerings," *School and Society* 20, vol. 741-742; "Planning Curriculum Research I," *School and Society* 22, no. 557: 263.

of preparing youth for adulthood and of resolving social and economic problems. In his rebuttal to “Cardinal Principles” in 1919, Snedden offered a left-handed compliment to the NEA’s report by noting that it was, at least, an improvement over the “mystic principles of ‘character,’ ‘self-realization,’ or ‘disciplined mind’” that were favored by the Dewey camp as appropriate educational outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

David Snedden’s fall from influence in the mid-1920s was almost as rapid as his meteoric rise had been before World War I. After helping to compose the “Cardinal Principles,” Clarence Kingsley, Snedden’s former acolyte, distanced himself from Snedden’s increasing extremism. Snedden had always endured flak from pedagogical progressives. But by the mid-1920s, he was also coming under attack from educators on school boards, in classrooms, and on state boards of education. In 1921, a New Hampshire school official coined the term “Sneddenism” in a scathing critique of his philosophy of socially efficient vocational schooling that was aimed at economic ends. He argued that “unskilled minds” were being “crammed with knowledge of facts and processes” instead of being shaped to think critically.<sup>21</sup>

### **III. “The Feudal Dogma of Social Predestination”: John Dewey’s Response to the Vocational Education Reform Philosophy**

John Dewey responded to Snedden’s views as early as 1913 and via two articles in the *New Republic* in December 1914 and May 1915. In 1916, he offered a longer reaction in chapter 23 of *Democracy and Education*. While Snedden delivered his perspectives on socially efficient, pragmatic, economically-oriented, and discreet vocational education at the 1914 NEA convention, John Dewey was completing a series of lectures on the politics of Germany and

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<sup>20</sup> David Snedden, “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education,” *School and Society*, vol. 9, 227, quoted in Larabee, “How Dewey Lost,” 13.

<sup>21</sup> Drost, “Social Efficiency Re-examined,” 182-183; Larabee, “How Dewey Lost,” 14.



America's obsession with besting that nation's economic powerhouse. His lecture in Imperial Germany occurred just as Kaiser Wilhelm and his warlords were preparing to launch an attack against Belgium, an act of aggression that sparked World War I. The articles appeared after Dewey returned to the United States.<sup>22</sup>

In a 1913 essay, "Some Dangers in the Present Movement for Industrial Education," which he had originally titled "An Undemocratic proposal," Dewey labeled the use of vocational education as a tool to retain students in high school beyond the age of 14 years a "mischievous enterprise." He was wary of establishing Snedden's pattern of a dual system of vocational and academic high schools. Dewey proposed three rationales to support his view.

1. A dual system of administrators and school boards—one for academic secondary schools and a second for vocational institutions—was a waste of money. He pointed out that such an arrangement would mean establishing and paying for *two* parallel school systems, with their accompanying faculties, physical plants, boards, and professional administrators. Ironically, Dewey said, this redundant pattern would fly in the face of Snedden's emphasis on efficiency itself.
2. Installing separate vocational high schools in the public school system would endanger the progress schools were already recording in applying Dewey's curricular methods that linked in-class instruction with real-world experience under one roof. For example, the study of botany in the classroom connected with the practical experience of raising vegetables and flowers in a school garden. Such activities would involve every student, not just those who were deemed academically inclined.
3. A school district divided along the lines of academics and vocational pursuits would "work disastrously for the true interests of the pupils of the so-called vocational schools." He was convinced that students in the vocational schools would be ill-equipped to improve their socioeconomic standing in American society. Armed with an intimate knowledge and experience of Germany's schools and its class divisions, Dewey was alarmed that the United States might use a dual system of education. It was "harmful to the democratic ideals of the country."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1915).

<sup>23</sup> Fallace, *Dewey and the dilemma of Race*, 90, quoting Jon Dewey, "Some Dangers in the Present Movement for Industrial Education," (1913), in *Middle Works*, vol. 7, 99-101.

In his first article, “A Policy of Industrial Education,” published in December 1914, Dewey focused his blunt ire at the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education. The Commission’s report, published in June 1914, was a paean to vocational school reform proposals and warned President Woodrow Wilson—a vocational education supporter—and Congress that the United States lagged behind Germany and other European nations in preparing youth for technical and industrial work. Further, the Commission recommended urged Congress and Wilson to underwrite this school reform initiative with matching grants to the states along with appropriate regulations governing the use of disbursements.

In addition to criticizing the Commission for restricting the Commission’s membership to pro-vocational advocates, Dewey labeled their plans to reform the schools as nationalistic, designed primarily to serve America’s competitive economic and industrial contest with Germany and its national security. Invoking skills and workforce development arguments, Dewey charged that except for concern over their future earning power and their ability to contribute to the economy, the needs of students were ignored. The Commission’s report supported Dewey’s critique. It lauded Germany’s conversion “from a position of commercial and industrial insignificance to a position of dominance in the markets of the world, largely as a direct consequence of her vocational, technical, and technological schools.” Commissioners worried that the United States was thirty years behind Germany in developing a school system—funded in large part by the central government in Berlin—that directly benefitted the economy and strengthened its national security. Members reasoned that similar federal aid for changing

the high school curriculum to offer robust occupational training “will put the work of the States on a scientific and business-like basis.”<sup>24</sup>

Dewey’s charge that public education should not be converted into the handmaiden of the American economy was delivered at a critical juncture. Germany—long admired by American vocational reformers as a model for occupational and technical high school training—had invaded Belgium and France in July 1914. When Dewey’s article appeared, the German government was using the benefits afforded by vocational and technical training in ways that made Germany unpopular in the United States. Dewey’s attack on narrowly conceived vocationalism was timely. He meant to evoke educators’ concerns about using public education as a servant of the American economy and its national defense. He argued that industrial leaders were merely interested in vocational education to meet their desire “of shifting the burden of (vocational) preparation to the public tax-levy.” Dewey had fired a direct salvo at vocationalist educators and their allies in business and industry who subscribed to the notion that the purpose of schooling was to produce skills for the workforce, nationalistic causes, and the economic well-being of society.

The type of vocational training proposed by Snedden, Prosser and the industrialists would merely reinforce the unjust, antagonistic industrial system that was already in place. In the new technological age, Dewey said, labor was pitted against ownership, a situation that inevitably resulted in a hostile work environment for all parties. Manufacturing had become a dehumanizing process and schools should not be recruited to sustain such a system. “Every ground of public policy protests against any use of the public school system which takes for

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<sup>24</sup> *Vocational Education: Report of the Commission on Federal Aid to Vocational Education*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1914), 32; Appendix A, “Vocational Education in Germany,” 89-90.

granted the perpetuity of the existing industrial regime, and whose inevitable effect is to perpetuate it, with all its antagonisms of employer and employed, producer and consumer”<sup>25</sup>

On a practical plane, Dewey pointed out that factory owners did not necessarily need the types of skills that high school vocational classes were training them to master. “Automatic machinery is constantly invading the province of specially trained skill of hand and eye,” he wrote. Most manufacturing processes merely called for “skill in managing machines.” Almost all of the tasks involved in fashioning a complicated automobile in a Detroit factory were unskilled. Moreover, the skilled trade training proposed by Snedden, Prosser, and the administrative progressives was unnecessary, to a large extent, because modern workers were frequently changing jobs. Moving from one machine to another required simple retraining, not command of high-level technical abilities.

With these points established, Dewey emphasized that the nation’s schools needed to be completely reorganized to meet the overall *social* needs of industrial society. “The chief purpose (of trade-training) is to develop initiative and personal resources of intelligence, not narrow manual skills.” Dewey feared that the myopic conception of trade -training championed by Snedden, Prosser and the NSPIE would “relegate the educational interest to the background” and blunt the moral and intellectual development of pupils as whole persons who were more than cogs in an industrial economy.<sup>26</sup>

In February, 1915 Dewey authored a second *New Republic* piece describing his fear that the patterns of experimental vocational programs in the various states, particularly in Indiana, were being designed to meet the limited objectives of local industry. He was again dismayed by

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<sup>25</sup> John Dewey, “A Policy of Industrial Education,” *New Republic* vol. 1 (Dec. 19, 1914), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Dewey, “A Policy of Industrial Training,” 12.

the lack of input from professionally trained educators and critical of the influence wielded by politicians and manufacturers. In “Industrial Education--A Wrong Kind,” Dewey flayed Indiana’s experiment in funding separate technical high schools, continuation schools, and evening classes for specialized vocations. Funds were being diverted from general education to prop up the salaries of teachers, administrators, and physical plants for vocational training in industry, agriculture, and home economics. He feared that future federal legislation would follow Indiana’s example and constrict funds to serve restricted vocational purposes.<sup>27</sup>

In a reply published after Dewey’s first article, Snedden appeared wounded and perplexed by Dewey’s attacks on his conceptions of a socially efficient vocational education model. Accusing Dewey of misinterpreting the goals of the administrative progressives and the advocates of vocationalism, he wrote that “to find Dr. Dewey apparently giving aid and comfort to the opponents of a broader, richer and more effective program of education, and apparently misapprehending the motives of many of those who advocate extension of vocational education in schools designed for that purpose, is discouraging.”<sup>28</sup>

Responding to Snedden’s rebuttal, Dewey was adamant that taxpayers should not pick up the tab for job-specific training. By meeting the limited needs of local industries, school districts were simply replicating the current inequities of the mass-production factory system that was already dehumanizing workers. He called on parents and school leaders to resist not vocational training *per se*, but to resist *socially efficient* and narrowly-conceived vocationalism because the “existing industrial regime with all its antagonisms of employees and employed, producer and consumer” needed to be transformed. Tightly defined utilitarian vocational courses would serve

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<sup>27</sup> John Dewey, “Industrial Education--A Wrong Kind,” *New Republic* vol. 2 (February 20, 1915), 71-73.

<sup>28</sup> David Snedden, “Vocational Education,” quoted in *Vocational Inquiry*, vol. 7, no 1 (Spring 1977) 37.

only to feed the “regime” and perpetuate its injustices. With the possibility of America’s entry into the European conflict after 1915, Dewey’s message would take the form of a warning as factories and farms were already revving up to supply the nation’s beleaguered European allies with materials, supplies, and foodstuffs.<sup>29</sup>

Eye-of-the-needle vocational education curricula would rob students of the “intelligent initiative, ingenuity and executive capacity as shall make workers, as far as possible, masters of their own industrial fate.” Although it sounded easy to understand and on the surface appeared to offer a solution to the problems of industrial society, Dewey was convinced that vocational school reform carried with it the ulterior motive of training young people to serve the industrial complex of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and, perhaps just as worrisome, the manufacturing and food producing needs of the United States as talk of war began to spread. Dewey charged that Snedden had not convinced him that the restricted and “efficient” vocational training he proposed would, as Snedden claimed, create a “broader, richer and more effective” education. Rather than serve the cause of democracy in America in general, it would pander to the profit needs of manufacturers. He called educators to push against the “educational time-servers” and to embrace instead “a kind of vocational education which will first alter the existing industrial system, and ultimately transform it.”<sup>30</sup>

John Dewey’s longer response to the vocational education reform initiative was delivered in *Democracy and Education*, a manifesto expressing his philosophy of education. The volume was published in the midst of congressional debate over the Smith-Hughes Act during 1916, and as efficiency-minded school reformers and pedagogical progressives were struggling over the

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<sup>29</sup> Dewey, “Industrial Education,” 72.

<sup>30</sup> John Dewey, Letter to the Editor, *New Republic*, vol. 3 (1915), 42-43.

purpose of vocational studies in the high school curriculum. Dewey devoted chapter 23 of his work to “Vocational Aspects of Education.”

Echoing some of the themes that reverberated in his rebuttal articles a year earlier, Dewey opened the chapter on occupational training for the high school by defining a broader concept of vocation and rejecting Snedden’s narrow approach to it. “We must avoid not only the limited conception of vocation to the occupations where immediately tangible commodities are produced,” but also the notion that persons are suited to fulfill only one in a lifetime. “No one is just an artist and nothing else,” he wrote. “(Occupation) includes the development of artistic capacity of any kind, of special scientific ability, of effective citizenship, as well as professional and business occupations, to say nothing of mechanical labor or enjoyment in gainful pursuits.” Dewey disputed the vocationalists’ dualistic idea that academic high school curriculum nurtures only culture and leisure, and that vocational skills are to be imparted exclusively for purposes of production in factories and on farms.<sup>31</sup>

In a period when empirical vocational inventories and measurements were being developed, Dewey acknowledged that nothing could be worse than working at an “uncongenial calling” that is not fulfilling and serves no harmonious social purpose. However, he argued that they should not be used as the means for counseling youth to make a once-and-for-all occupational decision. One’s occupation should be “a continuous activity having a purpose.” Vocational choice involved more than selecting a career that will lead to tangible outputs. One’s

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<sup>31</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, (New York: MacMillan, 1916), 359.

calling “is also of necessity an organizing principle for information and ideas, for knowledge and intellectual growth.”<sup>32</sup>

To Dewey’s way of thinking, vocationalists were taking occupational guidance and training to an extreme in the nation’s secondary schools. The empirical instruments they employed to measure occupational aptitude and to counsel students who were not bound for college smacked of social predestination. “To predetermine some future occupation for which education is to be a strict preparation is to injure the possibilities of present development and thereby to reduce the adequacy of preparation for a future right employment.” He worried that “socially efficient” high school vocational guidance—which was beginning to professionalize in the period before World War I—would ossify students’ growth and lock them into a lifelong career trajectory from which they might think there is no escape. Vocational discovery is a lifelong process, Dewey proclaimed. “It is a conventional and arbitrary view which assumes that discovery of the work to be chosen for adult life is made once for all at some particular date,” perhaps while sitting in the office of a high school guidance counselor after taking a battery of tests.<sup>33</sup>

Dewey asserted that an alternative educational vision for students could be crafted without completely abandoning the positive aspects of effective occupational guidance. The most appropriate approach to helping young people think about a vocation was to assist them in sketching out a general outline of an occupation they might pursue, whether in the arts, sciences, humanities, domestic, or mechanical arts. Educators must be watchful that students’ perceived callings “do not shut down on them and fossilize them.” Rather, they must continually be

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<sup>32</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 360, 362.

<sup>33</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 362-363.



challenged by teachers to grow and discover as their life pursuits unfold, and to rearrange or even erase the lines of their original sketch as new discoveries were made through learning. This approach, Dewey avowed, would avoid the danger that trade education would be seen merely as “a means of securing technical efficiency in specialized future pursuits” that could ultimately prove to be unfulfilling.

At the close of his chapter on the role of vocational education in the high school, Dewey reiterated the point he made in the *New Republic* articles. Bowing to the reality that American society had entered a new technological age that demanded new types of work and potentially damaging social arrangements and tensions—particularly between labor and capital—he called for a radical move away from socially efficient patterns of vocational studies. “Any scheme of vocational education which takes its point of departure from the industrial regime that now exists is likely to assume and to perpetuate its divisions and weaknesses, and thus become an instrument in accomplishing the feudal dogma of social predestination.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Vocational School Reform Debate in the African American Community: The Tuskegee Machine and the Talented Tenth**

An analysis of the debate over vocational education reform would be incomplete without parsing the important differences between two vocal and nationally appreciated educators: Booker T. Washington and William Edward Burghardt DuBois. Their views on occupational training embodied competing visions of education and the socio-economic aspirations of African Americans in the post-Reconstruction era, when Jim Crow laws segregated everything in Southern society along racial lines: schooling, work, justice, politics, labor, and the common

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<sup>34</sup> Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 372.

activities of everyday public life. Their disagreement was drawn out publicly between 1903 when DuBois published his critique of African American vocational education reform—"Of Mr. Booker T. Washington"—and 1915, when Washington died. Their tense discourse has achieved an iconic, if not overly simplified, status. Yet beneath the patina of the icon are layers of complexity. The portrait of their complicated relationship shifted between poles of friendship and discord, agreement and argument, cooperation and cunning. Initially, Washington and DuBois agreed on vocational education as a tool to foster African American skills for the workforce. But as the 19<sup>th</sup> century gave way to the 20<sup>th</sup>, the gulf that separated their views on vocationalism in public education grew deeper, wider, and choppier.

## **I. The Washington-DuBois Conversation on Vocational School Reform**

The purpose of vocational education in general and for African American youth in particular was a central issue in the debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. Their conversation emerged in the context of struggles over the role of public schooling and the place of African Americans in the politics, economy, and social order of the New South. At its core, the disagreement between Washington and DuBois that grew after 1900 and escalated until 1915 when Washington died centered on two radically different approaches to what was then termed the "race problem." Vocational education for African Americans was one of the lenses through which the two outspoken leaders viewed the issues of race that plagued American society at the time.

Washington urged African American youth to gradually earn the rights and freedoms that were guaranteed under the Constitution but were denied by white powerbrokers. He advocated a

narrowly-conceived education for African American students that focused mainly on vocational training in the industrial arts, agricultural sciences, and domestic skills. For black adolescents and young adults in the decades surrounding the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, building efficient skills for low-wage technical and menial labor was more critical than building intellectual capital. White powerbrokers who had created Jim Crow arrangements were obstinate in their denial of rights to African American society. Washington asserted that equality would be granted if black laborers and consumers rendered themselves *indispensable* to the economy and proved to white leaders that they could work hard and show themselves to be worthy of full civic engagement. This patient tactic, Washington asserted, would counteract what James D. Anderson refers to as the “lazy-shiftless-Negro tale.”<sup>35</sup> Only by making their labor and spending power essential to business, industry, and commerce could the rising African American generation gain the leverage to convince white society to recognize and honor the rights all Americans were granted under the Constitution. Vocational training at the secondary level was therefore essential in equipping African American students to enter meaningful work, earn decent wages, contribute to the economy, and establish financial security within the realities of the segregated social system. The time for protest against injustices and assertive demands for rights had not yet ripened, according to Washington. Aggressive actions against Jim Crowism in the decades surrounding the opening of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as dozens of white supremacy groups launched a reign of racial terror in both South and North, would only jeopardize and further delay future possibilities for the redress of grievances and repair of the nation’s persistent “race problem.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> James D. Anderson, “The Historical Development of Black Vocational Education” in Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyack, eds., *Work, Youth, and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 187.

<sup>36</sup> It is a myth that white supremacist groups existed only in the South. For a detailed analysis of such organizations in the North, particularly in Pennsylvania, see Philip Jenkins, *Hoods and Shirts: The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania, 1925-1940*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

W.E.B. DuBois and his colleagues in the African American community were diametrically opposed to Washington's approach.<sup>37</sup> DuBois asserted that African Americans' rights and protections under the law were inherent, and they did not need to "earn" them from whites. He argued that African Americans needed a highly educated cadre of leaders who would not only act vigorously to put an end to racist policies but who would also inspire and train people to work actively for social, political, educational, and economic reform. He deeply doubted Washington's belief that white society would gradually recognize African American rights. Economic pressure alone would not convince white oppressors to change their ways. Denial of rights was a *political* problem. It could be solved only when African Americans asserted their collective voice through electing democratic leaders and sharing in the creation of laws that upheld equal political, social, and economic status. DuBois and his disciples could not accept Washington's notion that whites had rights to "give" that African Americans had to earn. They advocated immediate demand of rights and equality, persistent opposition to oppression, and vigorous political activism. To publicize their views and provide a forum for discussion, DuBois' and his colleagues established the Niagara Movement in 1905. The organization called for immediate action to secure political, economic, and social rights that were the birthrights of all Americans. Although the Niagara Movement broke apart after only a few years, NAACP President James Weldon Johnson observed that its creation symbolized the beginning of a major public divide in the African American community over which approach was best, Washington's accomodationist concept or DuBois' argument for immediate and robust political action.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For an exhaustive list of African American spokespersons who commented on vocational education school reform, see Anderson, "Black Vocational Education," 192.

<sup>38</sup> Diane Lifson, "The Washington-Dubois Controversy: Its Development and Influence in Modern Negro Protest, M.A. thesis, Arizona State University, 1966, 1-5; James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way*, (New York: Viking Press, 1933), 313-314.

While the discussions between Washington and DuBois covered a wide range of political, social, and economic topics, both men understood the central role education would play in making progress toward full inclusion of African Americans in the rights and privileges the Constitution made available to all Americans. The discussion below focuses on the differences that separated Washington and DuBois with relation to the role of vocational education in the effort to secure rights and equality.

## **II. Booker T. Washington: Education for Economic Progress**

Washington's rise from slavery to national leadership in the African American community is well-documented. The founders of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial School in Alabama—a joint venture between the state and the local community— hired Washington away from Hampton Institute in 1881 to serve as the new school's principal. With support from the Alabama legislature, Tuskegee opened as a secondary normal school focusing on vocational education for African Americans. The Hampton experience strongly influenced Washington's firm-handed direction of Tuskegee, which he relinquished only at his death. Under his thirty-four year guidance, Tuskegee duplicated Hampton's objective of training prospective African American teachers. The school's curriculum emphasized manual training for practical occupations more than it did academics. Between 1881 and 1895 Washington built Tuskegee into a formidable institution. He raised funds, created a curriculum, erected buildings, and instilled military-like discipline among students.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 109ff. Tuskegee was one of many African American normal schools for industrial education. Among the most prominent examples based on the Hampton model were Snow Hill Normal and Industrial and Normal Institute (Alabama), Utica (Mississippi), and Fort Valley High and Industrial School (Georgia). The historiography related to the socio-economic purposes of these institutions is somewhat muddled. For a cogent review of historical interpretations, see James D. Anderson, "The Historical Development of Black

Erected on the Hampton-based foundation of self-help, self-knowledge, and self-discipline, by 1895 Tuskegee had evolved into one of the South's leading industrial normal schools. Fund-raising was an ongoing activity for Booker Washington. Working to provide a steady and reliable revenue stream, he created lasting relationships mainly with white Northern industrialists and business magnates who approved of his gradual, patient approach to achieving African American equality and lauded Tuskegee's stress on industrial, agricultural, and domestic training.

While building a school Washington also built an educational philosophy grounded in industrial training and skills development and inspired by his preceptor, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, "a great man—the noblest, rarest human being that it has ever been my privilege to meet." Armstrong exerted a lifelong influence on his pupil. Armstrong's goals in founding Hampton were to strengthen reconciliation between North and South in the wake of the Civil War, secure peace between the races, and instill moral character among African American students through manual training and physical labor undergirded by military discipline. He considered industrial training to be the best schooling for African Americans because it would benefit the economy of the devastated South and of the entire nation. Believing that skills development in the form of African American labor was the chief economic resource of the South, Armstrong asserted that educational institutions needed to nurture African American youth primarily for manual work. "The Negro is important to the country's prosperity," he wrote. "Commerce, the law of supply and demand, the necessity of labor, all are educational."<sup>40</sup>

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Vocational Education" in Harvey Kantor and David B. Tyack, eds., *Work, Youth, and Schooling: Historical Perspectives on Vocationalism in American Education*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 180-222.

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Chapman Armstrong, quoted in Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery*, 16.

In the aftermath of the political and economic failures of Reconstruction, Washington shared his mentor's conviction that African American schooling should focus primarily on the types of vocational training that would provide economic uplift, lasting financial benefits, and moral purpose to students. Washington famously stated his views in a five-minute speech at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition. The speech, delivered before a segregated audience, established his *bona fides* and placed "The Wizard of Tuskegee" in the national spotlight as the leading spokesperson for the entire African American population.

In what rapidly became an iconic address, he argued that a strong Southern economy and lasting racial peace were symbiotic: one could not survive without the other. Given the realities of the post-Reconstruction age, Washington argued that African Americans must be educated for manual and domestic work for the time being. They needed vocational schooling more than the academic curriculum in order to be equipped for the adult world of work as it existed in the post-Reconstruction South. Earning wages through well-developed skills would enable the oncoming generation to patiently and doggedly build a solid financial base that would render their commerce indispensable to Anglo-dominated industry and business. Only through exercising the economic and labor leverage they had accrued could African Americans demand rights and freedoms that were guaranteed under the Constitution but denied under Jim Crow. Although there were other benefits to education, the accumulation of industrial and vocational skills stood as the chief objective of schooling. Only through a curriculum that touched on academics but emphasized manual training could African Americans gain the practical skills necessary to land jobs and create the economic clout to motivate white society into embracing racial equality.

Washington used his speech to make the following points:

1. African Americans had attempted to climb the economic, social, and political ranks too quickly during Reconstruction. They secured political offices, shunning manual work as undignified. Manual training would elevate the community's perception of labor. Above all, African American youth must be educated in vocational pursuits because "the great masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands...No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem."
2. Industrial and agricultural training, such as Tuskegee offered, was the surest method to build the economy. Whites should encourage occupational classes for African American youth at the secondary level in order to create the skills needed for economic progress and prosperity. Business and industrial leaders had a clear choice: "Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull the load downward."
4. Vocational education for African American youth would train them for *well-paying* jobs and maintain peace among the races and between capital and labor. Education for earning pay would be a non-threatening alternative to "agitation of questions of social equality." Slow, measured progress toward social justice was better than the "artificial forcing" of the issues at hand.
5. Pragmatic schooling was the most needed form of education given the context in which African Americans lived. "The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house."<sup>41</sup>

Washington's Atlanta speech did not rise suddenly from his mind like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. It was the product of addresses he had delivered at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition and at other events throughout the South. On every occasion he repeated a similar mantra: African American school leaders should invest in the vocational skills training of students by teaching them skills that would render them vital to white-dominated Southern commerce, industry, and agriculture. Rights, education, and the economy were interrelated in Washington's view. Whites held most of the power in the post-Reconstruction era. They respected capital, social influence, and political power. Economic profit was the white gospel.

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<sup>41</sup> Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Address," in Washington, *Up from Slavery*, (New York, Doubleday and Co., 1901), 218-225.



African Americans wielded little power, political clout, or social prestige in the South and in the nation as a whole. The only advantage they held was their domination of what the South and the country needed most: cheap labor. Thus, educators should embrace the manual and vocational school reforms that were spreading across the country and growing in popularity.

The Atlanta speech helped cement Washington's reputation as an African American educator leader whose Tuskegee curriculum would not rock the racial boat. His message linking education with economic progress and prosperity appealed to Northern business leaders large and small. While the overwhelming number of donors who supported Tuskegee's industrial skills training emphasis were white, male, married, middle-class businessmen, Northern philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie—who donated vast sums of money and built Tuskegee's library—railroad magnate Collis P. Huntington—co-founder of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Chesapeake and Ohio line— and Philadelphia department store millionaire John Wanamaker regularly supported Washington's vocational school at Tuskegee. Education's objective of grooming students for future earning power and for strengthening the American economy also resonated with countless Northern white professionals, including journalist Ray Stannard Baker and the eminent philosopher-psychologist William James.<sup>42</sup>

The Wizard of Tuskegee courted intellectuals such as James, but he remained ambivalent about the role of advanced intellectual training for African Americans in the schools because of his experiences as an adolescent during Reconstruction. In his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, Washington stated that former slaves were not ready to use the new knowledge they had acquired in the Freedmen's Schools. Ex-slaves who attended them were convinced that even a

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<sup>42</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 177-195; Henry S. Enck, "Tuskegee Institute and Northern White Philanthropy: A Case Study in Fund Raising, 1900-1915," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 65 no. 4 (Autumn 1980), 336-348.

smattering of learning would liberate them from a life of working with their hands. “The idea, however, was too prevalent that, as soon as one secured a little education, in some unexplainable way he would be free from most of the hardships of the world, and, at any rate, could live without manual labour [sic].” Washington remembered encountering students who claimed that “a knowledge, however little, of the Greek and Latin languages would make one a very superior human being, something bordering almost on the supernatural.” A morsel of education, Washington observed, unleashed “general political agitation” in the Reconstruction-era South that “drew the attention of our people away from the more fundamental matters of perfecting themselves in the industries at their doors and in securing property.”<sup>43</sup>

While Booker Washington did not counsel African Americans to avoid the academic curriculum altogether, their schools at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century should themselves learn a lesson from Reconstruction’s failures and spurn any type of learning that would prematurely agitate accepted Southern social, economic, and political arrangements. Only when African American spending power, property ownership, and overall buying power were strong enough to threaten the health and progress of Southern business should African Americans assert their rights to vote, share public facilities with whites, and campaign for equal justice under the law. To build such influence, African American public schools needed to cultivate limited vocational skills more so than intellectual capital.

In all, Washington entered what DuBois’ biographer David Levering Lewis referred to as a “Faustian bargain” with the white South and Northern business magnates. In exchange for a docile labor force trained through vocational education, calm cooperation with Jim Crow, and the embrace the gospel of hard work and discipline learned through occupational schooling,

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<sup>43</sup> Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 81.

white Southerners would gradually loosen the lyncher's noose, guarantee protection under the law, extend suffrage, and open up economic opportunities. Northerners would continue to support Tuskegee and be excused from interfering with the immoral, illegal, and unjust treatment of African Americans south of the Mason Dixon Line.<sup>44</sup>

### **III. W.E.B. DuBois' and Vocational Training: Human Capital versus Intellectual Capital**

A prolific writer in a range of genres, including history, sociology, poetry, and fiction, W.E.B. DuBois often—but not always—spoke in opposition to the educational views of Booker T. Washington. Recent scholarship has moved past the simplified perception that they were constant antagonists and examined the behind-the-scenes cooperation in which DuBois and Washington engaged. The resulting portrait of their relationship is more complex and nuanced than earlier versions.<sup>45</sup>

As DuBois began his academic career in the mid-1890s, he shared educational views that were not far removed from Washington's. Initially, he reacted favorably to Washington's 1895 Atlanta speech and to his program of building vocational and technical skills through public education for young African Americans:

I was not overcritical of Booker T. Washington. I regarded his Atlanta speech as a statesmanlike effort to reach understanding with the white south. I hoped the south would respond with equal generosity and thus the nation would come to understanding for both races.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois*, 259.

<sup>45</sup> For recent works on this issue, see Lewis' biography, *W.E.B. DuBois: A Biography of Race* (referenced above) and Frederick Dunn, "The Educational Philosophies of Washington, DuBois, and Houston: Laying the Foundations for Afrocentrism and Multiculturalism," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 62, no. 1 (Winter 1993), 24-34.

<sup>46</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom," in Rayford W. Logan, *What the Negro Wants*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 154.

Before the century turned, DuBois derided African Americans who complained that they were not getting their fair share of privileges in society:

Bah. What does man who has the world in his grasp care for the meteors that escape him—and what does the monarch of the sphere, of the 7 stars and solar years care if some little stars of the universe shine not for him? Turn your back on evils you cannot right, & press to work that is calling so loudly and clearly.<sup>47</sup>

At one time DuBois advocated the development of vocational and technical skills and economic strength among African Americans as important educational goals. In 1899, he participated in “The Negro in Business,” a major pro-business conference held at Atlanta University that attracted Governor Allen D. Candler and John Hope, a professor of classics at Atlanta Baptist College—later Morehouse University—and a future collaborator with DuBois in founding the Niagara Movement. As recording secretary and lead researcher for the conference’s final report, DuBois tabulated the findings of a research study he had conducted on the state of African American labor. He acerbically noted what the data revealed: “the great majority of Negroes are *still serfs bound to the soil or house-servants*. The nation which robbed them of the fruits of their labor for two and a half centuries finally set them adrift penniless.” He signed his name to the conference *Resolutions* that called for high schools and colleges to educate African American youth “in the necessity of business careers for young people,” in establishing “habits of thrift among young people that we may have capital at our disposal,” and in patronizing African American commercial establishments. The accumulation of capital by pursuing vocations for which schools had prepared students would help the rising African

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<sup>47</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, “Carlyle,” undated speech, c. 1895, in Francis Broderick, *W.E.B. DuBois, Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959), 66, quoted in Lifson, “DuBois-Washington Controversy”, 44.

American generation amass the needed political and economic power to affect social and political change.

In the same document, DuBois expressed hope that schools like Tuskegee would eventually make significant progress in their mission to prepare young people for practical careers. Their success would impact the American economy in a positive way by enhancing the work skills of African American youth. Although there was “as yet...little trace of this movement,” DuBois recognized that “the great industrial schools are trying to make ...the mechanical industries whence they sprung, their especial field of work and, eventually, their efforts will undoubtedly bear fruit.”<sup>48</sup>

DuBois was not the only conference attendee to address the relationship between developing vocational and technical skills through public education and the needs of American business. John Hope—professor of classics at Atlanta Baptist College and future founding member of the Niagara Movement that would oppose Washington’s appeasement approach—presented a paper on “The Meaning of Business.” Hope contended that industrial education alone would not solve what he foresaw as an escalating and racially charged competition between African Americans and whites for decent-paying factory and mill jobs. African American youth needed to be trained in schools *and* taught to save their money to create the needed capital to open their own businesses. Given the racial realities of the time, Hope argued that trained black workers who could land jobs paying fair wages could in turn patronize enterprises owned by members of their own race. Without proper training and accumulation of

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<sup>48</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, “The Negro in Business”, in DuBois, ed. *Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on the Study of the Negro Problems Held at Atlanta University, May 30-31, 1899*, (Atlanta University: 1899), 5, 50.

capital in the African American community, white owners would simply hire members of their own race as employees whether they were competent or not to do the work.<sup>49</sup>

By 1901, DuBois' ongoing research into African American business ownership and education was strengthening his opinion that intellectual preparation for college was just as crucial as industrial education to close the gap between black and white achievements. In a detailed sociological study, "The Negro Common School," the data DuBois accumulated on the connection between African American education and economic progress convinced him that it was time to make "A Third Appeal to Caesar" regarding support for African American public schools. He petitioned federal and state governments to increase funding for African American common schools—not for vocational education—and to develop intellectual capital. Earlier pleas had fallen on deaf ears in the halls of Congress, and a great deal of Northern philanthropic money was already being funneled to Tuskegee for pragmatic industrial education. DuBois warned at the close of his study that intellectual training for African Americans was essential for economic, social, political, and racial progress. So important, in fact, that he italicized his warning:

*Race antagonism can only be stopped by intelligence. It is dangerous to wait, it is foolish to hesitate. Let the nation immediately give generous aid to Southern common school education.*<sup>50</sup>

A few months later, DuBois voiced strong opposition to Washington's appeasement approach and to the prominence he gave to practical education through industrial and agricultural

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<sup>49</sup> John Hope, "The Meaning of Business," in DuBois, ed., *Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on the Study of the Negro Problems*, 56-60.

<sup>50</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, "The Negro Common School," in DuBois, ed., *Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1901*, (Atlanta, GA: University Press, 1901), p. 118. Italics are in the original.

training for the purpose of developing labor-oriented vocational and technical skills. In an article appearing in the *Dial* he acidly praised Booker Washington for achieving two things: earning the vigorous support of Southern white potentates and assimilating so perfectly the “the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism and the ideals of material prosperity” that enabled him to successfully woo Northern investors who stood ready to underwrite Washington’s brand of vocational education.<sup>51</sup>

DuBois continued to walk a line between praising Washington’s approach to education and arguing that the hour had arrived for African Americans to push harder for schooling that shaped the intellects of promising students who would proceed to college and professional schools. On one hand, he and other African American leaders who found fault with Washington’s curriculum continued to publicly support Tuskegee and its Southern spin-offs. In 1902, DuBois edited the proceedings and final report of the Seventh Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems held at Atlanta University. The document demonstrated DuBois’ emerging ambivalence about vocationalism and nurturing labor-oriented vocational and technical skills as the twin foci for secondary education. As a member of the conference’s Resolutions Committee, he joined L.M. Hershaw and W.A. Hunt in signing a proclamation that commended trade schools for African American pupils that were patterned on Washington’s successful example. Speaking for his colleagues, DuBois stated that “we especially commend trades schools as a means of imparting skill to Negroes, and manual training as a means of general education. We believe the movements in this line, especially in the last ten years, have been of inestimable benefit to the freedmen’s sons.”

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<sup>51</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, “The Evolution of Negro Leadership,” *Dial*, vol. 31, (July 1, 1901), 54.

In the same document, however, DuBois balanced the successes with shortcomings that conference attendees observed in the Hampton-Tuskegee method. Writing in their—and his own—behalf, DuBois warned vocationally-oriented school leaders against “placing undue emphasis on the ‘practical’ character of their work.” He noted that “the best learning is more than merely practical since it seeks to apply itself, not simply to present modes of living, but to a larger, broader life which lives today, perhaps, in theory only, but may come to realization tomorrow by the help of educated and good men.” In a strong statement, DuBois and his colleagues contended that “above all, black men of light and leading, College-bred men, must be trained to guide and lead the millions of this struggling race along paths of intelligent and helpful co-operation.” Further, DuBois and other conference leaders cautioned that lurking in vocational training for young African Americans as practiced in schools arranged along the Hampton-Tuskegee axis was a Dickensian pattern that overemphasized schooling for manual labor and underemphasized academic training that could lead to professional careers.<sup>52</sup>

At DuBois’ invitation, Booker Washington shared the same podium with DuBois at the 1902 Atlanta conference. As the meeting’s final speaker, Washington’s remarks on vocational and technical skills and education ran counter to the views of DuBois and the conference’s Resolutions Committee. Washington told conference attendees—many of whom were professors and higher education administrators— that “we can begin in no wiser way than...beginning just where the race finds itself at the moment of beginning.” Washington underscored the importance of agricultural training because most African Americans in the South were tied to the soil already, and they stood to earn financial gain by purchasing land, skillfully improving it, and

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<sup>52</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, ed., *The Negro Artisan: Report of a Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Seventh Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1902*, (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press, 1902), 8, 11, 81.



selling its produce. Washington predicted that the majority of African Americans would remain tillers of the soil into the foreseeable future. “Since the bulk of our people are to live out of the soil, are accustomed to agricultural life, it is my opinion that agriculture should be made the chief industry for our people, at least for a long number of years.” Schools should therefore equip young people to work the land above all else. Even college graduates, he counseled, should nail their diploma to the walls of a farmhouse and “start a truck farm, dairy farm, or conduct a cotton plantation.” Washington also advocated a strong program of vocational training in the domestic arts. “We should the proper thing, regardless of criticism, which will enable our people to hold on to all forms of domestic service in the South.” He decried the negative influences of urban life on African American adolescents, and repeated his call for more emphasis to be laid on vocational training in schools that would lead to financially productive occupations in which they already had a foothold.

DuBois listened as Washington avowed that “our knowledge must be harnessed to the practical things of life. I want to see more of our educated young men and women take hold in a downright, earnest manner of the fundamental, primary, wealth-producing occupations that constitute the prosperity of every people.” Again calling forth his memories of African Americans who had overestimated the usefulness of the education they attained in the Reconstruction-era Freedmen’s Schools, Washington told the assembled scholars that he abhorred the possibility of college-educated students becoming “parasite[s] living upon the wealth originally produced by others” rather than “first-hand producer[s] of wealth.” His words echoed those of David Snedden and others in the vocational movement who argued that the nation’s economy was composed of producers and consumers, of givers and takers, and that public education should shape as many producers as possible. It is not too far-fetched to think

that this was an oblique reference to the professors and administrators who sat in the Atlanta conference audience.<sup>53</sup>

DuBois believed that Washington's call for schools to foreground vocational training and his commitment to assigning a more prominent role to developing *vocational and technical skills* than to fostering *intellectual* capital was misplaced. He rejected Washington's advice that youth should be content for the time being to work at jobs that did not threaten the hegemony of the white Southern labor force. He argued that they need not restrict themselves to be content working in the agricultural sector, and that the Tuskegeean was merely pandering to white powerbrokers.

Besides, Washington's dual strategy of practical high school education coupled with appeasing the racial status quo was simply not working. Hostility toward African Americans and white supremacy movements gathered momentum at the dawn of the new century despite Washington's call for gradual, safe race progress and his reputation in the white community as a voice of moderation. With pressure building up in DuBois to counter Washington's message that for the past decade had captured the ear of influential white leaders from the White House to Wall Street, DuBois struck back by publishing *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a collection of essays, stories, and poetry that has since achieved iconic status. In his essay, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington," DuBois sternly rebuked the Tuskegeean's social and educational viewpoints:

[I]t has been claimed that the Negro can survive only through submission. Mr. Washington asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things,--  
First political power,  
Second insistence on civil rights,  
Third higher education of Negro youth,--and concentrate all their energies on I industrial education, and accumulation of wealth, and the

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<sup>53</sup> Booker T. Washington, "Closing Remarks," in *The Negro Artisan*, 5-7.

conciliation of the South....As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years there have occurred:

1. The disfranchisement of the Negro.
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.
3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.<sup>54</sup>

To DuBois' way of thinking, Washington was a living paradox with a bi-polar orientation to the education of African Americans. Washington advocated accumulation of property and the financial means to enjoy a secure life, yet he did not publicly press for the franchise that would ensure that they could keep them. He promoted vocational education for African American youth over university training, yet without teachers trained in normal schools there would be no one to instruct in vocational classrooms. He stood for dignity and self-realization, yet counseled African Americans to subordinate themselves to whites for the time being. In DuBois' mind, Washington's philosophy of vocational training was a hollow exercise unless African Americans stood up to protect their other Constitutional rights, demanded admission to voting booths, and acted assertively to claim equality in every aspect of daily life. Washington did not avow these positions in his public life. Instead, the Machiavelli of the Black Belt, as DuBois would later call him, worked behind the scenes—sometimes with DuBois' collaboration—to campaign for racial equality.<sup>55</sup>

The 1901 publication of Booker T. Washington's autobiography *Up from Slavery* tightened the tension between the two leaders. Ghost-written by Max Bennett Thrasher, a white New England journalist, Washington's book became an instant hit. In Upstate New York,

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<sup>54</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Rockville, MD: ARC Manor, 2008), 41-42.

<sup>55</sup> Washington embraced the African American suffrage movement and the campaign for rights, and he collaborated in private with DuBois on several occasions in these efforts. For more information on his behind-the-scenes collaboration with DuBois, see Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois: A Biography of Race*, 258ff.

photography magnate George Eastman gushed over the work. When he finished the last page, Eastman wrote a check for five-thousand dollars to support the Tuskegee mission. William Sanders Scarborough, professor of classics at Wilberforce, praised the volume as “one of the sanest, most interesting and convincing of autobiographies—sane in views, interesting in unique material, and convincing in itself as a plain statement of the possibilities of the Negro race.” Aware of the tensions in the African American community over the purpose of education and its role in race relations, Scarborough predicted, perhaps with Pollyannish hope, that “it will help much in refuting errors, encouraging friends, and converting enemies.”<sup>56</sup>

Washington’s autobiography did not convert W.E.B. DuBois. In a review of *Up from Slavery* published in *The Dial* in July 1901, DuBois did not openly criticize the book. Instead, he portrayed the Wizard of Tuskegee as a holdover from the Ancien Regime whose success in selling his concept of vocational education to whites in the South and the North was notable. DuBois allowed that Washington had not created the concept of vocational education for African American students; however, he had enlivened an idea that already existed and provided a model that spread across the South. At the same time, DuBois noted that Washington was opposed by many leaders in the African American community who were suspicious of the ease with which he and his educational agenda were accepted among whites. His pattern for educating African American youth “falls far short of a complete programme [*sic*].” DuBois and others such as writer Paul Laurence Dunbar, painter Henry Ossawa Tanner, and novelist Charles W. Chesnutt, respected Washington and his accomplishments but called for “self-development and self-

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<sup>56</sup> Louis Harlan, ed., *Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. I, p. xxx, quoted in Levering, *W.E.B. DuBois*, 263; William S. Scarborough, review of B.T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 18 (Nov., 1901), 151.

realization in all lines of human endeavour [*sic*] which they believe will place the Negro beside the other races.”<sup>57</sup>

The tension of the philosophical disagreement over vocational and academic education reached a new level of strain after DuBois published his frank assessment of the Tuskegeean's work in an article he called “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington,” which appeared in *The Souls of Black Folk* in April 1903. He openly challenged Washington, whose anointing as the spokesperson of the African American community was conferred by Whites and by those Blacks who, DuBois contended, were uninformed about what Washington's message of appeasement really meant for them. African Americans needed to raise up their own leadership. Washington's compromise with White powerbrokers and financial donors in the matter of race relations, coupled with his narrowly conceived view that vocational training was the most appropriate path to the promised land of financial success, was unacceptable and made him a false prophet who had committed apostasy.

DuBois saw that Washington's “propaganda” gave white Americans a skewed interpretation of African Americans. First, to believe Washington's message was to accept that the reduced socio-economic status of Southern blacks legitimized Southern Whites' establishment of Jim Crowism; second, that Blacks' economic advance had bogged down because during Reconstruction they had chosen to meander through the wilderness of an inferior and incomplete academic education in the Freedmen's schools instead of selecting the straighter

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<sup>57</sup> DuBois, “The Evolution of Negro Leadership,” 54-55; Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift*, (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 143. For a deep exploration of the interlocking career paths of DuBois, Tanner, and Chesnutt, see Matthew Wilson, “The Advent of ‘The Nigger’: The Careers of Paul Laurence Dunbar, Henry O. Tanner, and Charles W. Chesnutt,” *American Studies*, vol. 43 no. 1 (Spring 2002), 5-50.

path of occupational training that would have guided them into a Canaan of economic prosperity; and third, that the progress of the freedmen's sons and daughters could only be earned through self-help and bootstrap-lifting with little assistance from outside the African American community.

DuBois set out to correct these false impressions. He argued that racist policies Caucasians enacted after the Civil War and in the wake of the failed experiment of Reconstruction had in reality created the deflated status of African Americans and their economy. The inadequacies of industrial and agricultural education for Southern Blacks existed because there were not enough colleges to train professional teachers who could improve them, and few promising scholars were encouraged to attend the limited number of colleges that had been set up specifically to admit them. Finally, although DuBois allowed that indeed African American youth needed to help themselves, they still required the assistance of the federal government and White society in general along with the removal of racist barricades that so often obstructed their forward movement.<sup>58</sup>

In that same year of 1903, DuBois published his iconic essay "The Talented Tenth" in *The Problem of the Negro*. David Levering Lewis reckons that the now-famous phrase germinated in DuBois' mind while an undergraduate at Fisk, found nourishment in his study at the University of Berlin in the early 1890s, and was heavily fertilized by the Episcopal chaplain at Wilberforce, Alexander Crummell, who argued from his university pulpit for in-depth higher education for African American youth who could provide leadership for the Black community.<sup>59</sup> In "The Talented Tenth" can be seen DuBois' movement away from his earlier conception of

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<sup>58</sup> Moore, "Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift," 72.

<sup>59</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois*, 73. 133. 165, 206, 288.

education in service to the “gospel of money” and toward an increased emphasis on the intellectual and leadership development of promising African American youth.

“The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men.” At the top of his essay, DuBois submitted a question for which the remainder of his short work provided a sharp, clear answer: “Was there ever a nation on God’s fair earth civilized from the bottom upward? Never it is, ever was, or ever will be from the top downward that culture filters.” Like the author of Ecclesiasticus—whose words he might well have heard while seated beneath the pulpit of the Episcopal priest Crummell at Wilberforce—DuBois sang the praises of famous men and women who were the glory of their times and who stood as shining examples of the Talented Tenth.<sup>60</sup>

The first generation of exceptional leaders—the Revolutionary Group—was the leaven that lifted the enslaved African American community during colonial era and the decades of the early Republic. DuBois included among the list of notables from that period the poet Phyllis Wheatley and scientist, astronomer, and almanac publisher Benjamin Banneker, who corresponded with Thomas Jefferson on the matter of the unjust and ironic enslavement of an entire people in a Republic built on the phrase he had turned in the Declaration of Independence, which announced “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

A second generation of exceptional leaders emerged in the wake of Eli Whitney’s cotton gin, which mechanized post-harvest cotton production, exponentially increased the amount of cotton that had to be picked, and intensified the South’s dependence on enslaved laborers. In

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<sup>60</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, “The Talented Tenth,” in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of To-Day*, (New York: James Pott and Co., 1903).

contrast to the racist white stereotype of the uneducated “darkie” who was fit only for manual labor stood the examples of Ira Aldridge, decorated Shakespearean actor whose interpretations of the Bard’s scripts enthralled audiences and the crowned heads of Europe. DuBois celebrated David Walker, “that Voice crying in the Wilderness,” the abolitionist and activist whose prophetic message rang out in protest against the ownership of African Americans for the purposes of forced labor and a chained existence. DuBois included Sojourner Truth as a member of the Talented Tenth. Above all others of that generation of distinguished African American leaders was Frederick Douglass, one of the “living examples of the possibilities of the Negro race.” Quoting the White abolitionist Maria Weston Chapman, Black anti-slavery spokespersons were “Corinthian capitals for the noblest temples.” Some leaders, such as Douglass, were self-educated; others were formed in the leading institutions of Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, where they were mentored academically by leading white scholars.

The post-Emancipation generation of the Talented Tenth included Langston, Bruce, Elliott, Greener, Williams, and Payne. DuBois noted that “it is the fashion to-day [1903] to sneer at them and to say that with freedom Negro leadership should have begun at the plow and not in the Senate.” This was an obvious reference to the approach of Washington and his Tuskegee advocates—Black and White—who believed that African American youth needed first to be trained for practical occupations during the high school years before aspiring to hold high offices and professional positions that might require university training.

Turning to a consideration of the need for a new Talented Tenth in his own time—the era of Jim Crowism and escalating incidents of lynching, intimidation, obstruction at polling places, and general violence against members of the African American community both within the South and outside of it—DuBois noted that the only way to overcome “The Problem of the



Negro”—as suggested by the book’s title—was to lift up “an aristocracy of talent and character.” And the only way to groom such an elite group was through schooling the “best and most capable of their youth in colleges and universities of the land.”

DuBois countered Booker Washington’s followers who insisted that university education would not enhance the economic progress of the American community. He outlined the process by which contemporary African American leaders in business, academics, and the professions in the closing decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had already been trained, and the immense impact they had exercised on the South’s economy. First, the best and brightest high school scholars had been encouraged to attend colleges and universities where Black students were admitted. Second, upon graduation, they had trained many youth “in morals and manners” that bespoke refinement, culture, responsibility, and success in their chosen fields. In turn, these students obtained a higher education and taught African American learners who “to-day hold \$300,000,000 of property.” DuBois called this development “a miracle—the most wonderful peace-battle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”

He acknowledged his critics from the Tuskegee Machine and their White supporters, who appealed for most black students to ride the rising wave of practical vocational training that was breaking across the ocean of high school reform. The increasing popularity of occupational classes, Washington and his allies asserted, would lead to financial security and strengthen the South’s economy. DuBois was concerned that focusing so narrowly on such goals rather than setting their sights on a university education would deplete the ranks of future African American leaders. Without mentioning him by name, he noted that Washington and his allies claimed that the best way to school African American young people was to give them “spelling books and

hoes” first, and then “look about for teachers” who could train people academically and vocationally. This strategy was backwards, and it would not work.<sup>61</sup>

To emphasize the points that pragmatic school training for a specific future occupation was not the only path to economic betterment and that a university education could prepare a student to earn a decent living and provide needed leadership for the African American community, DuBois provided concrete evidence. In a survey he had conducted prior to the publication of *The Problem of the Negro*, DuBois saw that the numbers did not support Washington’s conclusion that practical training was the sole conduit to financial success. DuBois research revealed the facts gleaned from a questionnaire completed by 1,312 college graduates in 1903. Out of the total respondents, DuBois computed the following percentages:

Teachers: 53.4%  
Clergy: 16.8%  
Physicians, Nurses, Dentists: 6.3%  
Students: 5.6%  
Lawyers: 4.7%  
Government Service: 4.0%  
Business: 3.6%  
Farmers/Artisans: 2.7%  
Editors, Secretaries, Clerks: 2.4%  
Miscellaneous: 0.5%

At the end, DuBois noted that the chief trait of the Talented Tenth was leadership, which had provided “five million and more of ignorant people with teachers of their own race and blood” in one generation. University-trained teachers had not only communicated content and basic academic skills, but had given “almost every Negro child an attainable ideal.” For DuBois,

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<sup>61</sup> DuBois, “Talented Tenth,” 47.

higher education—and schooling at every level—was more than a training ground for making money and strengthening the economy. It was preparation for life itself.

In summary, both DuBois and Washington waded deeply into the national vocational education school reform debate. Their disagreements echoed the central themes of the discourse that occupied the energies of the educational community in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: the central role of education and the promises and dangers of viewing the schooling of youth in terms of vocational and technical skills. Their participation in the debate over school reform is evidence of the widespread reach and importance of an emerging new vision for schools. No longer were they expected to teach only civic responsibility and public morality; they were also tasked with the responsibility of preparing the new generation to assume its place in the adult world. At the crux of the differences between DuBois' and Washington's approaches to education was how schooling should be used in the shaping of society. For Dubois, the clear purpose of schooling African American and other minority youth was to prepare them to tackle the injustices of White hegemony and contemporary racial constructions in American society. He stridently opposed any philosophy of vocational education that would continue the current Jim Crow subordination of Black and minority populations in American society. As for Washington, vocational education for African American youth was a ticket to a job whose pay could keep poverty at bay and strengthen the moral aspects of dignified labor while not upsetting the contemporary racial system. Where DuBois' vision of vocational training—and of education in general—was to *transform* social configurations, Washington's vision was to use vocational training to *conform* to them in hopes of eventual change.

## **Philosophies of Women in Vocational Education Reform**

Few scholars have devoted attention to the roles women played in the debate over vocational school reform in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Little has been written about the educational foundations that undergirded the occupational curricula they designed and carried out. Here I examine the roles of two women who shaped the contours of the vocational education reform debate between 1890 and 1917: Anna Julia Cooper and Nannie Helen Burroughs.

### **I. “Education for the Neglected”: Anna Julia Cooper**

Early in life, Anna Julia Cooper established a pattern of moving outside the boundaries that white society circumscribed for African Americans. She also transcended the limitations that society in general drew for women in the late Victorian and Progressive periods. As a student at St. Augustine’s Normal and Collegiate Institute in Raleigh she protested against the policy that only males could enter the classical curriculum. The Episcopal school’s courses were divided according to gender, with most academic subjects reserved for male students who intended to go to college or to enroll in a seminary to train for the Episcopal priesthood. Displaying the proactive approach to injustices that would characterize her adult career as an educator, young Cooper argued that all of the school’s classes should be open to males and females alike. Anna wanted to study Greek and Latin more than vocational subjects, particularly domestic arts. Her persistence led school administrators to allow her to take classical languages. Upon arriving to study the classics at Oberlin College, she refused to be confined to the “ladies course” and instead signed up for the male curriculum. Again, school administrators acquiesced

and permitted her to remain in the “male” studies program. Cooper graduated in 1884 and returned to earn a master’s degree in mathematics in 1887.

Moving to Washington, DC in 1887, Cooper was hired to teach at M Street High School, the only high school open to African American youth in the nation’s segregated capital. From 1887 until the end of her life, she dedicated her career to “education for the neglected”: African American boys and girls who displayed superior intellectual abilities. She began her career under the tutelage of Francis L. Cardozo, M Street’s principal from 1884 to 1896. Cardozo had built the curriculum around classical subjects, after the practice of most public high schools at the time. M Street accepted only the best and brightest students, many of whom matriculated from states and foreign nations where secondary education for people of color did not exist. Because of Cardozo’s elevated standards, a talented student body, and a well-educated faculty, the majority of M Street students graduated 12<sup>th</sup> grade and proceeded to college.

Cardozo’s knowledge of the M Street student body led him to acknowledge that even though his students represented what DuBois termed the “Talented Tenth,” not all pupils wanted to attend college. He therefore established a business curriculum, the first one in the District of Columbia public school system.<sup>62</sup>

Anna Julia Cooper believed that education was the best lever for prying open the door to opportunity for African Americans. In 1893, after her sixth year of teaching at M Street, she traveled to Chicago to participate in the World Congress of Representative Women, convened at the Columbian Exposition. Cooper enlightened her racially mixed audience about the critical

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<sup>62</sup> Cooper, “My Racial Philosophy,” in Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 236; Johnson, *Uplifting Women and the Race*, 53. M Street High School was renamed Dunbar High School when it moved to a new building in 1916.

role teaching and learning must play in the quest for economic opportunity among African American females:

Our idea of getting an education did not come out of wanting to imitate any one whatever. It grew out of the uneasiness and restlessness of the desires we felt within us; the desire to know, not just a little, but a great deal. We wanted to know how to calculate an eclipse, to know what Hesiod and Livy thought; we wished to know the best thoughts of the best minds that lived with us; not merely to gain an honest livelihood, but from a God-given love of all that is beautiful and best, and because we thought we could do it. If black girls can calculate equations and logarithms as I saw them doing yesterday, how much more could you with your higher inheritance do? Do you consider that you owe us an obligation for that?

There was a single word used in the address that I heard this evening that I cannot hear without having permission to reply. What is that word? We, as you know, are classed among the working people, and so when the days of slavery were over, and we wanted an education, people said, "What are you going to do with an education?" You know yourselves you have been met with a great many arguments of that kind. Why educate the woman - what will she do with it? An impertinent question, and an unwise one. Rather ask, "What will she be with it?" We are getting a better education all through America. I cannot think that the selfishness, the discourtesy that would push down a poor, weak, innocent creature because it could not protect itself will long remain in America. It is bound to succumb to the better education that is everywhere being given, till people will call it after awhile by its right name, viz: very bad manners.<sup>63</sup>

A superb teacher who demanded hard work and excellence from her students in Latin, Greek, and classical literature, Cooper's teaching, organizational, and leadership abilities were recognized when the District of Columbia's school board named her principal of M Street in 1902. She reinforced the school's academic reputation and intensified her commitment to using the traditional high school curriculum as a tool to improve the social and economic circumstances of African Americans. Cooper's accomplishments were remarkable, especially

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<sup>63</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "Discussion of the Same Subject: The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation," speech delivered at The World's Congress of Representative Women, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Ill., 1893, in Charles Lemert and Esme Bahn, eds., *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper, Including A Voice from the South, and other Important Essay, Papers, and Letters*, 201-206.

given the circumstances: Congress controlled District of Columbia schools and was largely hostile to African American public education, and the school board was dominated by whites.<sup>64</sup>

Despite her accomplishments, the outspoken feminist and educator was about to enter a difficult period in her professional life. Political manipulation to remove the energetic, straight-talking principal of M Street School began as Cooper continued to voice her opposition to Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee model and to deepen her connections to the W.E.B. DuBois philosophy of education. In 1906, the new white administrator of the city's African American public high schools, Percy M. Hughes, orchestrated Cooper's ouster as principal. According to historian Alison Stewart, a quiet storm over her principalship had been brewing among some white and African American education activists since she took office. Some white leaders apparently objected to Cooper's status as a prominent principal who was African American, had no children, advocated feminist views, campaigned for women's suffrage, and possessed two college degrees. She was an anomaly in racist, segregationist turn-of-the twentieth-century Washington. As Stewart observes, "She was that rare sort of soul who didn't seem to answer to anyone or anything but her own moral compass."<sup>65</sup>

The most egregious transgression in the School Board's view was Cooper's emphasis on academics and preparing students for college and her tendency to *downplay occupational courses* in M Street's curriculum. During her tenure as principal, vocational education models were beginning to take hold in high schools such as those in Massachusetts. Their popularity was growing in schools in a range of urban areas across the country. The Tuskegee pattern of vocational education for African American youth had already proven itself popular among many

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<sup>64</sup> For a comprehensive history of M Street-Dunbar High School, see Alison Stewart, *First Class: The Legacy of Dunbar, America's First Black Public High School*, (Chicago: Chicago School Press, 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Stewart, *First Class*, 39.

whites and African Americans. School Board officials and members of the African American community in Washington who supported the Tuskegee Machine wanted Cooper to emphasize the *vocational* curriculum as keenly as she foregrounded *academic* preparation for college. She was not opposed to the business-oriented courses that Cardozo had introduced a decade earlier for pupils who were intellectually gifted but did not plan to enter college. However, she simply refused to disturb the balance between academic and occupational courses by favoring vocationalism. Cooper believed that such a transformation would undermine the academic ethos she and her predecessors had worked so hard to strengthen. After four years of convincing white colleges to accept African American graduates from M Street, Cooper was not about to siphon the faculty's energy away from traditional classes. Nor was she prepared to be persuaded into thinking that manual labor would be "easier" and "more appropriate" for African Americans than scholarship and professional work. Cooper was convinced that installing a more muscular vocational track along the lines of the Tuskegee standard would only encourage white society's prevailing conception that African American students were destined to occupy menial jobs with no chance for promotion. Her steadfast refusal to reform M Street into a more Tuskegee-like institution was the last straw for the School Board. Despite Cooper's energetic protests, her dismissal was made permanent in 1906.

Some observers note that Cooper was dismissed because of her close identification with the educational philosophy of W.E.B. DuBois and her lack of support for the Tuskegee vocational agenda. Also suspected is behind-the-scenes maneuvering on the parts of Booker T. Washington's supporters in White and African American educational circles in the nation's capital. Cooper and DuBois had forged an intellectual connection in the 1890s, and their link



continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century even though DuBois did not spring to her aid when the School Board removed her.<sup>66</sup>

It seems clear that the historical record supports Horace Mann Bond's assertion that the Washington, D.C. School Board removed Cooper because of her association with DuBois and her advocacy for social, gender, and economic change through rigorous academic training. In 1897, Cooper had been the sole woman invited to join the newly created all-male American Negro Academy, an organization of elite African American intelligentsia that counted DuBois among its charter members. DuBois accepted Cooper's invitation to address the student body at the M Street School in the winter of 1902-1903. In 1905—a year before her dismissal as M Street's principal—Anna J. Cooper was the only woman invited to the first meeting of the Niagara Movement.

Her commitment to retain the college preparatory curriculum as the centerpiece of M Street rather than permit the introduction of vocational courses certainly reflected her allegiance to DuBois' approach to education. Under the leadership of both Cooper and Cardozo, M Street forged its reputation as a school of high academic achievement that graduated young men and women who were prepared for university courses, the world of commerce, and the professions. In 1899, all students in Washington, D.C.'s public secondary schools were administered a test. M Street students outscored every other institution in the District. Constance Green has found that the M Street faculty possessed more college degrees than any White school at the time. This reality underscores the argument that Cooper's primary goal was to prepare African American youth for higher education, the professions, and positions of leadership, not for manual labor or

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<sup>66</sup> Errol Tsekani Browne, "Anna Julia Cooper and Black Women's Intellectual Tradition: Race, Gender, and Nation in the Making of a Modern Race Woman, 1892-1925," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008.

for the subservient social and economic status that white society intended for them under Jim Crow arrangements.<sup>67</sup>

Although Cooper aligned herself with the DuBois camp and preferred to keep the academic curriculum in the foreground, she did not oppose high school vocational classes *per se*, and she supported the concept that education and the development of vocational and technical skills were important partners. A visionary who tempered her views with pragmatism, she believed that vocational training served a practical role in educating African American young people to make a living. During a speech at the Hampton Conference in 1894, she declared her support for manual training:

I believe in industrial education with all my heart. We can't all be professional people. We must have a backbone to the race....There is a crisis ahead in the labor question....The people of this country will inevitably look around for a stable working class. When the time comes for the need to be appreciated and satisfied, the Negro must be ready to satisfy it; there will be no prejudice against the colored man as a worker."<sup>68</sup>

Her prediction that "there will be no prejudice against the colored man as a worker" would often be disproved in the North when African American men and women migrated to industrial cities to take better paying jobs. Yet she remained hopeful that manual training at the

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<sup>67</sup> Johnson, *Uplifting the Women and the Race*, 81-82; "Protests from Teachers: Mrs. Anna J. Cooper, J.L. Love, and J.B. Clark Object to Dismissal," *Washington Post*, September 19, 1906, 2; "Not Entitled to Pay: District Auditor Rules Against Deposed Teachers," *Washington Post*, January 5, 1907, 14; "Colored High School," *Washington Post*, September 19, 1905, 1-4; L.D. Hutchinson, "Anna Julia Cooper in Darlene Clark Hines, ed., *Black Women in America*, 67; Carol Ortman Perkins, *Pragmatic Idealism: Industrial Training, Liberal Education, and Women's Special Needs: Conflict and Continuity in the Experience of Mary McLeod Bethune and Other Black Women Educators, 1900-1930*, Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School and San Diego State University, 1986,

<sup>68</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, Address before the Second Hampton Negro Conference," May 1894, quoted in Errol Tsekani Browne, "Anna Julia Cooper and Black Women's Intellectual Tradition: Race, Gender and Nation in the Making of a Modern Race Woman, 1892-1925," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2008, 247

high school level would at least qualify and inspire them to pursue a wider range of occupations than were open to them in the 1890s.<sup>69</sup>

On another occasion, Cooper shared her awareness that the economic situations of some African American females prohibited them from studying the traditional high school curriculum and moving ahead to the university level. Millions of young African American girls and women needed to train for the narrow spectrum of vocational choices that were available to them at the time. One of them was domestic work. Even then, it was essential to Cooper that students who elected to take pragmatic courses in subjects traditionally assigned to females—cooking, nutrition, housekeeping, and child care—be formed in the high school years by the ideals of Christian womanhood.

Let us insist then on special encouragement for the education of our women and special care in their training. Let our girls feel that we expect more of them than that they merely look pretty and appear well in society. Teach them that there is a race with special needs and [it] is already asking for their trained, efficient forces. Finally—if there is an ambitious girl with pluck and brain to take the higher education, encourage her to make the most of it. The earnest, well-trained Christian woman, as a teacher, a homemaker, a wife, mother, or silent influence even, is as potent a missionary agency among our people as is the theologian; and I claim that at the present state of our development in the South she is even more important and necessary.<sup>70</sup>

Still, Cooper was more committed to racial uplift through academic training of African Americans than through domestic, agricultural, and industrial training. She argued that although

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<sup>69</sup> In Detroit, for example, it was not until the period surrounding World War I that Henry Ford opened up more desirable, higher paying jobs for African American men in his automobile plants. Still, they faced significant discrimination and racism on the factory floor and in the United Auto Workers' union. Meanwhile, General Motors and Chrysler continued to hire African Americans almost exclusively for janitorial work and other menial jobs until well after Ford expanded job opportunities. See Beth Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women," American Conference of Educators, March 25-27, 1890, in *A Voice from the South*; see also Browne, "Anna Julia Cooper and Black Women's Intellectual Tradition."

many African Americans had little choice but to engage in occupational classes, “education should be aim[ed] at making men [*sic*] rather than constructing machines.”<sup>71</sup>

She was convinced that women were essential to improving the social and economic conditions of African Americans in general and believed that higher education was the best training ground for leadership. Women’s impact was “real and special,” she wrote. It formed “an influence subtle and often involuntary, an influence so intimately interwoven in, so intricately interpenetrated by the masculine influence of the time that it is often difficult to extricate the delicate meshes and identify the closely clinging fibers.” She believed that men and women are neither superior nor inferior to one another, but are “complements...in one necessary and symmetric whole.”

## **II. “The Bible, the Bath, and the Broom”: Nannie Helen Burroughs’ Perspectives on Vocational Education Reform**

Nannie Helen Burroughs was a national voice in the vocational education debates of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly as they impacted the schooling of African American girls and young women. Like most educators who embraced the vocational school reform movement, she connected educational advancement primarily with the development of vocational and technical skills while emphasizing moral training and Christian womanhood. However, her contributions have been largely ignored by all but a few educational historians, most of whom have instead concentrated much of their work on the male intelligentsia in African American education during the period under consideration. Paul Violas discusses only Booker T. Washington when exegeting African American vocationalism. James D. Anderson’s important history, *The*

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<sup>71</sup> Anna J. Cooper, “On Education,” Anna J. Cooper Papers, quoted in Johnson, *Uplifting the Women and the Race*, 109.

*Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* focuses on Washington and DuBois and ignores Burroughs' contributions. Melvin Barlow's institutional history of vocational education passes over not only Burroughs but Washington and DuBois as well. Historian Sharon Harley has observed that "[Burroughs'] ideas and public life were an eclectic mix of Washington (she was sometimes referred to as 'Mrs. Booker T. Washington'), Du Bois, and [Marcus] Garvey. Moreover, she exhibited the courage and principled positions of Wells-Barnett, including her style of hard-hitting criticisms."<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps historians have passed over Burroughs' contributions because a great deal of her fundraising and campaigning for vocational education in behalf of African American women was carried out primarily within religious circles, particularly the National Baptist Convention (NBC). Harley believes she is overlooked because she identified more with working-class African American females than with the elite classes: the janitor who labored in Washington, D.C.'s federal office buildings; the laundress who lived in the District's alleyways and hired herself out to middle and upper class families; the cook who, as her own mother had done, prepared meals in the kitchens of cafeterias and wealthy members of Washington society. The answer to the puzzling question of what types of vocational and academic training were really needed in America's schools was to be found in the living rooms and on the front porches of the nation's poor laborers, not in the theoretical works of elite educators, in the tidy offices of the Chamber of Commerce, or at the long tables of corporate boardrooms. Regarding the domination of vocational education debates by well-intentioned White and African American middle and upper class commentators, Burroughs argued that in reality the men and women who

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<sup>72</sup> Paul Violas, *The Training of the Urban Working Class: A History of Twentieth Century American Education*, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1978); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Barlow, *History of Industrial Education*; Sharon Harley, "Nannie Helen Burroughs: 'The Black Goddess of Liberty,'" *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 81, no. 1/4, "Vindicating the Race: Contributions to African-American Intellectual History," (Winter - Autumn, 1996), 62.

performed manual labor in American society had a keener awareness of what was needed for “racial uplift”: “I swear by my plain people. There are none like them . . . nowhere in this country is the situation of the colored man in America more clearly recognized and soundly analyzed than in the homes of the humblest.” <sup>73</sup>

Burroughs and Anna Julia Cooper shared several characteristics in common. They were African American females and children of the South who grew up in poverty. Both women were superior orators and firm believers that education was a key component in racial uplift. Cooper and Burroughs were “club women,” members of various Progressive African American women’s organizations dedicated to improving the lives of African Americans—especially women and children— through social, economic, educational, and political activism. They shared membership in the popular National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Through the women’s club movement that peaked during the Progressive era, they involved themselves in the struggle for suffrage, social improvement, and economic parity among men, women, and the races. The timing and location of their teaching careers began to overlap in 1892, when Burroughs enrolled as a student at M Street High School and fell under the influence of Anna Julia Cooper.

While pursuing interests in business courses, domestic arts, and ancient Greek and Latin literature at M Street, Cooper’s impact on the young Burroughs inspired her to embark on a career educating African American women through a combination of occupational training and academics. The school Burroughs opened in 1909 for African American adolescent girls from impoverished families blended rigorous, traditional classes and *vocational* courses in a model

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<sup>73</sup> Harley, “Black Goddess of Liberty,” 63, quoting a Burroughs’ news clipping from *The Afro-American*, April 7, 1934, in Nannie Helen Burroughs Collection, Box 331, Library of Congress.

curriculum that educators eventually called the comprehensive high school. Surrounding the comprehensive curriculum was an aura of Christian morality. Burroughs summarized her approach to vocational and academic education for African American girls and women as the “Three B’s: the Bible, the Bath, and the Broom,” shorthand religious faith, clean bodies, and homes that were to be kept spic-and-span.<sup>74</sup>

#### **A. The Bible: The Role of Religion in Burroughs’ Approach to Vocational Education**

Two traits marked Nannie Helen Burroughs’ character: pragmatism and Christian faith. A practical leader, she recognized that domestic work was the most available wage earning labor in the nation’s capital and throughout the South. Her view of the job prospects for African American women was realistic: most of the students in her school would graduate to domestic positions in the homes of elite Washingtonians and Southerners. She was also a deeply religious, lifelong Baptist. Unlike most of the figures we have already discussed, Burroughs was not college educated. Through vocationalism she aimed to transform not only the personal lives of African American girls and women, but also the racist American society in which they lived. As Debra Newman has noted, “Faith in God and biblical Christianity seemed to radiate from every fiber of Miss Burroughs’ being, coloring everything that she said and wrote and shaping her philosophy toward all other aspects of life.” Burroughs herself announced that the goal of her vocational program was to make it “a glory to God on earth.”<sup>75</sup>

Dynamic and outspoken, Burroughs was prophetic but not in the sense of being an oracle who foretold the future. Nannie Helen Burroughs was prophetic not because she was a

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<sup>74</sup> Nannie Helen Burroughs, quoted in Debra L. Newman, “Jesus and Justice: Nannie Helen Burroughs and the Struggle for Civil Rights,” *Humanity and Society*, vol. 12, no.3 (1988), 273.

<sup>75</sup> Newman, “Jesus and Justice, 269; Nannie Helen Burroughs, Letter to Mrs. Fannie B. Shaw, September 21, 1954, Anadarko, OK, Library of Congress, Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, quoted in Newman, 269.

visionary, but in the sense that she used vocational education, religious faith, as well as ecclesiastical and social institutions—the National Baptist Convention and the Black women’s club movement—to work for justice, racial equality, and occupational opportunity for Black women. Like DuBois, Burroughs spoke out regularly in addresses, letters, articles, and journals calling for a new society bereft of racism. Like Washington, she examined the vocational opportunities for Black girls and young women with a practical eye. She concluded that the best strategy to bring about social and occupational equality was to train them for the most prevalent jobs available, mostly in homes, restaurants, hotels, laundry facilities, and businesses that called for high-level sewing skills. Through Christian moral training in vocational classes, Burroughs trained students to work as Christian women were expected to work: with moral purity, cleanliness, and dedication to the task no matter how menial.

Raised in a Bible-centered, mission-oriented evangelical church community, Nannie Helen Burroughs developed deep religious roots that influenced her approach to vocational education. As Tameka L. Dunlap has pointed out, Burroughs’ faith, pragmatism, and commitment to uplifting African American women who thrashed to keep themselves and their families above the floodwaters of poverty came together in her mission of vocational education. “Burroughs conflated her appreciation for the plight of the working class Black women, her belief in the dignity of menial work, and her adamant stance that the church existed in part to assuage the struggles of the poor to redefine what racial uplift entailed.”<sup>76</sup>

Burroughs constructed deep networks among women in the National Baptist Convention (NBC), an African American association of Protestant Christians that wielded enormous

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<sup>76</sup> Tameka L. Dunlap, “Washington’s Sweetheart: Nannie Helen Burroughs,” Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 2008, 4.



influence in the Black community. As did many proponents of the social gospel movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the NBC spoke prophetically and worked actively for racial equality, extension of African American suffrage, as well as the end of lynching and restrictive Jim Crow laws. Burroughs served as the secretary and accountant for the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention from 1898 to 1908.

A gifted orator with a growing national profile, Burroughs became one of the most sought-after speakers at NBC women's conferences. On the floor of the NBC's national meeting in 1900, she delivered a stirring address that focused on women's frustration over their diminished status in the male-controlled denomination. The clarity and passionate demands of her oration inspired the NBC to launch the Women's Convention, Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention (WC). With a membership of one million in its first year, the WC soon became the largest and most powerful African American women's movement in the country. Burroughs was immediately elected to serve as the organization's Corresponding Secretary. A gifted teacher who had already established several educational programs for economically struggling African American women, she used her national platform within the NBC to campaign for a new vocational and academic school to be opened in the nation's capital, a metropolitan area overflowing with Black domestic workers and impoverished girls and young women.

As her political power and influence in the church strengthened, Burroughs successfully convinced the WC to donate money for a vocational training school for girls and young women in the nation's capital that would be rooted in Baptist values and pragmatic vocational training. She advised her fellow members in 1901 that "the age in which we live"—the period Logan tabbed "the nadir" of African American existence—"demands that we have well-trained men and

women in all walks of life.” Further, she argued that Christianity and vocational and technical skills were intertwined: “Preparation of our women for domestic and professional service, in the home and communities, ranks next in importance to preparing their souls for the world to come.” The objectives for the proposed school were: “(1) train women for mission work in this and other lands (2) prepare women as teachers of the Word of God in our Sunday Schools (3) train them to give better domestic service.”<sup>77</sup>

In 1909, Burroughs achieved her dream of opening a school for African American females in Washington, D.C. for the daughters of impoverished Black families. The National Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls (NTPSWG) was funded in part by seed money from the National Baptist Woman’s Convention. However, the majority of the money needed to open and maintain the school came as a result of Burroughs’ untiring fundraising campaigns within the African American community. Unlike Booker T. Washington, Burroughs veered away from elite White philanthropists who might use their financial gifts to leverage control over her school’s curriculum and philosophy. Instead, she solicited gifts from African American church women and from the members of the expanding Progressive Black women’s clubs. Because most donations were small, Burroughs spent significant time raising money.<sup>78</sup>

Christian moral training coupled with vocational preparation was the hallmark of Burroughs’ school. Courses in church work and Bible were nested within the NTPS vocational curriculum. Christian mission and social service work were taught to provide students with a

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<sup>77</sup> Earl L. Harrison, *The Dream and the Dreamer: An Abbreviated Story of the Life of Dr. Nannie Helen Burroughs and Nannie Helen Burroughs School* (Washington, DC: Nannie Helen Burroughs Literature Foundation Publisher, 1956), 17; “National Baptist Convention Eighth Annual Assembly of the Women’s Convention,” 1908, Nannie Helen Burroughs Papers, Library of Congress. Quoted in Johnson, *Uplifting the Women and the Race*, 91.

<sup>78</sup> For an in-depth examination of the African American women’s club movement, see Marcia Y. Riggs, “African American Children, “‘The Hope of the Race’: Mary Church Terrell, the Social Gospel, and the Work of the Black Women’s Club Movement”, in Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 365-385.

theological basis for personal and on-the-job deportment. Burroughs drew an important connection between Christian values and the role of Black women in the family. She believed that Christian vocational education would accomplish three objectives: it would elevate the status of African American girls and young women, teach them to occupy responsibly the moral high ground at the center of the family, and in turn uplift the socioeconomic position of Black families in society. Vocational classes that trained Black females only for work—simply to occupy their place in the burgeoning American economy—was not enough. Students also had to be steeped in the values of Christianity in the context of a strong focus on manual training and academic subjects.<sup>79</sup> Only then could students live up to the ideal Victorian woman: pure, moral, religious, and responsible for properly raising children.

#### **B. The Broom and the Bath: Burroughs' Pragmatic Vocational Expectations for African American Females in Washington, D.C.**

Burroughs believed that a decent paying job performed with skill and dedication was the best way to render an African American woman independent, without leaning on government, charity, or a spouse to provide for her. According to her vision, vocational education would provide Black females with the needed skills to participate in the American economy. With a nod to the Tuskegee philosophy of Booker T. Washington, Burroughs said that “if you do not work, you do not eat.” She based her vocational model on the Puritan work ethic and equipped students to perform their jobs with dedication, skill, and diligence. Self-sufficiency through work for which Black girls and women were properly trained in vocational classes would also

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<sup>79</sup> For a more detailed examination of the complexities of the ideal of Victorian womanhood in American society, see Mabel Collins Donnelly, *The American Victorian Woman: The Myth and the Reality*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), and Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*, (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1980).

advance the race and overturn long held White myths about the intelligence, resolve, and work ethic of people of color.

Like DuBois, Burroughs spoke out strongly and frequently against the social, legal, and economic injustices African Americans, especially women, suffered. She repeatedly called for social change and racial equality. Yet like Washington, she was strictly pragmatic about the types of positions most of her students would be able to enter in the nation's capital and in cities North and South at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eighty percent of African American women who worked outside the agricultural field labored as domestics in private homes. She consciously selected Washington, D.C. for her school's location because of the broad availability of domestic positions in private homes and government office buildings. Classes were offered in business, practical nursing, cosmetology, restaurant service, housekeeping skills, home economics, household management, dressmaking, tailoring, and laundering. The curriculum also included subjects featured in the traditional high school: history, classical and modern languages, literature, and mathematics. All students were required to take a class in African American history and pass a rigorous exam in the subject. Textbooks used in the history course were written by Dr. Carter G. Woodson. In all courses Burroughs' teachers emphasized "industry, common sense, cooperation, dependability, honesty, and initiative."<sup>80</sup>

Burroughs' knowledge of job market realities for African American girls and women in the South and the nation's capital is supported by evidence from the period. According to Beverly Guy-Shetfall, "a woman's race, class, and geographical location determined the nature of her daily experiences, such as her participation in the labor force, her access to education, and her life expectancy." In 1900, 90 % of African Americans still lived in the South. Between 50

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<sup>80</sup> Johnson, *Uplifting the Women and the Race*, 90-93.

and 70 percent of African American women worked outside the home for at least some part of the year in the South's major cities. In 1910, a year after the NTPS opened its doors, 54 percent of African American women worked outside the home compared to only 17 percent of white women.

Much of the reason for such a wide gulf in employment percentages between Black and White females rested in the job situation of African American men in the South: many positions they filled were menial and low paying, a condition that forced large numbers of wives in the Black community to go to work. In Southern urban areas, African American women dominated the paid domestic occupations of housekeeper, cook, childcare provider, and laundress. While most women worked in farm-related jobs in the South, nearly eight out of ten who held jobs outside agriculture were housecleaners or domestic servants of some type. According to one source, 65% of domestic help reported that they were laundresses. During the Great Migration between 1900 and 1930, many African American women settled in Washington, D.C. Sharon Harley has shown that at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century over half the African American women living in the District of Columbia were widowed, divorced or, like Burroughs, never married. Most of them had to find jobs. Only 47 percent of African American men in Washington, D.C. were in similar circumstances. Jobs for African American women were narrowly circumscribed. In addition to household positions, many were employed to clean federal government buildings. Some women would spend many years earning their paychecks as janitors in federal installations even if they possessed the credentials to work as a clerk or executive in the very offices they were assigned to clean.

Burroughs was also aware that her school would equip students to find work in the face of new and growing competition from immigrants in the District of Columbia. As Karen

Johnson has pointed out, Burroughs feared that unless African Americans were properly prepared for these abundant domestic positions, newly arrived women from Ireland and Eastern Europe would fill them. White newcomers might even work for lower wages and subvert the pay structure—however limited—in which well-trained African American women already worked. Surveying the realities of segregated Jim Crow life for African American women, Burroughs contended that:

...the majority of our women make their living at service, and the demand is for trained servants. Unless we prepare our selves, we will find within the next few years that our women will be pushed out of their places, filled by white foreigners who are...taking advantage of the instruction...in schools of domestic science....Since we must serve, let us serve well, and retain the places we have long held in the best homes in the land.”<sup>81</sup>

The domestic arts vocational curriculum at Burroughs’ school— as well as in public high schools— coincided with the professionalization of household management, food preparation, and hygiene into a field that carried the new, modern labels of “domestic science” and “home economics.” Burroughs’ vocational education emphasis on domestic service was not only rooted in the conditions for working African American women at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was also grounded in what was at the time cutting edge science related to keeping house, preparing and storing food, and caring for children.

In the late 1800s and the opening decades of the 1900s, household work, child care, and managing all aspects of the domestic sphere were increasingly taught using the latest laboratory

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<sup>81</sup> Beverly Guy Shetfall, “Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880-1929, Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1984, 32-33; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 113; Sharon Harley, “For the Good of the Family and Race: Gender, Work, and Domestic Roles in the Black Community, 1880-1930,” in M. Malson, eds., *Black Women in America: Social Science Perspectives*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 165; Johnson, *Uplifting Women and the Race*, 96-97.

research, psychological perspectives, and economic theories. Elevating housework to the level of a science lent new weight to a field of study that, like education and psychology, had long been considered “soft.” Nancy Tomes has pointed out that discoveries about microbes and germs in the late 1800s led to a rash of articles, books, lecture series, and courses on how these elements of nature could convey diseases and threaten bodily and household cleanliness. The increasing social pressures to maintain the home as a fortress of protection from childhood disease contributed to an emphasis on teaching female students about *scientific* aspects of nutrition and hygiene. “Home economics” classes expanded as more and more public high schools embraced vocational education designed for female students who anticipated becoming homemakers. Typhoid, tuberculosis, and influenza were among the conditions that vocational classes in domestic science sought to fight. Daily household chores that had been traditionally viewed as exhausting and bothersome were now perceived as critical tasks in the battle for “sanitation” and “bacteriological” purity. Burroughs’ commitment to teaching African American girls and young women how to combat disease and filth in the home through scientifically supported interventions was a reflection of real concerns that were exposed by science and shared by prospective employers of domestic help. Her efforts in *material* cleanliness matched her emphasis on *moral* cleanliness.<sup>82</sup>

Burroughs’ emphasis on training girls and young women for domestic service met with resistance among some students and parents. Victoria Wolcott’s close examination of Burroughs’ correspondence reveals tensions between the school’s leader, the student body, and parents who enrolled their adolescent girls in NTPS. Students and parents appreciated learning

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<sup>82</sup> Nancy Tomes, “Spreading the Germ Theory: Sanitary Science and Home Economics, 1880-1930,” in Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 34-54. See also Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life, 1870-1930*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

about African American history and Christian theology. However, many were adamantly opposed to Burroughs' emphasis on training girls and young women for domestic jobs. Burroughs was a pragmatic businesswoman. When surveying labor conditions, racism, and Jim Crow arrangements in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and throughout the South, she concluded that the most practical way to begin engineering social change was through accepting the types of positions that were available for young Black women and training them to exceed employers' expectations and stereotypes in vocational skill, cleanliness, deportment on the job, and dedication to excellence. In Burroughs' taxonomy, if graduates of her school remained faithful to the church and to their personal religious practices, they would participate in the church's social gospel agenda to remake society into a more just and equitable community for African Americans. Her approach tapped into powerful early 20<sup>th</sup> century concepts of religion, cleanliness, and morality.

However committed Burroughs remained to social gospel imperatives and to the strategies of racial uplift at the time, her students—most of whose parents worked in domestic positions—enrolled in Burroughs' school to *avoid* following in their parents' footsteps. Like their white counterparts, African American girls and young women wanted to climb the socioeconomic ladder, not remain stuck on the same rung as their parents. Yet student and parent critics misinterpreted Burroughs' objectives. Virginia Wolcott has suggested that Burroughs used vocational education in traditional African American jobs—housecleaning, laundering, cooking, and the like—to *subvert* the race-based expectations for Black females in the American workforce. Additionally, behind the veil of vocational education, Burroughs' students were creating new female identities for the African American communities that were based on the proactive, outspoken, and vocal pattern of anti-racism that Burroughs herself



modeled in public. Historian Earl Lewis has observed that in all-African American institutions "Blacks gained critical leadership experience, channeled their oppositions to setbacks in civic conditions, and gained momentary respite from the unpredictable world of American racism." While the National Training and Professional School served as a reminder of racially segregated and limited society, it was also a space where working-class Black females could build the leadership skills that would be necessary to openly challenge the racial hegemony that marked American society.<sup>83</sup>

### Summary

During the struggle to put in place a federally funded vocational education school reform, a chorus of Progressive voices in many educational communities commented on its goals and objectives. Commentators were generally divided into two camps: those who saw the role of education as a servant to the economy, efficiency, and national security and those who argued that education should not be reified into a set of preparations for adult life in the world of work. The philosophies of the administrative Progressives who aligned themselves with David Snedden and Charles Prosser saw the public school classroom as a vestibule before the entrance to the factory, plant, and mill. They were genuinely concerned about the fate of youthful dropouts. They perceived the classroom as a space that should be tailored to their needs and preferences, not all of which included the academic curriculum that had become the hallmark of the American high school. In the minds of Booker T. Washington and Nannie Helen Burroughs, education was the ticket to a job within the given realities of Jim Crow constructs for African American youth.

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<sup>83</sup>Victoria W. Wolcott, "Bible, Bath, and Broom: Nannie Helen Burroughs's National Training School and African-American Racial Uplift, *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 9, no. 1, (Spring 1997), 90,99, quoting Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 23.

In the opinion of W.E.B. DuBois and Anna Julia Cooper, schooling for African American children and youth needed to be broadened to include critical academic courses that enriched the experience of human life and provided skills for leadership beyond the narrowly conceived vocationalism of Washington and Burroughs.

Debates over the role of vocational education in the public schoolhouse continued into the 1920s and 1930s with little change in the basic philosophies of those who favored and those who opposed its ideals and objectives. In modern times, debates over the merits of vocationalism in public high schools have largely faded into history. The contemporary high school almost always features some form of occupational training in its curriculum. Although the debates are gone, those who struggled to define and understand the core purpose of American public education at the elementary and secondary levels planted seeds whose fruits can be seen in school reform initiatives that came after the vocational reform movement and continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The next chapter explores one of those events, the adoption of the National Defense Education Act of 1958, which revisited many of the same themes that had characterized debates over vocational education, including pragmatism and national security.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The National Defense Education Act of 1958**

#### **Introduction**

Why is it important to look back at the nearly forgotten Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 and the surrounding debates that characterized the period leading up to its passage? In this chapter, I argue that Smith-Hughes paved the way for a series of federally-funded reform movements and accompanying conversations over the purpose of public education in American society that continued for the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and reverberate still in modern debates about the shape and role of schooling in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Smith-Hughes enabled public education to morph into the servant of national economic and political needs. The pattern was repeated in similar fashion in the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which is profiled here. The vocational education school reform movement established enduring patterns and themes that were not duplicated exactly, but were nonetheless echoed in subsequent 20<sup>th</sup>-century attempts to change public schools for the better. Parallel motifs prevail in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, as we will see in the conclusion that follows this chapter.

Before considering the linkages between school reform causes and effects of 1917 and those of the late 1950s, it is important to note that in the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government did not lay dormant when it came to K-12 school issues. The federal role expanded into many areas of public life through New Deal programs and World War II initiatives. Although generally ambivalent about entangling himself in public school matters in general, President Franklin D. Roosevelt provided temporary federal funding for school districts whose dropping tax revenues as a result of Great Depression economics made it difficult to pay

teachers' salaries. In 1935, he launched the federally-backed National Youth Program. The NYA supplied school aid to qualifying individual students in public K-12 classrooms and in some cases paid needy high school youth to perform after-school work projects. Vocational education benefitted from enlarged funding from the central government in 1934 and 1936. In 1946, the George-Barden Act further increased vocational dollars from Congress. During World War II, numerous programs assisted school children and youth in understanding and aiding the war effort. The NYA and in-school war support programs ended in 1945, while Congressional vocational education funding continued unabated.<sup>1</sup>

Similar arguments used to advance the national high school vocational education reform in the early 1900s reemerged in 1958 when Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). This legislation awarded federal funds to universities and local public schools specifically for courses in science, mathematics, and foreign languages. Reform-minded educators and politicians made similar points in 1958 to those of 1917 when the Smith-Hughes Act was passed, marking the first time the federal government paid for local public education. Consider the following scenarios common to school reform in both eras as outlined in the table below.

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<sup>1</sup> See David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Public Schools*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990) and Palmer O. Johnson and Oswald L. Harvey, *The National Youth Administration*, Staff Study Number 13, The Advisory Committee on Education, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938).

Similarities between 1917 Smith-Hughes Act and 1958 NDEA	
1917	1958
<b>The crisis:</b> A complex mixture of national defense concerns as the United States prepared for entry into World War I, experienced mass immigration and industrialization, heard the call of manufacturers for additional, better trained workers, and the problems resulting from urban and industrial growth.	<b>The crisis:</b> National defense and a failing U.S. rocketry program during the Cold War; the successful launch in late 1957 of two Soviet satellites dubbed “sputniks” in the context of expanding Soviet communist influence in Eastern Europe, China, and parts of Southeast Asia; the panic that seized many Americans who believed that the United States had fallen behind Communist Russia in science, technology, and educational prowess, which threatened national security.
<b>The enemies:</b> Domestic industrial and social inefficiencies; Imperial Germany, whose armies had overrun much of Europe and fought the Allies to a stalemate in the trenches of Belgium and France; the industrial might that backed the German war machine; poverty and the plight of immigrants.	<b>The enemies:</b> The Soviet Union and its military-industrial complex backed by what Americans perceived to be a more rigorous public education system than their own; perceived lack of trained American scientists, mathematicians, and engineers to provide for national security; the public school system and its lack of academic rigor.
<b>The conversation:</b> A decade-and-a-half of lobbying and national debate over the role and shape of public education in American society involving educationists, politicians, and leading national voices. Debate swirls around the school’s role in building vocational and technical skills to serve the nation’s needs.	<b>The conversation:</b> Nearly a decade of debate over the need for schools to develop vocational and technical skills to serve national defense needs and to buttress the American economy—in recession during 1958—by stopping its international competitive edge. Debates center on the purpose of public education to enhance the nation’s vocational and technical skills by training students for practical careers in science, mathematics, and technology.
<b>The solution:</b> Reform the public school system by passing the Smith-Hughes Act authorizing federal aid for public schools in the form of vocational education. Many political and educational leaders blamed the public high school yet viewed it as an already established institution that could potentially improve the nation’s defense in a time of war with Germany, strengthen American industrial prowess and efficiency, and elevate the socioeconomic conditions of laboring and impoverished classes.	<b>The solution:</b> Reform the public school system by passing the 1958 National Defense Education Act authorizing federal aid for public schools to boost educational performance. Politicians, educators, editors, and everyday citizens blamed public education for the perceived “crisis” that was unfolding. Critics turned to public schools to resolve the situation.

Similarities between 1917 Smith-Hughes Act and 1958 NDEA	
1917	1958
<p><b>The result:</b> A new comprehensive high school blending academic and pragmatic vocational classes, accompanied by high stakes testing to determine vocational and academic abilities and the educational tracks individual students should follow in order to best serve the nation, society, and their own economic needs. The new high school curriculum is pinned to the economic and security needs of the nation.</p>	<p><b>The result:</b> A new set of curricular rubrics is designed, accompanied by empirical testing, to distinguish superior academic performers who would be encouraged to continue their studies beyond high school into colleges and universities. Their success—especially in science, mathematics, and technology—would strengthen American defense capabilities and aid the national economy.</p>
<p><b>Political supporters:</b> Two Democratic lawmakers from the South—Sen. Hoke Smith and Rep. Dudley Hughes of Georgia—successfully spearhead the drive for unprecedented federal funding for local public secondary schools through pragmatic vocational education reforms in the years prior to World War I. They understand that federal education aid will improve the Southern economy and the financial status of their constituents. President Woodrow Wilson strongly supports their efforts.</p>	<p><b>Political supporters:</b> Two Democratic lawmakers from the South—Sen. Lister Hill and Rep. Carl Elliott of Alabama—teamed up to push the NDEA legislation involving large amounts of federal largesse for public schools during the Cold War era of the late 1950s. Lister and Elliott appreciate the positive impact the legislation will have on the Southern economy and their own constituents. President Dwight D. Eisenhower has to be convinced to support the idea of expanding federal aid for public school curriculum and endorses educational reform in the end.</p>

This chapter examines these overarching elements as they appeared in the passage of the 1958 National Defense Education Act, a sweeping law that vastly increased federal funding in local public schools and universities for training in a narrow range of academic subjects. This time, *intellectual* training was the target of public school reform instead of manual training because many lawmakers, educators, and individuals perceived that children and youth in the United States lagged behind their Soviet counterparts in academic pursuits, especially math, science, technology, and foreign languages.

Lawmakers successfully pushed for NDEA by taking the “problem” of American education directly to the people. Congressman Carl Elliott, Democrat from Alabama and co-sponsor of NDEA, was especially active touring the country giving speeches in behalf of the federal aid for public schools in the wake of the Sputnik launches of late 1957 that panicked many Americans.

A range of university professors, pundits, and observers outside government joined the national conversation over what they interpreted as serious and debilitating failures of the American public school system. At the University of Illinois, Arthur Bestor lamented the status of public K-12 schools and called them to task in preparing students for advanced education. Admiral Hiram Rickover expressed his outrage at the flabbiness of high school curricula in the late 1950s by publishing *Education and Freedom*, a flogging jeremiad against country’s public schools. *Life* magazine’s editors published a series of articles claiming to flay open the weaknesses of American classrooms and arguing that Soviet schools were superior.<sup>2</sup>

Convinced by science lobbies and military experts that science, math, and technology subjects were in an anemic state in public K-12 schools, lawmakers and pundits singled out public education for a transfusion of federal dollars that officials hoped would give new life to these areas of study. Similar to 1917 as examined in earlier chapters, the late 1950s presented a perfect Cold War storm of crisis, fear, blame, and curricular vulnerability that enabled politicians, critics, and educators to again draft a significant reform for public education that called for federal aid to support narrowly conceived subjects. As it had done in the early 1900s, a concerned nation turned its anxious eyes to public education to stabilize society in a time of

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<sup>2</sup> Hiram G. Rickover, *Education and Freedom*, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1959).

national crisis. The crisis was certainly real in the sense that the often bellicose Russian Premier, Nikita S. Khrushchev, threatened that the Soviet Union could flatten the United States militarily and economically. Americans were convinced that the Soviet education system was superior, especially in science and mathematics. According to observers who had visited Soviet educational institutions, Russian students were schooled rigorously in foreign languages and were more physically fit than their Twinkie-consuming counterparts in the United States. In 1955, William Benton, former Senator who had become publisher of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, returned from a fact-finding trip to Russia and reported that the Soviet education system was superior to the American version. He was “convinced that Russia’s classrooms and libraries, her laboratories and teaching methods, may threaten us more than their hydrogen bombs or guided missiles to deliver them....If we compare the Soviet educational system with our own, it is clear that we can lose the race if we continue to waste our potential talent.” Benton’s observation echoed the philosophy of social efficiency that had driven the vocational reform movement forty years earlier.<sup>3</sup>

Germany’s former position as competitive enemy in the early 1900s was filled by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the 1950s. The national defense issue in 1958 was not a heated war confined to Europe, as it had been in 1917, but a “cold” war of espionage, diplomatic tension, technology, geopolitical assertiveness, and nuclear warhead competition. This conflict spread in the icy diplomatic strain between the USSR and its World War II allies in the aftermath of the war. Its temperature dropped even further when Mao Zedong led a successful Communist revolution in mainland China in 1949. In the case of the United States

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<sup>3</sup> William Benton, “‘Cold War’ of the Classrooms,” *New York Times Magazine*, April 1, 1956, 22. Quoted in Barbara Barksdale Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and National Defense Education Act of 1958*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 26.



and Russia, the diplomatic standoff was characterized by ideological differences, mutual suspicion, and the overhanging threat of nuclear attack.

In contrast to early vocational education reform in the national role, the vocational and technical skills—now known as human capital—that American schools were called on to produce in the late 1950s was not composed of future factory workers who knew how to operate complex machinery. Nor was the emphasis on training agriculturists to be skilled at coaxing larger yields from tired soil. Those were emphases that characterized the vocational education reform movement. Rather, the human capital to be nurtured by the public school system in the late 1950s was viewed in terms of a strengthened cadre of *technology-savvy, inventive professionals*: scientists, mathematicians, engineers, technicians, and linguists who could give the United States technological and economic superiority over the Soviets on land, sea, and sky, as well as in the emerging arena of outer space.

After rehearsing the status of public education in the decade of the 1950s, brief attention will be given to the beeping basketball-sized *Sputnik* satellites that touched off panicked assaults against the public school system in virtually every segment of American society. Next, we will unpack the full frontal attack on the nation's taxpayer-supported schools by the military, the public, pundits, and politicians who were convinced that the nation's classrooms were inferior to the Soviets' because they were too focused on the fluff of "life adjustment" classes and soft on science and math. Against that background, we will turn to the federal process of passing legislation—the National Defense Education Act of 1958—designed to remedy what many observers believed to be an ailing school system. We will see that the Eisenhower Administration, Congress, educators, scientists, and political officials were hell-bent on

reconfiguring the nation's public schools to fit the needs of American national and economic security in the throes of an international geopolitical struggle.

## **I. Expansion in Public Education, 1950 to 1960**

The decade of the 1950s produced phenomenal growth in almost every public school statistic on record. The numbers of school-age children, teachers, and school expenditures rocketed into stratospheric levels, straining outdated facilities and causing a serious teacher shortage. The sheer size of public education now thrust it into the critical eye of the public. This section profiles the increases in the number of students to be educated and their effects on public education's infrastructure.

### **A. Baby Boom Growth**

Like the rockets the United States and Russia were launching into space, America's birth rate arced into the statistical stratosphere during the decade of 1950-1959. Between 1946 and 1959, nearly 80 million babies were welcomed into the world. The climax of the post-World War II population explosion occurred in 1957, when the birth rate reached 123 live births per 1,000 women ages 18 to 44. Only a quarter-century earlier, in 1930, America's birth rate had been 89 live births per 1,000 women in the same age cohort. More babies were born in the United States during the seven years after 1948 than in the previous thirty.<sup>4</sup>

Looking at the school-age population as reported by the U.S. Census allows us to focus on growth in the numbers of children who would normally qualify to attend kindergarten through

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<sup>4</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 299-316.

twelfth grade in a public school. The numbers of school-age children were astounding. The following table demonstrates this phenomenal growth. The year 1940 is included for comparison purposes.

**U.S. Population, Ages 5-17, 1940 to 1959<sup>5</sup>**

<b><u>Year</u></b>	<b><u>Ages 5-13</u></b>	<b><u>Ages 14-17</u></b>
1940	19,942,000	9,846,000
1950	22,266,000	8,445,000
1951	22,786,000	8,521,000
1952	22,279,000	8,723,000
1953	25,452,000	8,864,000
1954	26,645,000	8,993,000
1955	27,716,000	9,221,000
1956	28,776,000	9,526,000
1957	29,539,000	10,148,000
1958	30,559,000	10,606,000
1959	31,683,000	10,951,000

Between 1950 and 1959, the population of school-age children grew by 39%, compared with a gain of only 3% between 1940 and 1950. The increase in population of elementary and junior high school children ages 5 to 13 measured 42%, while the overall teenage population

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<sup>5</sup> “Table 1.—Population by age, Race, Live Births, and Birth Rate: 1790-1991,” in Thomas D. Snyder, ed., *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1993), 12.

ages 14-17 grew by 54%. The presence of so many children in the population taxed everything from pediatricians' offices to community playgrounds. Even babysitters were in short supply and were commanding as much as five dollars per evening.<sup>6</sup>

Enrollments in elementary and secondary education grew alongside the population rate. The table below shows the annual advances in elementary and secondary school registrations combined.

Numbers of Children and Youth Enrolled  
Elementary and Secondary Education, 1950 to 1960<sup>7</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number Enrolled</u>
1950	28,492,000
1952	30,372,000
1954	33,175,000
1956	35,872,000
1958	38,756,000
1960	41,762,000

Public schools absorbed about three million new students every year between 1950 and 1960. In total, American public education took on an additional 13,270,000 new pupils in the 1950s. Enrollment percentages were up as well, up from 75% of the school-age population in

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<sup>6</sup> Miriam Brunell-Forman, *Babysitter: An American History*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 49-50. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, five dollars in 1950 was equivalent to \$49 in 2013. See "CPI Inflation Calculator," [data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl](http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl).

<sup>7</sup> "Kindergarten, Elementary, and Secondary Schools and Enrollment: 1870-1970," in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Series H, 412-432, Vol. II, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), 368.

1950 to 89% in 1959. Compared to the numbers at the half-century mark, teachers and administrators at the end of the decade were dealing with a nearly 20% increase in the rate of registrations per 100 children. After a dip during World War II, the high school graduation rate moved from approximately 51% in 1950 to 70% in the 1959-60 school year, representing a 38% increase.<sup>8</sup>

The addition of so many pupils to the schools taxed outdated facilities, created a teacher shortage, and increased expenditures in elementary and secondary institutions. Financial outlays for schools more than doubled from \$5,838,000,000 in 1950-51 to \$15, 613,000,000 in the 1959-60 school year, a 167% increase. Each year, public school systems were adding about \$1.5 billion to their budgets. The expense per pupil more than doubled from \$232 in 1950 to \$483 in 1960. The vast majority of these expenses were shouldered by states and local school districts. The federal government was still funding high school vocational education classes, and it had not yet begun to grant financial outlays to states for *general* education with the exception of school districts that were negatively impacted by federal activities within the district boundaries, such as the opening of military installations and the seizure of land leading to loss of school tax revenue. Only a very small minority of local school jurisdictions were affected by the presence of federal facilities in the 1950s.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Snyder, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, 15, 31.

<sup>9</sup> *Historical Statistics of the United States*, Series H, 492-507, "Public Elementary and Secondary Schools—Expenditures by Purpose: 1870 -1970," 373. Even in constant dollars from 1950 to 1960, the raise in per pupil expenditures was impressive. The total per pupil spent in 1950 was \$285 in 1960 dollars, compared with \$485 in 1960. This shows an increase of nearly 70% in a decade. This compares with a per pupil expenditure increase of slightly over 20% in the decade 2000-2010. Some federal figures show less growth in total expenditures per pupil. See, for example the Institute of Education Sciences, *Digest of Education Statistics*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics), Table 182—"Total and current expenditures per pupil in public elementary and secondary schools: Selected years, 1919-20 through 2006-07". For a full reading of legislation related to compensation to local school districts impacted by federal activities and installations, see *The First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Education Concerning the Administration of Public Laws 874 and 815 for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1951*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1952).

## **B. Strains on Public School Facilities**

In 1951, Commissioner for Education Earl James McGrath reported “an appalling lack of classroom facilities to house our rapidly increasing school population.” In 1952, he presented the results of a year-long survey of the nation’s public school plants. “One of the most serious issues existing in the Nation today is the shortage of schools. McGrath reported that school districts of all types throughout the forty-eight states were experiencing problems erecting needed school buildings to accommodate the population explosion in pupils. He observed that thousands of communities were unable to fully educate the young citizens who appeared in ever-growing numbers at their schoolhouse doors. McGrath published what he termed “alarming” statistics based on surveys completed in 1951 by twenty-five out of forty-eight states. Summarizing the situation in his annual report to the Federal Security Administration, he wrote:

To provide adequate classroom auxiliary facilities such as gymnasiums and auditoriums for all the children expected to be enrolled in the public schools in the fall of 1952 would require an expenditure of over 10 billion dollars. Moreover, many of the school plants now in use do not meet acceptable standards of fire safety; 40 percent of the school buildings are more than 30 years old and 16 percent are more than 50 years old. That this is a national problem is clear from the fact that even the States with the most satisfactory facilities are in serious difficulties. In those States, too, the building shortage is severe and will grow worse in the years ahead as a result of the continuing rise in the number of births.”<sup>10</sup>

Samuel Miller Brownell, McGrath’s successor, pleaded the case of the school building shortage in his annual report in 1954. He recorded a national deficit in classrooms during the 1952-53 school year of 312,000. Only 55,000 classrooms were under construction during that period. The newly-appointed Brownell announced frankly that unless the nation’s schools

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<sup>10</sup> Earl James McGrath, *Annual Report of the Federal Security Agency 1951, Office of Education*, (Government Printing Office, 1952), 15; McGrath, *Annual Report of the Federal Security Agency 1954, Office of Education*, 1952, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1953), 7ff.

opened more classrooms, the education of children and youth would be put at further risk. In 1955, Brownell continued to make President Eisenhower and Congress aware of the national lack of properly configured school buildings. He reported that the United States needed an additional 476,000 classrooms by the close of the 1959-60 school year in order to keep up with the population spurt. If the rate of 60,000 classrooms that were opened in the 1954-55 school year were to continue, the nation would only open two-thirds of the required number of new facilities to meet the needs.<sup>11</sup> School sessions were held in churches, YMCA buildings, municipal auditoriums, and just about anywhere else safe classroom space could be secured. Delegates to the 1955 White House Conference on Education heard that almost 7,700 school districts—especially those in the process of consolidating—were without buildings of any kind and were bussing students to other districts until facilities could be completed.<sup>12</sup>

Between 1955 and 1957, several members of Congress attempted to secure federal funds for school construction, but a bill proposing such aid fell short. President Eisenhower supported national aid for constructing new classrooms and other facilities. Just as alarming as a lack of proper facilities was a shortage in the number of teachers needed to instruct the swelling numbers of children crowding into outdated buildings.

### **C. Teacher Shortages**

In 1945, concerned politicians, parents, and educators sounded an alarm about the shortage of teachers in the sciences in America's public schools. They were also worried about

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Miller Brownell, "Office of Education," in Oveta Culp Hobby, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, et al, *Annual Report of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1954), 175-176; Brownell, "Office of Education" in Marion B. Folsom, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, et al, *Annual Report of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1955), 147.

<sup>12</sup> "Inform Delegates of 'School-less Districts,'" n.a., *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Vol. C, no. 37, (Dec. 1, 1955), 1.

the greater lack of elementary level instructors. Laurel Tanner points out that a major reason for the teacher deficit was pay. Just as the United States was ramping up production for World War II and expanding the war-related workforce, the average annual salary of a public school teacher stood at \$1,441, about ten percent higher than the median American income level of \$1,299. As the war unfolded and the need for labor grew greater, salaries in wartime industries increased dramatically. Many teachers moved from the classroom into war production offices, factories, and government work to take advantage of higher wages. The average American wage in 1940 stood at \$0.57 per hour. By the peak of war production in 1944, the average hourly wage increased to \$0.98. This represented an increase of 68% in inflation dollars. Even in constant 1940 dollars, the rise in average wages amounted to 26%, a significant gain in income for a teacher who elected to take a wartime job. A teacher who chose wartime work at the average wage of just under a dollar per hour at the height of the war could gross \$2,038 in a 52-week pay period, a 41% increase in wages compared to the average pay of a classroom position. In the immediate postwar era, schools rushed to fill in the pay gap. In the 1949-50 school year, teachers were making more than twice amount they did in 1939-40 with an average annual salary of \$3,010.

By the 1951-52 school year, Commissioner McGrath told President Truman and Congress in his annual report that the number of “qualified teachers” was projected to decline from 1954 through 1960 while the number of new teachers coming into the profession would remain flat. McGrath predicted dire consequences for the nation’s school system: “further overcrowding, additional substandard teachers, and re-entering old teachers.” The remedy was to “train more teachers [and] use teachers more effectively.” Other ideas included school



consolidation by “eliminating one-room schools with few pupils or very small high schools; and keeping teachers in the profession for a longer period of time.”<sup>13</sup>

## II. Americans’ Reaction to Sputnik

Conversations over school reform in Washington and across the country had centered on shortages of buildings and teachers. On October 4, 1957 the dialogue changed dramatically after the Soviet Union announced that it had successfully launched a satellite into space. The world’s first artificial satellite—about the size of a basketball and sprouting four long antennae—was hurtling around the earth every 96 minutes carrying instruments for measuring radiation and other elements. The media seized the story and sprang into action with nearly nonstop coverage. The launch motivated endless commentary from the nation’s capital to the New York newsrooms of the three major television networks and into living rooms from coast to coast.

Some responses to the Russian satellite launch showed that many Americans simply took the event lightly and in stride. Bartenders began selling Sputnik cocktails with a vodka base. Macy’s department store offered an array of Sputnik-inspired toys. “Space fashions” were sped to local shops. Lampshades with Sputnik-like decorations appeared in furniture departments. Even children’s balloons began sprouting Sputnik antennae. At a Chicago sales convention, a bevy of models wearing space helmets and suits descended onto the stage in a Sputnik-like vehicle. They peeled off their space wear and paraded before the whistling conventioners in bathing suits and high heels.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Table 8: Historical Summary of Public Elementary and Secondary School Statistics: 1869–70 to 1989–90, in Thomas Snyder, ed., *120 Years of Educational Statistics*, 35. Laurel N. Tanner, “The Science Shortage Myth,” *Teachers College Record*, vol. 72 no. 4 (1971), 605–614. Casey B. Mulligan, “Pecuniary Incentives to Work in the United States during World War II,” *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 106, no. 5 (October 1998), 1041, 1043.

<sup>14</sup> “The Feat that Shocked the Earth,” *Life*, October 21, 1957, 23.

Yet not all the reaction was in fun. The realization that the Soviets had achieved a successful rocket launch and put a satellite into orbit inspired a mix of depression and angst on a national scale. The American public's perception of the country's prestige on the international stage sank as a Gallup poll revealed that the United States' image had suffered among Europeans. Suddenly, the United States—which only a dozen years earlier stood as the world's most powerful nation at the end of World War II—seemed fallible and vulnerable as Russia appeared to possess a rocket that could launch an intercontinental missile with a nuclear warhead to North America. Many pundits believed that the United States was without defensive measures against a nuclear attack and could not retaliate against Soviet-launched nuclear rockets.

Reactions continued to be swift and at times uninformed. In hindsight, the “crisis” appears to have been manufactured. Hidden underneath the surface of heated debate were the cold facts that in its Vanguard program the United States possessed rockets capable of greater range and thrust. Further, American scientists could perform more complex experiments using smaller satellites than could the Russians. These truths were overwhelmed by Sputnik hysteria. Politicians and other observers fed the frenzy by not waiting for a complete analysis of the Soviet achievement by scientists and national security agencies. Amid the Sputnik spasms of fear and dread, Americans looked for someone or something to blame. They found it quickly by blaming the nation's lowered status and slowness in the space race on public education, particularly the high school.<sup>15</sup>

Within days of the Sputnik success, Dr. C.C. Furnas, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Research and Development and Chancellor of the University of Buffalo, thought the federal and

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<sup>15</sup> Drew Middletown and M.S. Handler, “As NATO Meets: What Europe Says of Us”, *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1957, 221; Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 6-10.

state governments should do more to help the nation's colleges. He observed that "in order to go back and win the race for scientific supremacy, there are some things we must do.... We must give more aid to our educational institutions in turning out more engineers and scientists, especially at the graduate level." Harry Stine, a whistleblowing rocket scientist dismissed for "speaking out" by space and defense contractor Martin Company said that no one listened to the "rocket men." He sarcastically concluded that "we [scientists] are a smug, arrogant people who just [sit] dumb, fat, and happy, understanding Russia." Dr. Elmer Hutchisson, director of the American Institute of Physics, noted that there was a gap in the status of scientists in Russia compared to those who work in the United States. "In Russia scientists and teachers are esteemed, [and] youngsters [are] taught physics from the fifth grade. Unless we give children more disciplined scientific schooling our way of life is doomed."<sup>16</sup> The "crisis" smacked of the anxiety that many Americans felt during the vocational education reform debate, when Germany's educational prowess was viewed as the world's standard, against which the United States' high schools did not measure up. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Americans felt threatened *economically*, primarily by competition from Germany and Great Britain. The United States had already boasted the world's largest economy since taking over the top spot from Great Britain in 1877. The German economy was not as robust as that of the United States, although it did pose a serious threat to American national security in 1917. As in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century during the vocational education reform movement, Americans began blaming the public school system for the nation's shortcomings in the wake of Sputnik's launch. In the aftermath of Sputnik, once again politicians, parents, pedagogues, and pundits called for drastic reforms of the American school system.

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<sup>16</sup> "The Feat that Shocked the Earth," *Life*, October 21, 1957, 23.

### **III. The Simple Solution: School Reform Funded by the Federal Government— The National Defense Education Act of 1958**

While millions of Americans pondered what was wrong with their public high schools, two lawmakers in Washington, DC and in the White House were preparing bills that would provide massive federal aid to education at all levels to remedy perceived shortcomings in teaching and learning in the wake of Sputnik. This section describes the 1958 National Defense Act, explores the effort of President Dwight D. Eisenhower to pass school aid legislation, and the ultimate success of two Alabama Democrats with deep ties to vocational and general education within their state, Sen. Lister Hill and Rep. Carl Elliott, in securing a measure that would provide federal aid to education on several fronts. As we will see, their ability to pass a controversial federal aid bill was made possible by the Sputnik crisis and by their clever attachment of the bill to concerns about national security. They carried on the tradition of Southern Democratic lawmakers who fought for and won federal aid for local public schools in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the Smith-Hughes Act and the Southern lawmakers on Capitol Hill who perpetuated aid for vocational education between 1917 and 1946: Walter F. George, Braswell Deen, and Graham Barden. Unlike the earlier vocational reform movement that focused its energies on securing funds exclusively for occupational education, the new proposal sponsored by Hill and Elliott centered on federal aid primarily for *academic* courses. Passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958 meant immediate federal aid for three subject areas: mathematics, science, and foreign languages.

## **A. Provisions of the 1958 National Defense Education Act**

The National Defense Education Act of 1958 was signed into law on September 2 of that year and enacted for a period of four years, 1959-1962. It followed in the footsteps of the 1917 Smith Hughes Act and its descendant laws in the following ways: First, it made a direct link between public education and the nation's security; second, it viewed public school classrooms as nurseries for human capital that would eventually benefit the national state; third, it offered federal aid to local education without threatening local autonomy. These elements were sufficiently important to warrant immediate mention in Title I of the law:

1. The opening paragraph of the NDEA states that the nation's security is directly related to the development of American human capital in its schools:

The Congress hereby finds and declares that the security of the Nation requires the fullest development of the mental resources and technical skills of its young men and women. The present emergency demands that additional and more adequate educational opportunities be made available. The defense of this Nation depends upon the mastery of modern techniques developed from complex scientific principles. It depends as well upon the discovery and development of new principles, new techniques, and new knowledge.

2. Developing human capital in service to the state is clearly delineated in the act's second paragraph:

We must increase our efforts to identify and educate more of the talent of our Nation. This requires programs that will give assurance that no student of ability will be denied an opportunity for higher education because of financial need; will correct as rapidly as possible the existing imbalances in our educational programs which have led to an insufficient proportion of our population educated in science, mathematics, and modern foreign languages and trained in technology.

3. The law's provisions clarify the intent of the national government not to tread on the powers of states or local school jurisdictions when sending federal aid to assist in the teaching and learning process:

The Congress reaffirms the principle and declares that the States and local communities have and must retain control over and primary responsibility for public education. The national interest requires, however, that the Federal Government give assistance to education for programs which are important to our defense.

To be certain that lawmakers and the public understood that the central government had no intention of taking over its schools by virtue of giving them federal aid money, the bill's authors—Hill and Elliott—immediately repeated the codicil on local school control:

Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed to authorize any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution or school system.<sup>17</sup>

NDEA contained ten titles. Title I announced that the federal government was not planning to overtake local or state authority in any school that received aid. It also acknowledged that a national education emergency existed that needed to be redressed immediately with federal aid dollars.

Title II outlined student loans for qualifying high school graduates who intended to enroll in schools of higher learning. A total of \$47.5 million would be set aside in 1959 and up to \$90

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<sup>17</sup> National Defense Education Act (NDEA) (P.L. 85-864), *United States Statutes at Large*, vol. 72, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1958), 1581-1582.

million by 1962 for qualifying applicants. Loans in the maximum amount of \$1,000 would be made available on a per student basis at an interest rate of 3.7% with terms up to ten years for repayment.

Title III provided \$70 million in grants per year for the four years of the law's run to individual states for public schools—and loans for private institutions—to achieve the goal of improving instruction in science, math, and foreign languages. It authorized \$5million in aid for supervisory aids in these subjects. Money would be distributed to each state based on the relationship between its number of full-time high school students and the number of full-time secondary students in the nation. Grants from Washington would pay for one-half of the state programs in math, science, and foreign languages.

Title IV created a national fellowship program for graduate education offering 1,000 fellowships in 1959 and 1,500 for the remaining three years of the legislation. Federal stipends began at \$2,000 for the first year before jumping to \$2,200 for the second, and \$2,400 for the third year. Each institution would receive a \$2,500 grant for administrative purposes each year the fellowship recipient was enrolled.

Title V offered \$15 million per year for four years to the states to pay for empirical tests that would identify potentially gifted students who could be encouraged to take additional and more difficult course work in science, math, and foreign languages. The grant also paid states to provide guidance and counseling of students who demonstrated unusual aptitudes in these subjects. Finally, Title V would pay universities and colleges from a pool of \$5 million to sponsor elementary and secondary teacher training institutes.

Title VI was aimed at teacher training for instructors in foreign languages and social studies insofar as they taught the history, culture, and language related to specific parts of the world. Training would be designed and carried out by colleges and universities for teachers at the elementary and secondary levels. Schools that sponsored training events would be reimbursed from a federal pool of \$8 million under the terms of NDEA.

Title VII included money for developing teaching media: television, radio, and films would be paid for by the U.S. Office of Education with input from the recently created National Science Foundation (NSF). Experts in media production and input from college and university faculty would also be solicited and paid for out of NDEA funds.

Title VIII directly linked the new national education funding program to vocational training in the high schools. It expanded the George-Barden Vocational Education Act of 1946 and targeted areas of the country where technical vocational training was thin or not available. A total of \$15 million per year for four years was earmarked to ensure that vocationalists were able to obtain teacher training and the latest technical equipment.

Title IX created the Science Information Service (SIS) within the NSF to advise state education leaders, universities, and local school teachers on scientific methods, materials, and concepts to be used in the classroom.

Title X declared that each state was required to gather and disseminate statistics using improved methods. States could receive up to \$50,000 per year to elevate the accuracy of collecting data on federally funded programs within the state.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> National Defense Education Act (NDEA) (P.L. 85-864), *United States Statutes at Large*, 1581ff.



The passage of the NDEA was primarily the work of Lister Hill and Carl Elliott, both of whom had long been interested in obtaining federal funds for education. As we will see below, they were able to break through resistance to passing legislation that would send money from the federal treasury to states and local school districts. Hill's and Elliott's success in this endeavor was made possible by harnessing their aid bill to heightened anxiety over national security and fear that the American public education system was too soft and underproductive.

## **B. Dwight D. Eisenhower and Proposals for Federal Aid to Education**

Dwight D. Eisenhower was interested in public education and supported limited federal aid for local schools as long as the central government could afford it. The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was created on his White House watch, lifting educational concerns to the cabinet level for the first time. Eisenhower—who built up his educational portfolio as President of Columbia University from 1948 to 1953—ran successfully for President of the United States in 1952 on a Republican platform that contained three noncontroversial sentences pledging the party's support for traditional public schooling: "The tradition of popular education, tax-supported and free to all, is strong with our people. The responsibility for sustaining this system of popular education has always rested upon the local communities and the States. We subscribe fully to this principle."<sup>19</sup> Platform writers were apparently not aware that the central government had been paying for local community schools through vocational education grants since 1918. At any rate, the 1952 "Eisenhower Answers America" campaign

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<sup>19</sup> "Republican Party Platform of 1952", adopted in convention July 7, 1952. Retrieved from The American Presidency Project, Political Party Platforms, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/>

television ads that attacked Democratic spending, the federal deficit, and inflation, which were much larger concerns than education at that time.<sup>20</sup>

During Eisenhower's first term, most of the energy he spent on educational issues was tied to constructing new schools to meet the overwhelming demands of baby-boom growth in the population as outlined earlier in this chapter. The Great Depression had caused a slowdown in school construction. The national defense priorities of World War II further delayed the erection of new classroom facilities, as labor and materials were concentrated on building new military bases, camps, hospitals, and factories essential to waging and winning a global conflict. With the baby boom in full swing, physical plants were inadequate. Projections anticipated that by 1965 the nation's schools would play host to 44,000,000 pupils from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>21</sup>

Eisenhower had arrived in office in 1953 carrying only lukewarm support for federal aid to local schools. His appointee as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Olveta Culp Hobby, seemed apathetic about federal help of any kind for the schoolhouse. After finally recognizing the crisis in school construction, Eisenhower focused almost entirely on bricks-and-mortar federal aid and avoided school curriculum reform. He sponsored three aid bills in 1955, 1956, and 1957 as temporary measures based strictly on demonstrated, evidence-based need for physical plant additions and improvements. Aid from Washington was meant only to be an *stimulus* for states to budget their own money to supplement federal dollars for construction. Accompanying each bill was a statement that money would arrive in local accounts with no federal dictation as to school design, curriculum, teachers' salaries, or any other aspects of the

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<sup>20</sup> See "Eisenhower Answers America" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDBYuAxyT4E> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgVrvSDYa54>.

<sup>21</sup> Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 41.

schoolhouse that were under the jurisdiction of local boards of education. Despite Eisenhower's assurances to the contrary, there were enough members of Congress who believed that this toe-step inside the tent of local schooling would inevitably lead to an entrance of the entire federal elephant into the classroom.<sup>22</sup> Critics of Eisenhower's proposals seemed to be unaware that the federal government already had significant say over the way grants were used in vocational education dating back to the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act.

While Eisenhower and his administration concentrated on federal aid for improving physical plants, other school aid supporters were absorbed in finding ways to obtain broader help from Congress and the new Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Still others campaigned for no federal involvement in schools at all. Advocates for school help from the central government contended that federal aid for teachers' salaries—which had been a limited component of New Deal federal aid to schools in the 1930s—would attract new teachers through higher pay and prevent current teachers from having to work second jobs.<sup>23</sup> They pointed to the reality that the field of educational funding was uneven: wealthy states could afford to pump more money into facilities, teacher salaries, textbooks, libraries, and curriculum than could poor jurisdictions. Federal aid to needy states would flatten out the differences and enhance educational equity. Some supporters wanted Congress to establish a minimum amount that each state was required to spend per pupil, contending that the highest population of schoolchildren was often found in the poorest districts and states. Other supporters of federal aid joined conservative Republican Sen. Robert A. Taft, who wanted to funnel federal money to private

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<sup>22</sup> Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 41.

<sup>23</sup> For an in-depth treatment of federal aid for teachers' salaries during the Great Depression, see David Tyack, Robert Lowe, and Elisabeth Hansot, *Public Schools in Hard Times: The Great Depression and Recent Years*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

schools in addition to public institutions. Taft and this wing of school reformers were responding to Roman Catholic critics who charged that their schools were being discriminated against when it came to federal aid proposals.

Critics who opposed federal aid to local education leaned on the age-old argument that Washington money for local schools would lead inevitably to federal oversight. They argued that community control of their own schoolhouses was best even if it meant inequities in funding and disparities between districts. These were community problems that were best solved by localities, not by Washington lawmakers and statutory enforcers. Some feared they would have to complete mountains of paperwork to track accountability of everything federal funding purchased, from playground equipment to textbooks to paper clips and paste. Citing the separation of church and state—which was not the reality in public schools—most opposition did not want to see taxpayer dollars flow from Washington to support private and parochial institutions. Many who opposed federal funding also called for an end to progressive education pedagogy, life adjustment education, and cushy curricula.<sup>24</sup>

Opposition to assistance from Washington for teaching and learning programs was not confined to one political party. Democrats in 1956 were being torn asunder over federal aid to public schools. Some members of the party wanted any proposed aid bills to be tied to racial integration as mandated by the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. Many Southern Democrats argued that they would not vote for any federal grants to local schools if an integration rider were attached to the measure. Nonetheless, House Democrats sent H.R. 7535—awarding stimulus grants to states for building schools—to the floor in 1956. Adam

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<sup>24</sup> For more in-depth material on NDEA and federal aid to public and parochial schools, see Wayne J. Urban, *More than Science and Sputnik: The National Defense Education Act of 1958*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 174-176 Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 40-46.

Clayton Powell (D-NY) proposed an anti-segregation rider to the bill stipulating that any state supporting racially segregated schools could not be awarded construction grants. Despite wanting federal help, Southern Democrats could not politically support the Powell amendment, and the bill was voted down.<sup>25</sup> The Democrats managed to send an additional bill on school construction to the floor in 1956, but it was stymied by Eisenhower's contention that it would be too costly to earn his signature if passed.

Yet Eisenhower remained committed to federal money for local school construction. It was both a needed program—as statistics quoted above indicate—and just as important, it seemed to be a safe method for the president to show public support for education without being seen as overly intrusive in local school affairs. In November 1955, an unprecedented White House Conference on Education was held. On the first day of the conference, President Eisenhower addressed the gathering by prerecorded film and laid out the core rationale for calling the conference. He told attendees that “by being here you are focusing attention on a grave national problem. That problem is the losing race between the number of classrooms and qualified teachers we have on the one hand, and, on the other, the increasing population of school age.”<sup>26</sup>

In the same speech, President Eisenhower addressed the issue that had been at the center of the debate on federal aid for education since the start of the republic: *the fear that federal management would supersede community-level self-determination*. On this issue, Eisenhower was clear and faithful to the 1952 party platform statement:

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<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of this bill and the politics surrounding the Southern Democrats' dilemma on this and other race-related issues, see David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 102-133.

<sup>26</sup> “Remarks for the White House Conference on Education,” November 28, 1955, accessed at The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10391>.

The first thing is that the education of our young should be free. It should be under the control of the family and the locality. It should not be controlled by any central authority. We know that education, centrally controlled, finally would lead to a kind of control in other fields which we don't want and will never have. So we are dedicated to the proposition that the responsibility for educating our young is primarily local.... If we depend too much on outside help, too much on the Federal Government, we will lose independence and initiative. But if the Federal Government doesn't step in with leadership and with providing credit and money where necessary, there will be a lack of schools in certain important areas. And this cannot be allowed.<sup>27</sup>

Eisenhower's remarks demonstrated his willingness to go to the mat for school construction grants from Washington without supervisory strings attached. At the same time, he also made it understood that too much dependence on the central government was unhealthy and undesirable because it would squash local "independence and initiative." Nothing was said about racial integration or finding an equitable formula that would benefit the poorest and wealthiest states in proportion to their need. When it came to education, Eisenhower could be counted on to say nothing controversial and to pave a middle road between those who supported Adam Clayton Powell's rider on integration on the one hand and, on the other, those who were utterly opposed to any school aid measure crafted at the White House or on Capitol Hill.

Eisenhower's pragmatic approach to plans for federal grants to community-based schools and his White House conference on education inspired Republicans in 1956 to expand their views on education in that year's presidential campaign. The party plank on education was

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<sup>27</sup> "Remarks for the White House Conference on Education," November 28, 1955, accessed at The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10391>.

longer this time: “Four thousand communities, studying their school populations and their physical and financial resources, encouraged our Republican Administration to urge a five-year program of Federal assistance in building schools to relieve a critical classroom shortage...”

Following a prominent mention of the White House Conference on Education, the platform promised to “renew its efforts to enact a program based on sound principles of need and designed to encourage increased state and local efforts to build more classrooms.”

To summarize, President Eisenhower did not support school reform, only temporary, limited stimulus money from the central government to help states and community jurisdictions pay for bricks and mortar. Some opposed federal aid because they believed it would override local and state authority. Most Southern members of Congress objected to any school money from Washington if it were harnessed to mandated integration. Working quietly on the issue were two Alabama Democrats, Sen. Lister Hill and Rep. Carl Elliott. Their challenge was to overcome obstacles to federal help for the nation’s public schools without agitating the race issue or alienating states’-righters.

### **C. “The Threat to States’ Rights in Federal Aid is a Bogeyman”: Sen. Lister Hill and Education**

Lister Hill was a progressive Alabama Democrat whose philosophy motivated his quest to pass the NDEA in 1958. He had been elected to the House in 1923 and served there until his election to the Senate in 1938. Hill supported federal involvement in local affairs as long as it brought money and programs to improve economic conditions, rural life, and public education for his constituents.

When he first arrived in Washington, Hill knew Alabama had a range of problems that needed to be addressed. He believed the federal government could assist his home state in relieving the difficulties of the poor and rural populations he represented. The challenges Alabamians encountered were grounded in economic disadvantages that could be meliorated with federal aid, self-help programs, and public works projects dedicated to improving infrastructure. Hill therefore staunchly supported Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal.

Roosevelt had been a friend of the South in his New Deal programming without disparaging its people or ways of life. He had a home in Warm Springs, Georgia to which he periodically returned to find respite from the whirl of the nation's capital and to bathe in the tepid waters there to gain relief from the polio that immobilized his legs. FDR had established a collection of agricultural and urban projects that benefited Hill's Alabama district as well as many areas throughout the South. During his tenure as a Representative and Senator in the 1930s, Hill welcomed and supported the National Youth Administration (NYA) programs assisting impoverished high school students with after-school work projects that paid a stipend. A boys' club for African Americans in a crowded area of Birmingham was operated under the leadership of a full-time NYA supervisor and twenty-five part-time NYA high school boys. The Works Project Administration (WPA) had put many of Hill's constituents to work on an array of building programs that benefited Alabamians.

In turn, Hill had assisted Roosevelt in gaining votes in Congress to pass his Farm Security Administration bill in 1935 because he was convinced it would improve the lives of poor and rural populations in Alabama and throughout the South. His support of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) helped establish him as a representative who could bring home federal aid when needed. He was a federal activist whose career was dedicated to improving the



standard of living for the people he represented. It is no wonder, then, that he never lost an election and retired from the Senate in 1969 following 46 years of service.<sup>28</sup>

Among all the programs and projects for which Hill had gained notoriety in his long career, he considered the 1958 NDEA to be his crowning achievement in the field of education. Hill had a deep background in the public school system. After earning two law degrees at the University of Alabama and Columbia University, Hill served on the Montgomery, Alabama School Board. He became president of the board at age 22. He then began what he called a lifelong commitment to educational reform. In 1922, he successfully ran for the U.S. House of Representatives on a platform that included federal aid for public schools. He believed federal aid could assist Montgomery schools and did not believe that such aid would lead to federal control of the local school apparatus.

When elected to the Senate in 1938, Hill continued to be a strong New Dealer who rose quickly to the upper echelons of leadership. He placed Franklin D. Roosevelt's name in nomination to be the party's standard bearer in the 1940 presidential election. He supported FDR's entry into World War II and applauded the concept of the United Nations. As a well-connected Senator who operated in the upper levels of the nation's top deliberative body, Hill became a respected, masterful operator in Senate wheeling and dealing.

Hill wanted federal aid for general education but not for specific programs. His philosophy dictated that general aid would satisfy those who were frightened that monetary help for particular programs would undermine local school authority and at the same time protect his

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<sup>28</sup> Betty and Ernest K. Lindley, *A New Deal for Youth: The Story of the National Youth Administration*, (New York, Viking Press, 1938), 150.

constituents from Washington insiders who did not know, as he did, what community schools really needed.

Throughout his career Hill remained very close to the Alabama Education Association (AEA). In speeches before that body and others like it, Hill reiterated his basic philosophy on federal aid to education. A 1947 address before the AEA illustrates his approach. First, he observed Americans were not as generous as they ought to be when supporting the public school system. He noted that the United States was facing what he termed an “educational crisis”. Americans spent only 1.5% of their income on schooling, whereas the British spent twice as much, and the Russians spent 7.5% of their government income on public education. Second, stingy funding for schools meant that American teachers’ salaries were too meagre, making it difficult to attract top talent. Third, the states by themselves could not fill the funding gap—they needed help from Washington. Fourth, states had different levels of wealth. Poorer states could not pump as much money into schools as richer ones. States such as Alabama and Mississippi could not afford to support their public school infrastructure as much as California or New York. To those who protested against federal help for local schools, Hill replied, “The threat to States’ rights in Federal aid is a bogeyman which frightens few people today.” People who were against federal aid to schools were “those who opposed the diffusion of knowledge, who believe in monopoly of power, who restrict the vote.” He viewed opposing forces to federal aid for education as “reactionaries [who] still seek to keep tight the ranks of the educated.”<sup>29</sup>

Hill continued to fight for federal aid for general education in the postwar era. Wayne Urban has noted that the late 1940s and 1950s were “a high point of agitation for federal aid to

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<sup>29</sup> Urban, *More than Science and Sputnik*, 6-17, quoting Lister Hill from a speech read into the *Congressional Record* on March 28, 1947. Original from the Lister Hill Papers at the Archives in the Special Collections Library of the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, Folder 47, Box 462.

education,” and Lister Hill was in the thick of it. In 1946, Hill won appointment as the chair of the newly created Senate Subcommittee on Education and Labor. This achievement provided him a new platform from which to seek federal dollars for education. In 1947 he sponsored a bill to grant funds for schooling, especially for those in agricultural areas of the country. He saw it primarily as a bill for farmers whose children composed 30% of the public schools but whose families earned only 10% of the nation’s income. Hill argued that agricultural workers needed a way to gain more parity with those in other lines of work. The bill failed to pass, and Hill tried again. This time, he sponsored a bill that would bring \$19.8 million to Alabama public schools, but it failed when conservative House members did not allow the bill to make it onto the floor for debate and voting.

Overall, Hill supported Eisenhower’s school construction aid, impact funds for schools affected by military bases, a school lunch program, and the G.I. Bill to pay for veterans’ trade training and college. He opposed Eisenhower’s efforts to cut federal spending on vocational education in a 1954 legislative agenda that would have slashed \$5 million from federal grants that were used to train occupational teachers and purchase supplies and equipment. When vocational funding was cut by a House bill in 1957, Hill promised to fight it. In the Senate, he managed to restore the money that meant so much to his state’s occupational training at the high school level.<sup>30</sup>

However, none of the bills he and others sponsored were passed. Conservative members of Congress who were in control of the House of Representatives in the postwar era continued to block proposals for federal grants to education, especially through the powerful House Rules Committee that was able to keep a vigilant eye on the House agenda. Hill was successful in

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<sup>30</sup> Urban, *More than Science and Sputnik*, 20-25.

helping to overcome threats to lop off large dollar amounts from vocational education funding by the Eisenhower Administration in 1953 and 1954. The Eisenhower team thought the appropriations to vocational education were too lavish and believed they did not show clear connections with intellectual advancements in the high schools.<sup>31</sup>

#### **D. Overcoming the “Three Rs: Race, Religion, and the Reds”: Rep. Carl Elliott and NDEA**

Fellow Alabamian Carl Elliott was Lister Hill’s partner in crafting the National Defense Education Act. Elected to Congress from Alabama in 1948, he entered the House with the goal of increasing educational opportunities for his state’s citizens. At his initial meeting with President Harry S Truman, the president advised him not to waste time and energy on an educational funding bill. “Aw, Carl,” he said, “You don’t want to fool with that. There’s no politics in education, no future. You’ve got to be practical about these things. There’s probably never going to *be* any federal aid to education in this country, at least not in your lifetime.” What you need to do is get you a dam built down there somewhere. Now *that’s* something I can help you with, something that’ll do you some good, that’ll help you get reelected...and you’ll have none of the problems that come with this education business.”<sup>32</sup>

Elliott never told the president that he disagreed with his sentiments about educational work, and he went on to sponsor successful programs to erect dams, hospitals, and clinics throughout his district. But Truman’s remarks did not stop him from lobbying persistently for educational aid from Congress. “From the first day I came to Washington, I began working on a

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<sup>31</sup> Urban, *More than Science and Sputnik*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Elliott, Sr. and Michael D’Orso, *The Cost of Courage: The Journey of an American Congressman*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 124.

bill for federal aid to education. In every session of Congress from 1948 to 1958, I brought up some form of student aid act, knowing I'd get nowhere for a while, knowing it might be years before my bill would even get a hearing."<sup>33</sup>

In 1951, Elliott was appointed to the House Committee on Education and Labor. Mistakenly, Elliott wrote in his autobiography that the United States government had provided federal aid to education on only two occasions to the country's public schools:

By stepping into the arena of the fight for federal aid to education, I was entering a battleground littered with nearly two centuries of corpses. Only twice in America's history had the federal government been able to pass laws that significantly and directly provided The first was the passage of the Northwest Ordinance in 1787, which set aside public lands for elementary and secondary schools. The second came in 1862 when Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act, which provided land grants for state universities.<sup>34</sup>

Elliott had neglected to mention that the Smith-Hughes Act and its three successors had provided *money* to local public schools at the secondary level since 1918. Nonetheless, he was primed to use his influence on the Committee on Education and Labor to fund schools through Washington.

Elliott blamed the blockages to federal grants for schools on four prickly subjects: *religion, economics, Communism, and race*. School aid bills proposed in Congress that excluded private institutions raised the hackles of Roman Catholic leaders. Their institutions were educating 13% of the nation's children and youth in the early 1950s. On the other hand, any measure calculated to include religious schools raised "howls of protest" from other faith

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<sup>33</sup> Elliott and D'Orso, *Cost of Courage*, 126-127.

<sup>34</sup> Elliott and D'Orso, *Cost of Courage*, 127.

communities, especially from the South, and from people anxious about the wall of separation between religion and government.

The *economics* of federal support for local schooling was a major concern of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber had stood strongly for federal aid in the run-up to passage of the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act. It had been a founding organization of the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Elliott observed that by the 1950s, “that group insisted on the sanctity of local school boards and councils of education to control the teaching of their students.” The Chamber was opposed to federal involvement because it would mean federal control. Most school boards were composed of local business leaders who held connections to the Chamber of Commerce, which gave reason for the Chamber to protect its members’ interests and involvement in local school politics. Additionally, the economic objection to federal money was the “idea of a multi-million or multi-billion federal aid program that would uniquely require them to kick in with taxes.”

*Communism* and *race* became major issues in public education’s postwar era. Elliott complained that fears of Communist subversion attached themselves to many Washington initiatives in the early Cold War period, including his own efforts to aid local schools through central government grants. “There was just a general distrust of the government getting too much control over the country, specifically over something as important as the shaping of the minds of its children.” Elliott was not comfortable playing the fear game, as he saw Richard

Nixon and Sen. Joseph McCarthy do. “[T]o use those fears to hold back the best weapon we could ever develop—the minds of our young men and women—made no sense to me at all.”<sup>35</sup>

Finally, Elliott noted in his autobiography that harnessing federal aid to anxiety over school integration “made even less sense” than blocking federal aid because of fear of central government control linked to Communism. Integration of public education was a significant issue in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Those who opposed “race mixing” were aware that the life of “separate but equal” ideology had been declared unconstitutional and was nearing an end. At some point in the near future, White segregationists realized that their children would be attending school with African American students under the same roof. According to Elliott, they understood that “any federal aid to white schoolchildren would include federal aid to *black* school children as well. The segregationists were perfectly willing to sacrifice the futures of millions of poor white children to make sure the blacks were held down.”

Schools in Carl Elliott's district were overcrowded, often bereft of adequate facilities such as sanitation, playground equipment, and cafeterias. Many schools were understaffed. “But every time the alarm was sounded” about these shortcomings and the need for federal monetary intervention, it was blocked by a politically paranoid version of the three R's: Race, Religion, and the Reds.”

There was another obstacle to Elliott's vision of federal spending on community schools: Rep. Graham Barden, a crusty North Carolinian who chaired the House Committee on Education and Labor. In 1949 President Truman—who had advised Elliott to steer clear of educational

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<sup>35</sup> Elliott and D'Orso, *Cost of Courage*, 128. Note that Elliott refers to the minds of children and you and a “weapon.” Tying the learning capabilities and the schools to the concept of weaponry was not an unusual move in the Cold War era when so much of the nation's attention was occupied by survival.

issues—introduced a federal education aid bill calling for \$300 million per year in grants to public and private schools in the states. Truman’s proposal was designed to provide help for general education. The bill passed the Senate and was on its way to the House when it ran into Graham Barden. Barden was an anti-labor and anti-education member of Congress who “saw no reason to be spending the government’s good money on schools, especially when the money would wind up being sent to Catholics and blacks.” Barden rewrote the bill, excised the integration and private school sections, and provoked public outcries from New York’s Cardinal Spellman and Eleanor Roosevelt, among others. As he knew it would, Barden’s version of the bill expired in committee, and the issue of federal aid for general education died another death.<sup>36</sup>

Undaunted by Barden’s obstructionism, Elliott continued to work for a federal funding bill that would benefit all public elementary and secondary schools in the nation, an effort he referred to as “the cause.” He worked hard to craft a passable bill, even touring the nation to hold hearings. “Everywhere we went, everyone agreed something needed to be done about education.” Elliott recalled later in his memoirs:

[Y]ou can talk to people until your face turns blue, you can make the most compelling arguments in the world, you can swamp them with statistics, but more often than not they’re not actually going to make a move—especially if it involves paying a price—unless they feel they have no choice, unless they feel they *have* to. Sometimes people can be persuaded to do something. But most of the time they have to be *frightened* into it.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Elliott and D’Orso, *Cost of Courage*, 128-132.

<sup>37</sup> Elliott and D’Orso, *Cost of Courage*, 148.



By the spring of 1958, people *were* frightened into doing something about public education in the aftermath of the Sputnik satellite launchings of October and November, 1957. Sen. Lyndon Johnson (D-Texas) chaired the Senate Preparedness Investigating subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Armed Services and referred to the successful Soviet launch as “another Pearl Harbor.” Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Washington), said it was “a devastating blow” to the nation and urged President Eisenhower to set aside “a week of shame and danger.” Republican Sen. Styles Bridges of New Hampshire quipped that Americans were more concerned about the height of the tailfins on their cars than about American supremacy in technology and science.<sup>38</sup>

Hill and Elliott’s long association with federal aid to general education, their legislative persistence, and Elliott’s cross-country hearings on the subject helped set the stage for passage of the 1958 National Defense Education Act. But it was Sputnik that provided the window of opportunity for them to move ahead with the bill. Suddenly, the nation was listening to their ideas. So were Congress and the White House. Now the concerns about cost, the issue of restricting school aid to bricks-and-mortar projects, and the sanctity of educational states’ rights melted in the flash of the new Soviet achievement.

#### **E. Linking School Aid to National Defense: Sputnik Opens the Window for Federal Aid**

After the Sputnik crisis swept the nation, education suddenly took on new importance, perhaps too much importance to be left in the hands of local officials, many of whom had no background in education at all. Still, some lawmakers balked at the prospect of federal help.

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<sup>38</sup> Elliott and D’Orso, *Cost of Courage*, 149.

Persistent worries about loss of local control swirled around school board meetings. Fears about reams of complicated paperwork spooked many officials. In the wake of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, people who wanted to maintain segregated schools saw federal aid to education as a leading edge of school integration. Another obstacle had been President Eisenhower's refusal to withhold potential federal funds from schools that refused to desegregate, claiming that the judiciary branch had decided on *Brown v. Board of Education*, and it was now up to them, and not the White House or Congress, to enforce the law. Yet even President Eisenhower now realized that a federal aid to education bill could pass if it were somehow tied to *national defense*.

The prevailing sentiment in the country in the wake of Sputnik and the scathing *Life* magazine articles that galvanized public opinion was that education as it existed in the spring and summer of 1958 was a threat to national security. Lister Hill and Carl Elliott were well-situated in the Democratic hierarchy to do something about it through securing federal funds in a wide-reaching program to help public education improve.

Hill and Elliot realized that harnessing a bill for federal aid to education to national defense was the key to overcoming opposition to a bill on the grounds of states' rights infringement—even though states had been accepting federal aid since 1917. National security was also powerful enough to dilute somewhat the fear that federal money would inevitably lead to racial desegregation of schools, an important issue for Hill's and Elliott's constituents. Further, defense concerns were robust enough after the Sputnik launches to overwhelm concern that increased federalism would mean more red tape, oversight, and loss of local control. Hill and his staff understood well that the subject of Sputnik would dominate the upcoming spring session of Congress, and the wily Senator from Alabama knew that the time was ripe to push for

federal aid to schools to affect major reform. Robert Havighurst, a physicist at the University of Chicago, confirmed Hill's sense that the timing for federal intervention was right. He wrote that "it would be a crime if we were not to take this opportunity to reconstruct our educational system, or at least the methods of financing education in this country, on a permanent basis."<sup>39</sup>

As noted earlier in this chapter, the details of the bill's ten titles provided massive federal aid not only for local schoolhouses, but for students who intended to enroll in colleges and universities, where they could benefit from student loans at generous terms and where they could compete for a limited number of federal graduate fellowships in science, mathematics, and technology.

#### **IV. Blame Game: Americans Attack Public Education and Offer Reform Ideas**

How did the "crisis" in education appear to everyday Americans in the wake of the Sputnik crisis? Why was the public high school singled out for attack? To formulate answers to these questions, we can examine the spring 1958 four-issue series, "Crisis in Education", in *Life*, America's most popular weekly magazine.

With a weekly circulation well over ten million, *Life* made its way into living rooms, medical waiting areas, hotel lobbies, and school libraries where millions more people read it. *Life* was so popular that Winston S. Churchill, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, and President Harry S Truman elected to publish their memoirs in its pages. Its audience was broad; however, its advertisements for automobiles, household products, alcohol, and cigarettes portrayed families

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<sup>39</sup> Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 60-67.

and couples enjoying the benefits of middle and upper-middle class life in the United States. The “Crisis in Education” series was so popular that *Life*’s editors made a rare reprint offer: the four articles could be purchased as a unit for 15 cents.

On March 24, 1958, *Life* published the first installment of its “Crisis in Education” series as the main article in the issue. The article began by stating that educational reform had been called for throughout the preceding decades, but it suffered from “the curse of Cassandra,” the mythical figure who was seldom listened to or believed. “Now they’re being heard and believed,” intoned the author, novelist Sloan Wilson. “The schools are in terrible shape. What has long been an ignored national problem, Sputnik has made a recognized crisis.”

Novelist Wilson penned a litany of faults: overcrowding, “grossly underpaid” teachers, not enough individualized instruction, and acceptance of mediocrity, a charge that would be repeated in the 1983 “A Nation at Risk” report to be discussed in the conclusion. In Wilson’s view, schools had given too much freedom to students. In an attempt to “be all things to all students,” high schools had “gone wild with elective courses.” Learners were not opting for tougher classes such as mathematics, sciences, and pre-engineering. Wilson quoted an anonymous Dartmouth College professor who said he was “concerned about the easy living in this country. In the past, classes relieved from physical labor—the leisure class—always had some demanding ideal, bravery in war, social grace, or the responsible wielding of power. The only corresponding ideal in U.S. society that I can make out is being a good guy.” Wilson continued by noting that “studies show that brilliant children in this country are nowhere near as advanced in the sciences as their opposite numbers in Europe or Russia.” Wilson and the unnamed Dartmouth professor had fallen prey to a manufactured crisis. We will see later that Soviet schools were less effective than Americans thought them to be.

To contextualize his remarks about the current problems of public schools, Wilson offered *Life*'s readers a lesson in educational history. He tied the beginnings of the modern school movement in America to the birth of the *vocational education reform movement* of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He made the following points to the magazine's audience. They are keys to understanding the echo between the vocational education reform movement and the Sputnik event.

1. Public high schools were class-conscious institutions in a country that prides itself on equality. "[The early 1900s] was the land of equality where no class distinctions were tolerated," he wrote misleadingly.
2. High schools around 1900 were narrowly-shaped academic institutions. Only the well-to-do could afford to continue beyond 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
3. The vocational education movement, Sloan continued, installed a broader curriculum in public high schools that embraced more than the academic track. "Instead of trying to find students to fit a rigid [academic] curriculum, the schools decided to try to hand-tailor a course of instruction for each child. If poor Johnny could not learn chemistry or mathematics, the schools would not throw him onto the street. They would teach him woodworking, they would adjust him to life, they would make him a better citizen. And after he served his four years in high school, they would give him a diploma as fancily lettered as everyone else's."<sup>40</sup>

Fast-forwarding to the 1950s, novelist Wilson expressed his views about what he thought were several elements that had caused the public high school's demise in the 1950s. First, no one predicted how expensive the comprehensive high school would be with its combination of academic and pragmatic vocational curricula. Second, without enough money to give attention to each student in the growing enrollment lists, teachers started planning lessons for "the average student." The result was that "our most gifted students were largely ignored." Third, lowered

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<sup>40</sup> Sloan Wilson, "It's Time to Close our Carnival", *Life*, March 24, 1958, 36-37.

standards were accompanied by report cards and diplomas that were essentially meaningless. Wilson excoriated the public schools for automatic promotions and graduations. Even dullards were required to remain in high school until age 16, and even then they were promoted. Fourth, Columbia University's Teachers College accentuated the worst of progressive education as much as it lifted up its good aspects. Finally, Wilson charged that there was no incentive to study and work hard to get good grades. Thus, high schools rewarded adolescent laziness.

Comparing American and Soviet school systems had become a blood sport in the 1950s. When it came to exalting the Soviet system and flaying the American methods, Wilson did not disappoint. For millions of *Life* readers, Sloan Wilson pictured a Soviet high school that was rigorous, competitive, and effective. In the Soviet Union, scientists and technicians are the “new aristocrats,” he said. If pupils do not study hard enough in Soviet schools, they will become day laborers or work in a menial job. Drop-outs simply could not succeed. Wilson noted that a high school diploma in the USSR was a recognized achievement.

Educated people were respected and Soviet society valued smart learners. In contrast, high schools in America had not been designed for the intellectually gifted. Rather, “hordes of students” were merely “drifting” through the nation’s secondary schools, looking for the path of least resistance to graduation. Wilson emphasized that drifting was made possible in high school because there were too many “soft” electives. Courses in marriage, driver’s education, advertising arts, typewriting, dancing, and chorus were not wrong, *per se*, if the local school district could afford such “frills” and the student had time to pursue them. But if the school board must make a decision on which types of classes they can realistically pay for with taxpayer funds, they should not water down or displace science and math.

The evidence shows that Wilson was tapping into a rich vein of public criticism about its high schools. In November 1957, the Gallup Organization polled 1,505 Americans using a 52-question face-to-face survey about the status of American society—including its educational policies—in the wake of the Sputnik launches. Gallup discovered that 71% of those interviewed said they agreed with educators who argued that American students needed to start working harder than Soviet pupils if the United States wanted to “compete with the USSR.” As we have seen in previous chapters, Americans a half century earlier had feared competition from Great Britain and Germany and had enlisted the public high school to sharpen the pragmatic side of the nation’s educational system through federally subsidized vocational education.

In the same 1957 Gallup inquiry, 24% of Americans allowed that the Soviets made it into space first because they “worked harder on it, [and] concentrated more effort” to achieve it. When it came to mathematics and science classes in high school, 89% said high schools should require math classes, 68% said chemistry should not be an elective, and 66% said high schools should mandate students to take physics. Meanwhile, many observers in the United States complained that high school environments were too soft and not enough emphasis was being placed on rigorous academic work. To them, the central role of American public education had become to cosset the nation’s youth.<sup>41</sup>

Considering the fact that Soviet technocrats had beaten the United States into outer space and developed a successful rocket system, Wilson opined that “it is hard to say that America’s schools, which were supposed to reflect one of history’s noblest dreams and to cultivate the

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<sup>41</sup> “Gallup Poll No. 591,” Nov. 7-12, 1957, n=1,505, (Princeton, NJ: Gallup Poll News Service, 1957), retrieved from <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy.its.virginia.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/ipoll/>

nation's youthful minds, have degenerated into a system for coddling and entertaining its mediocre....what we have to do is recapture the enthusiasm for the great dream we once had.”<sup>42</sup>

To recapture the dream, Wilson offered three pieces of advice. First, parents should respect education and cease referring to intellectually gifted persons as “eggheads,” a term that appeared in the American vocabulary in 1952 as a derisive reference to highbrow academics. Second, parents ought to enforce more discipline at home in such a manner that it will translate into good deportment in the schools. And third, *government should increase funding for local schools* such that teachers and learners can enjoy smaller classes, more individual attention, and better curricular planning. As with the vocational education reform initiative in the early 1900s, so it was in 1958: the answer to the current “crisis” was to inspire federal, local, and state governments to invest more dollars in a reformation of the schools.

Wilson's solutions to the supposed calamity in public schools were hardly specific. Like many critics, his ideas centered on the generalities of more parental control of their children and more government money than on particular strategies and concrete answers that were more difficult to invent given the complexity of solving problems in a school system that was required to allow *everyone* through its doors. In contrast to the American open enrollment policy for secondary education, Europe and the Soviet Union in 1958 featured ruthlessly competitive exams to gain entrance into the best academically oriented public high schools. Those who were not up to standards were shunted into more vocational-technical types of high schools to prepare for a career in factory, secretarial, and mechanical work that carried lower prestige and pay.

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<sup>42</sup> Wilson, “It's Time to Close our Carnival”, 37.



Americans were given the impression that Soviet schools were more rigorous, competitive, and effective. Reflecting the dualism so prevalent in the ethos of the Cold War conversation, the same *Life* magazine issue that provided Sloan Wilson a platform for complaint profiled two 16 year-old high school students, Stephen Lapekas of Chicago and Alexei Kutzkov of Moscow. In the photo essay, “Schoolboys Point Up a U.S. Weakness,” the contrast between the American and Russian school system was no doubt startling to *Life*’s readers. The magazine’s editors clearly favored the rigors of the Soviet system. Like Wilson, the magazine’s editors portrayed the American high school as a flaccid institution whose students were more interested in dates, dances, and Elvis Presley than in learning math, science, or any other serious subject.

In Moscow, photographs showed Kutzkov dressed in a neatly tailored Soviet school uniform. He appears serious, studious, and focused on the task at hand. He is depicted making presentations in science class, conducting experiments in a laboratory, studying from an English language textbook, alertly looking for a pass in a tense game of volleyball in the gymnasium, and playing the piano for “a sedate fox trot” for classmates in a dance hall. Even at home, Alexei was either studying or playing chess with a schoolmate. The text describes life in the Soviet 10-year school system as a flinty existence where studies carried priority over socializing and high school hijinks. School for Alexei was a factory for producing human capital to aid the country in overcoming its workforce deficiencies, an idea that was not far removed from the objectives of the vocational education movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Alexei is filled with a fierce determination to get to college and become a physicist. In Russia, which desperately needs trained manpower, few can rise above a humble level without an education. The entire school system has been geared to this. With a curriculum standardized across the country and with no elective subjects, the 10-year Soviet schools are like mammoth obstacle courses

for the nation's youth. The laggards are forced out by tough periodic examinations and shunted to less demanding trade schools and apprenticeships. Only a third—1.4 million in 1957—survive all 10 years and finish the course.<sup>43</sup>

Alexei was ahead of Stephen by two years in his academic subjects, according to the article. Where Alexei was reading Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw's works in English language class, Stephen has just completed reading *Kidnapped* and could not speak a word of Russian. Alexei was a math wizard, while Stephen struggled with simple geometry.

Meanwhile, in Chicago, Stephen Lapekas is portrayed as the Andy Hardy type: outgoing, sociable, and not too serious about his studies. While he and a classmate perform the dialogue from a play out loud in English class, a female student reads a fashion magazine. In one photograph, Stephen returns to his seat laughing along with classmates after flubbing a geometry problem on the chalkboard. During the week, he devotes eleven hours to practicing for the swim team and struggles in typing class. He is never shown doing homework. The stark contrast between Stephen's after-school fun and Alexei's after-school homework sessions is revealed in two photos placed next to each other in the article. While Stephen practices a rock-n-roll version of the cha-cha at the YMCA with two girls, Alexei studies in the lace-curtained hush of a friend's Moscow apartment. "Alexei spends three to four hours a day on homework," reads the caption.

The opening installment in *Life*'s educational crisis serial summed up much of the national fear about American public education in the *Sputnik* era: The Russian school system may be stark, demanding, and fiercely competitive, but it produces results in a nation that is eager for its schools to produce efficient human capital to serve the state. Meanwhile, the U.S. system is a relaxed, don't-worry-be-happy world where math and science are not taken

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<sup>43</sup> "Schoolboys Point Up a U.S. Weakness," *Life*, March 24, 1958, 27.

seriously—Stephen Lapekas is never shown in a science class— and after-school study sessions are replaced by fun malt-shop socializing. Critics charged that American schools lacked a sense of urgency and were inefficient in developing human capital needed to “beat the Russians.” *Life* magazine’s photo comparison of the two systems reflected the national consensus that U.S. high schools were spaces of flabby academics guided by fuzzy purposes.

*Life* editors followed up Wilson’s article a week later with a piece titled “A Waste of Fine Minds.” Eleven year-old Barry Wichmann from Rockwell City, Iowa was profiled in the April 7, 1958 edition as a gifted student. But public schools were unprepared to deal with Barry and others of superior intelligence. Quoting an unnamed expert, the editors noted that “the gifted are the most retarded group we have.” Yet the future of American leadership depends on them, said *Life*, “especially in creative scientific thinking.” Barry Wichmann was presented as a typical example of a gifted learner overlooked by overworked classroom teachers.

An examination of the photographs *Life* editors presented in the article shows Barry peering longingly into the high school laboratory: he would rather study there than in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom where he feels unmotivated because so much of the schoolwork at that level is below his abilities. Another photograph reveals him reading a book on reptiles and amphibians that demonstrates his keen interest in science. Barry is a loner, with few friends in school presumably because few people his age share such an intense devotion to scientific subjects. Despite his high IQ, Barry is doing poorly in school, especially in math, because he is bored with the instruction. He reads at an 11<sup>th</sup> grade level and would rather be focusing his bespectacled eyes on a science experiment in the high school lab or a book on astronomy than a 6<sup>th</sup> grade reader. “Across the U.S. today,” cautioned *Life*’s editors, “brilliant youngsters are growing up in an isolation almost as profound as Barry Wichmann’s.”

“Why is so little being done for gifted students?” asked the article’s author. The answer was terse: “Because of ignorance, prejudice, and a paralyzing inflexibility in the whole public school system.” Only about 5% of the nation’s secondary schools had programs for gifted students. Elementary programs had even fewer. Most high school districts could not afford to hire extra teachers and purchase the materials needed to develop the talent of the intellectually gifted pupils in their charge, “yet the communities often spend generously on much more costly schooling for the retarded.”<sup>44</sup>

On April 14, 1958, the third installment on the “Crisis in Education” hit the newsstands. This time, *Life* profiled ideas that were working well in public high school classrooms. The generous photographic article examined science and math, particularly how students were excelling in science fairs in Houston, Texas. Science instructors were developing curricula on “Do-It-Yourself Physics” and geometry. “New Patterns in Mathematics” showcased high school students solving problems in calculus and Boolean algebra. “In the new atmosphere of urgency, scientifically-minded youngsters all over the U.S., in school and out, have suddenly become the objects of fine and anxious national attention.” They were being awarded generous scholarships while still in high school, “admitted to the sanctum of scientific research and even honored with parades.” The article reported that school science clubs had grown in number to 300,000 in cities and towns nationwide, a 25% increase over 1957’s total. The City of Houston, Texas even stopped its Saturday afternoon traffic to permit a grand parade celebrating high school science students and their achievements.

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<sup>44</sup> “The Waste of Fine Minds,” *Life*, April 7, 1958, 86. The term “retarded” in these articles refers to students who had failed to advance to the next grade.

Experimentation in more lively curricula was being tried where the United States needed it to occur: in the “vital fields of science and math.” Science and math courses were being “reassessed and tightened up” all over the country. In rural schools, the latest teaching technology—television—was being used to bring science and math concepts to students whose districts could not afford to hire specialized instructors. It seemed fitting that such learning should take place over the most popular technological fad of the 1950s.

In a separate article in the same issue, *Life* profiled what it considered to be the ideal cutting-edge curriculum for the post-Sputnik era. Designed by James B. Conant, former President of Harvard University, the curriculum was conceived as a holistic affair that would expose youth to “unhampered intellectual growth—and yet still preserve its traditional democratic ideals.”

It is difficult to see how Conant’s plan could maintain democratic ideals because he called for American high school curricula to be sliced into three levels with students being tested to determine which tier they would occupy during their four years of high school. Conant’s diagram showed how little the school’s sorting mechanisms had changed over the past fifty years. Like the earlier vocational education movement, Conant was placing great faith in empirical tests and inventories to sort learners into appropriate tracks. The highest level would be reserved for the top 20% in a given school—called “Bright” in Conant’s taxonomy— and would feature “a stiff academic curriculum” of advanced courses in virtually every subject. The Bright learner—a white male dressed in a white shirt and tie symbolizing the professional socioeconomic class of the 1950s— avoids vocational courses and concentrates only on the classes that will ensure a place in college. The “Average” learner, culled from the middle 60% of the class, is exposed to less difficult levels of the same subjects as the gifted student, and

dabbles in an occasional vocational class. The bottom-feeding “Slow” learner—humbly attired with no tie— occupies the lower 20% of a given high school homeroom class and takes courses such as remedial reading along with a heavy dose of vocational studies.

Conant’s scheme was a blueprint for high school studies and for life after graduation. It neatly pigeonholed students into one of the three tracks based on standardized testing coupled with academic and vocational guidance. “Dr. Conant emphasizes that the success of the plan depends on the school’s guidance counselors, who must help every boy and girl choose the right subjects and *pressure* bright students to take tough courses. As a result, every student will have a hand-tailored school career and a definite idea of what he intends to do after graduation.”<sup>45</sup>

The chart in the article and the pressuring of students to take certain courses smacks more of top-down Soviet-style education than the democratic schooling that is symbolized in Dr. Conant’s diagram by the “Average” student, who holds an American flag that waves over the entire cartoon chart. In Conant’s response to the Sputnik education crisis, students are tracked into one of three levels based on batteries of empirical exams. As in the Soviet schools profiled above, *rigorous testing—rather than free choice*—would determine the tier into which each boy and girl would be funneled. The bottom 20% of students in Conant’s plan—based on interviews and observations of 50 comprehensive high schools in 16 states—are not exposed to any college-level courses and are pictured in the last frame working in aprons on an automobile in a repair shop. The Average and Bright students are depicted with white shirts and ties symbolizing their future in the professional classes. At the end of the chart, the Bright student proceeds to college, the Average student moves on to be a general contractor, and the Slow learner heads to Joe’s Garage as a repairman. Such was the conception of James B. Conant and *Life* magazine of the

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<sup>45</sup> *Life* magazine, April 14, 1958, 121. Italics added.

ideal comprehensive high school curriculum as “reformed” to accomplish the sorting it should do. Presumably, such a sorting system would elevate American public schools to the heights of achievement and organization that characterized Soviet teaching and learning programs.

The final “Crisis in Education” installment appeared on April 21, 1958. Entitled “Family Zest for Learning” the magazine chose to profile an “ideal” American family. Yet this family was headed by a father with a Ph.D. in physics who worked at M.I.T. and a mother who had earned a master’s degree. The objective of the article was to describe what every family should do in the wake of the Sputnik event to encourage learning in children and youth on the home front.

The “typical” grouping in this edition of *Life* is the Little family of Massachusetts. Their home life is steeped in culture. All the children play musical instruments and are so talented that they can play a string quartet concert every Sunday. Strict discipline concerning academics is emphasized. The children, ranging in age from elementary to high school, are active and never have to be pestered to complete their homework assignments. They regularly earn As and Bs in school, and are so inquisitive about their schoolwork that a tutoring chalkboard is pinned to the kitchen wall to help one child with his spelling. The parents are described as having “a love for all things intellectual” and fostering a “zest for informing themselves.”

Of course, the Littles were anything but typical. Dr. Bert Little designed successful physics programs for high schools in the late 1950s while working out of his office at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He and his wife, Barbara, counseled *Life*’s readers that parents must make sacrifices of material goods and time for self—as they had done—if they want their children to succeed in school. This was a hard lesson in an age of unprecedented

levels of mass consumerism supported and celebrated by the advertisements that filled the pages of *Life*. The Littles made themselves available in the evenings to help their children with homework problems and expected the older family members to teach the younger ones. They suggested that emphasizing the essentials in schoolwork was another key to academic progress. Parents should coach their children, quiz them, and engage them in conversation about the world around them. Dinner conversations in the Little's household were studded with current events based on the daily newspaper. Their advice presupposed an American society where both parents were present, the mother did not work, and neither the mother nor the father clocked in and out on a swing shift or night shift at the local plant.

**V. "Handicapped in the 'Cold War' of the Classrooms":  
Hyman Rickover, Arthur Bestor and the Crusade of Criticism**

*Life* believed it had stepped on sensitive nerve in American society with its exposé of American public education. In a brief piece called "Life and the Experts with Similar Thoughts," the magazine's editors announced that they had been overwhelmed with communications from Americans who agreed with the conclusions reached in the articles about the apparent crisis in the nation's classrooms. "A rising chorus from thoughtful citizens has confirmed the urgency, the validity, and indeed the form of the series. The weaknesses that are being criticized match almost point for point the ones which *Life* has singled out for special attention." Photographs of three "experts" in the national conversation over school reform who agreed with *Life*'s articles were shown speaking at the prestigious St. Alban's School in Washington, DC. Dr. James Killian, Eisenhower's chief science adviser, Admiral Hyman Rickover, in command of the U.S. Navy's nuclear fleet, and Dr. Merle Tuve, a director at the



Carnegie Institution, shared their thoughts about school reform. Their speeches made the following points about needed school changes:

1. We must raise the standards of our secondary schools and eliminate their ‘trivial’ courses.
2. We must shore up the sagging quality of our science teaching, cut down on teacher’s extra jobs, give him time to be a professional scholar again.
3. We must provide both opportunity and incentive for our gifted children. There must be an unremitting search for talent and intellectual giftedness.
4. We must not slam the door in the faces of qualified people who want to teach, merely because they have not taken superfluous courses in teacher education.
5. We must fight the pose that it is smart to be anti-intellectual, and cultivate in our education a taste for what is excellent in intellect and spirit.

While millions of subscribers pored over the four-part serial on the status of education in America, other critics jumped on the school-bashing bandwagon. Perhaps the best-known of this group was Rear Admiral Hyman Rickover, father of the nuclear-powered U.S. Navy fleet. Like the editors of *Life*, Rickover was convinced that the U.S. education system needed a major overhaul in the face of a supposedly superior Russian mechanism for teaching children and youth. In the scores of public speeches he delivered throughout 1958, he told audiences that what was more disturbing to him than the Sputnik launch itself was the speed with which Russian scientists—albeit helped along by ex-German specialists who had worked in Hitler’s rocket program—were able to launch a rocket into space and deploy two data-gathering artificial satellites.

Rickover’s speeches featured seven themes that were later gathered into a 1959 volume entitled *Education and Freedom*. The main idea of his work was that the Russian education

system was superior to that of the United States, and Americans needed to toughen their high school curriculum in order to “beat the Russians.” This core concept in Rickover’s criticisms echoed earlier claims by vocational educators who had referenced Germany as the education system that America should emulate in order to maintain the prestige and position of the American economy and national defense. His public addresses frequently made the following points:

1. The USSR devotes more resources to achieve technological superiority not just for the present moment but also for “the day after tomorrow.”
2. Russia has invested a smaller amount of the national budget in public education than has the United States but gets better results.
3. The Soviet Union has so many awards for high academic achievement that “her children are working extraordinarily hard to keep up with the curriculum.”
4. The Soviets have no teacher shortage and no “substandard” instructors. Teachers are honored by society and rewarded with respect.
5. Soviet schools maintain high “scholastic standards.”
6. Russian public school teachers are given a “heavy workload,” but the Republic honors them and pays them well.
7. Russian schoolchildren are not distracted by soft pursuits such as movies, TV shows, proms, excessive dating, and jukeboxes. They are serious, determined, and focused.

Rickover was everywhere, crusading for better schooling, tougher curricula, the end of frills and any extracurricular activities that did not contribute to academic excellence. “Unless we remove accretions of ineptitude, irrelevance, and frivolity from American education, we shall be severely handicapped in the ‘Cold War’ of the classrooms.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hyman G. Rickover, *Education and Freedom*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1959), 162ff, 179.

Like his vocational education predecessors David Snedden, Charles Prosser, and others, Rickover favored massive federal aid for public schools. Like some observers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, he called for a national curriculum, but with a new twist: universal testing and special classes for intellectually gifted learners. Because society was so layered and complicated, he believed that public schools should expand their structures for shunting students into different levels of learning depending on intellectual capabilities. In his opinion, high-stakes, empirical national tests could accomplish that goal efficiently. Ironically, the school system he proposed was remarkably similar to the system in the Soviet Union, a nation he detested.<sup>47</sup>

Arthur E. Bestor, Jr. was another prominent public school critic who believed that progressive education had churned a once tough and demanding high school curriculum into a chiffon of fluffed up classes, such as the “life adjustment” courses on courtship, marriage, childrearing, household budgeting, and the like. A professor of history at the University of Illinois, Bestor engaged in a campaign to wrestle the public high school away from the grip of education leaders whose affinity for progressive pedagogy had undermined the process of teaching and learning. Bestor was thoroughly familiar with the “soft pedagogy” of progressive education, having graduated from the Lincoln school, a progressive high school at Teachers College, Columbia University and having taught at the university for four years. A graduate of progressive schools and equipped as he was with an insider’s knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, he had morphed into a crusader for returning “basic education” to the high school curriculum.

Bestor worked to strike down the State of Illinois’ efforts that, in his opinion, threatened to dumb down the essential curriculum in secondary schools. He suggested that a permanent

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<sup>47</sup> Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 35.

national committee be fashioned to reform high school teaching and learning and replace soft classes with more rigorous academics while improving teacher training. When his proposal failed to draw adequate support, he formed a national commission of non-educationists who would study high school curricula and make recommendations, critiques, and suggestions for concrete school reforms that would toughen up the learning process and sharpen teachers' skills. His aim was to help public schools build "up a nation of men and women highly literate, accurately informed, and rigorously trained in the process of rational and critical thought." Funding for his research and travel came from the conservative Volker Foundation.<sup>48</sup>

## **VI. "A Good Measure of Drivel": Reaction to Attacks on Public Education**

Assaults on the inadequacies of America's public school system in the face of the perceived superiority of the Soviet school structure did not go unanswered. Although few critics at the time took on Rickover and Bestor publicly, several people did. George E. Shattuck is a good representative of the limited number of educators who dared to challenge the Rickover-Bestor axis of critique because he was an on-the-ground educator who spoke out for many who either did not have the financial backing that Rickover and Bestor enjoyed or did not have the publishing outlets and networks to assist them in getting their minority message heard during the post-Sputnik outcry over the shortfalls of the American high school.

George Shattuck was principal of the Norwich Free Academy, a prestigious private high school in Connecticut. He was President of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and had his finger on the pulse of what was throbbing in America's high school

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<sup>48</sup> Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War*, 32-33, quoting Arthur E. Bestor, Jr.; Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., "Life-Adjustment Education: A Critique," *American Association of University Professors Bulletin* no. 38 (Autumn 1952), 413.

classrooms and hallways. Shattuck frankly assessed the frontal attacks on education in the wake of Sputnik as “a good measure of drive.” In an article addressing the school critics, he challenged the charges that the American high school was “a dismal failure” and that “Russian youth accomplish in ten years more and better than we do in twelve.” He sarcastically observed that educators should immediately head out in every possible direction to find a permanent solution to the “crisis” that had suddenly befallen American education. “We better mount our steeds and ride off in all directions before it is too late,” he advised. If every direction were covered in the search for an educational panacea that could help the United States “beat the Russians”, then someone somewhere was likely to gallop unintentionally into a solution that could be universally applied and end the “crisis”.<sup>49</sup> However certain he was that the educational sky was not falling, Shattuck recognized that there were serious realities in education that had to be faced head on and dealt with.

*First, Americans need a better understanding of the implications for education before they engage in knee-jerk reforms.* Radically altering the curriculum and composition of America’s high schools could endanger the benefits to teachers and students who study in a diverse community of learners and instructors. The situation of America’s comprehensive high schools was complex. Shattuck argued that the American high school was superior to Russia’s and unique from others in the world because young people and teachers alike in many places engaged youth of all classes, economic levels, races, and creeds in the learning process under one roof. He reminded his audience that children’s learning varied widely in ability, interests, goals, and potentials, which differed from some countries, such as the Soviet Union, where children with different capabilities were siloed into discreet tracks based on high-stakes national tests.

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<sup>49</sup> George E. Shattuck, “Sputnik Is Good If,” *The Clearing House*, vol. 32 no. 8 (April 1958), 467.

With an appreciative nod to the vocational education reformers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shattuck noted that through the introduction of vocational education and electives, freedom of choice and democracy had become embedded in the curriculum itself. Because the American system of secondary education was so democratic in its makeup that differences in race, creed, class, and status could be celebrated in such a way that any potential “social cleavage” could be healed or avoided altogether. Extreme tinkering with the current system could make it less effective and rob students and faculty of the richness of encountering and learning with people of different backgrounds and abilities.<sup>50</sup>

*Second, before turning the American high school upside down in response to a basketball-sized satellite orbiting the earth, Americans needed to awaken to the reality that the Soviet education system was inferior.* Its leaders controlled the entire educational enterprise from Moscow. In other words, the educational system in Russia that was being celebrated in the United States as “superior” *featured central control by the government* which, as we will see below most Americans abhorred. Local initiative in selecting curricula and textbooks was not possible under the Soviet central control. Russian testing of students in order to sort them into different types of schools depending on scores smacked of predetermined educational agendas for youth. Shattuck argued that Soviet screening exams shunted learners into professional, technical, industrial, and agricultural tracks. The most incompetent students—James B. Conant’s “Slow” learners—were destined for the Soviet military as potential fodder for war with the West. Shattuck pointed out that the USSR spent larger portions of the gross domestic product on education than did the United States. Yet the cost was high: leaders of the educational bureaucracy told students where they would go to school, for how many years, and for a specific life preparation based on test

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<sup>50</sup> Of course, the irony in Shattuck’s remarks was that many public schools remained *de facto* or *de jure* systems segregated by race in 1958.

scores and the needs of the State. In retrospect, it is difficult to see a great deal of difference in the essential framework of the Soviet education system and the “ideal” sorting mechanism that James B. Conant envisioned for American high schools.

Shattuck had stern words of criticism for Hyman Rickover and Arthur E. Bestor. He charged that people in “high places” with national reputations had hijacked the school reform debate and lashed out at public *high schools* while leaving the *elementary schools* largely untouched. Shattuck observed that Arthur Bestor was not an education specialist. He was a historian and did not have the expertise to engage in school reforms in the nation’s high schools that would affect the lives of millions of adolescents, some of whom were his students at Illinois and were themselves the products of public high schools.

For Hyman Rickover, an atomic specialist who had been crisscrossing the United States attacking schools and offering a test-and-sort approach to radically reform secondary education, Shattuck had sharp words: “There is little of the objectivity of the scientist or the careful evaluation of data of the engineer apparent when he says (as quoted in *Time* for December 2, 1957) that the American high schools teach ‘Life Adjustment’ and ‘How to Know You’re Really in Love’ instead of French and physics.” Shattuck also quotes Rickover as saying that

some American high school graduates never get beyond quadratic equations, but every graduate of the European science-math secondary school must be familiar with differential and integral calculus, analytic geometry, [and] application of math to physics and trigonometry.”<sup>51</sup>

The problem with Rickover’s argument was that European high schools in the late 1950s were highly selective, and they ignored the needs of millions of youth who would never get to

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<sup>51</sup> Shattuck, “Sputnik Is Good If,” 469.

the math-science magnet schools that he proposed. They would be left behind and consigned to the Average or Slow tracks featured in James B. Conant's taxonomy.

In answer to the claim echoed by Bestor, Rickover and the editors of *Life* magazine that American high school students preferred to shun tough subjects such as math and the sciences, Shattuck had two words: "What rot!" Statistics showed him that from 1900 to 1954—the latest year for which data were available—there had been a 50% increase in the total number of youth in the U.S. population, a 1,200% increase in youth enrolled in secondary education, a 200% expansion in the enrollment in high school physics, and an increase of 1,100% in registrations for chemistry courses.

Responding to Rickover's remarks that 23% of secondary schools did not offer chemistry or physics in the 1954-55 school year, Shattuck shared another important statistic that Rickover either left out intentionally or was not aware of: the 23% of high schools he referred to were mostly small schools that only enrolled 5.8% of all high school seniors in the country. Therefore, almost 95% of American high school students were exposed to classes in physics and chemistry. In closing, Shattuck stated, "I conclude that the admiral is as competent to comment on secondary education as I would be to run his [atomic] submarine."<sup>52</sup>

The National Education Association needed to respond to the message that America's schools were to blame for the "crisis" of America's apparent slowness in the space program. The nation's leading educational organization called an emergency meeting of its Educational Policies Commission (EPC), a consortium of university presidents, educators, professors of education and communication, and several state leaders of education. They concluded that there

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<sup>52</sup> Shattuck, "Sputnik Is Good If," 469.



were indeed weak spots in the nation's public school system, but normally they could be attributed to lack of facilities due to absence of adequate funding. Although funding was an issue, EPC members did not conclude that massive federal funding was a panacea that would make the problems of schooling disappear. As for the hue and cry for more math and science education in the elementary and secondary levels, the EPC reminded readers of its report that American schools, unlike their Soviet counterparts, were required to be democratic. Schools should emphasize science and math only in the context of the comprehensive high school curriculum that was committed to educating *all comers*, the educationally challenged, the average student, as well as the gifted and talented. They did not endorse the idea of spending more money on gifted and talented pupils than on others in the school system. Finally, the EPC cautioned critics who attacked public education without marshalling facts, data, and statistics to back up their claims. They also warned against fear mongering and needless blaming.

Citizens must recognize that careless criticism of education may actually result in a deterioration of quality rather than in improvement. An atmosphere of fear, distrust, or emotional antagonism is not conducive to those changes and tests of new ideas which are the basis of improvement.”<sup>53</sup>

## **VII. Impact of the National Defense Education Act**

NDEA's life after 1958 resembled that of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 in several ways. First it was originally intended by President Eisenhower to be a temporary measure that lasted only four years from 1958 through the end of fiscal 1962. NDEA was meant to “complement and augment more selectively targeted federal educational programs...through the Office of

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<sup>53</sup> Urban, *More than Science and Sputnik*, 119, quoting Educational Policies Commission, *The Contemporary Challenge to American Education*, (Washington, DC: The National Education Association, 1958), 23.

Education within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.” However, the act was renewed in 1962 and lived on until 1968, six years beyond its original life expectancy. It fell far short of vocational education’s ability to survive virtually every budget cut in education from 1917 until the present, but it nonetheless echoed the Smith-Hughes pattern of being renewed beyond its original temporary tenure.

NDEA also replicated its predecessor's feat of drawing *increasing amounts of federal aid* as the years progressed. In 1959, the act’s original allotment was \$47.5 million. This amount ballooned to \$75 million by the next year. In 1961, \$82.5 million was allocated, and in 1962 it reached \$90 million, nearly twice the amount originally earmarked by Congress. NDEA was renewed for fiscal 1963 and 1964 after John F. Kennedy’s attempt to pass a general education funding bill for public schools was defeated in 1963 due to the age-old obstacles of religion and fear of federal control of the levers of power that rightfully belonged to local school boards.

As with Smith-Hughes and its successors in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, each time NDEA was renewed beyond its original lifespan, the funding ceiling was raised. As Wayne Urban points out, in the absence of federal aid for general education “NDEA served as a vehicle through which to renew the national commitment to education and to increase funding for various federal aid programs, without extending the reach of federal legislation into different realms.”

Another important trait that NDEA and Smith-Hughes vocationalist reform held in common was the reliance on standardized testing to determine the educational future of students. NDEA devoted \$53 million to state educational agencies and colleges for testing and guidance of students and for training high school and university guidance counselors in helping learners

select classes and occupational trajectories based on aptitude testing. The vocational education movement relied heavily on tests such as the MacQuarrie interest and ability inventory that appeared in the 1920s. Guidance counselors relied on IQ tests at that time as well in determining whether to advise pupils to enter the academic or vocational track.

Identifying gifted students in the sciences through standardized aptitude tests was also a top priority for scientists who worked on projects funded by NDEA. In a report on gifted and talented students published by the National Science Foundation (NSF), which had a stake in NDEA funding, NSF agents relied on data from these examinations to argue that there was a significant pool of exceptionally gifted students in the sciences who were being overlooked by local schools. It also approved of schools that were already offering Advanced Placement (AP) classes and deplored economic conditions in which some poorer schools could not afford to host an AP curriculum. However, although the NSF report also noted that “the imperfection of objective tests as devices for measuring ability is fully recognized,” they proceeded to rely on test scores as indicators of how many talented children and youth were being ignored in subpar schools. Their claim was reminiscent of *Life* magazine’s profile of Barry Wichmann, the Iowa 6<sup>th</sup>-grader whose high IQ and stellar performances on aptitude tests rendered school boring because the district did not have enough money to launch an AP program.<sup>54</sup>

The NSF report was adamant that economic conditions should not be a deterrent to advancing academic studies for students at any level of schooling. About students in similar conditions to those endured by Barry Wichmann and his parents, the committee wrote:

[U]nder no conditions should young people be forced to discontinue their education at any level for economic reasons. They are the nation’s most valuable,

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<sup>54</sup> Urban, *Beyond Science and Sputnik*, 169.

and its ultimate, asset. The nation as a whole should take the responsibility for seeing that they are permitted to make themselves as useful as they can become.....It is scarcely possible to put the matter too strongly. The potentially great scientist or engineer, scholar, physician, or educator who ends up, through no fault of his own, as an underling at a task below his native endowment, represents an indefensible national loss.<sup>55</sup>

## Summary

The National Defense Education Act recreated a number of traits that marked the nation's first federal school reform program as embodied in the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act. On both occasions, federal school grants were made possible by progressive-liberal Democrats from the South who envisioned educational progress tied to human capital, the economy, and national defense. In each scenario, educationists lobbied heavily for federal aid to local public schools, and they succeeded in achieving the lion's share of their objectives. In 1917 and again in 1958, the motive for monetary help for community schools was driven by national crises—immigration, industrialization, urbanization, and the approach of World War I in 1917 and fears in the late 1950s that the Soviet Union was outperforming the United States in the classroom and on the launching pad. The specter of a Soviet rocket reaching North America frightened Americans into action over federal involvement in local education.

In 1917 and again in the 1950s, the White House played an active role in the debates over federal help. Woodrow Wilson pushed for a commission in 1914 to study the challenges faced by the nation's high schools in the face of the national "crisis" in education. Many educationists believed the country's public school system had let citizens down and were not preparing youth for realistic vocations. In 1958, Dwight D. Eisenhower's moderate Republican stance enabled him to support an education measure that addressed a felt national crisis in the schoolrooms of

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<sup>55</sup> Urban, *Beyond Science and Sputnik*, 166, quoting the President's Science Advisory Committee, *Education for the Age of Science*, (Washington, DC: The White House, May 24, 1959), 14-15.

America's public institutions. In both instances, occupants of the White House believed that public schools could and should play an important role in securing the national defense and in buttressing the American economy.

Both the Smith-Hughes and NDEA acts left trace elements that influenced school reform that appeared in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. These traits include the perception that the United States was in the grips of an educational crisis, that federal reform initiatives could remedy the situation, and that the pressures of high-stakes empirical school testing would ensure accountability and success. We now turn to the conclusion to briefly consider these issues.

## CONCLUSION

### **Coming Full Circle: *A Nation at Risk* and Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Reform**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vocational education reform initiative opened the door to federal funding for local schools where repeated attempts in earlier decades had failed. In the 1950s, politicians and education leaders duplicated vocationalism's success by opening up federal aid for broader subjects in science, mathematics, and foreign languages at the elementary and secondary levels. The preceding chapters have attempted to demonstrate that occupational training was a vast, highly organized, successful, and groundbreaking reform that fundamentally changed the American high school curriculum. It established a new set of purposes for education and laid down a pattern of elements for subsequent school reforms in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries:

1. Public education should be used to develop human capital and alleviate concerns over America's economic prowess in world markets, as well as to address real or perceived national crises.
2. Schools can be enlisted to serve the nation's national security needs.
3. Federal spending on education comes with layers of regulation and accountability.

A collection of school reforms were enacted after NDEA. The largest, most influential, and most pervasive reform has been the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which was passed to use public schooling as a platform to address poverty and educational inequities throughout American society and to ensure that every school district had access to adequate funding. Dismantling *de jure* and *de facto* racial segregation in schools was a centerpiece of this legislation. In inflation adjusted dollars, federal outlays for ESEA grew from

\$4.5 billion in 1966 to a peak of nearly \$17 billion in 2011.<sup>1</sup> Extensions of ESEA have been voted many times by Congress.

Lines of continuity exist between the vocational education reform movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and calls for school reform in recent decades in terms of human capital and the training of children and youth to take their place in the American economy. The framework used here for tracing these lines is the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, a report that continues to influence educational reforms in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This paper was the hand-wringing inspiration for a collection of school reforms in the federal government and among the states that has continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among them is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It is sometimes mentioned that *A Nation at Risk* launched a round of “new” initiatives: the school accountability movement; high-stakes empirical testing; the deep connection between education, the U.S. economy, and work; and the concept of school accountability. The call for these actions in *A Nation at Risk* echoed the characteristics that defined both the vocational education reform movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the NDEA Act of 1958.

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Its authors were members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report’s most widely quoted line announced that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.” More stridently, it declared that if a foreign power had imposed the American educational system on the United States, it would be considered an “act of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Budget for Fiscal Year 2013*, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, “Program and Financing”, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 371.

war.”<sup>2</sup> While condemning the state of American public education, it described 13 areas in which schools placed the United States at educational risk. The authors warned that these deficiencies threatened to reduce the nation’s ability to meet “the demand for highly skilled workers.” The greatest fear was that by the year 2000, high school graduates would not be equipped to fill the need for computer specialists in every field, thus putting the United States behind its foreign economic competitors.

The report made four overarching recommendations for school change that reflected elements found in both the vocational and NDEA reform initiatives. First, the authors called for a set of “five new basics”—English, math, science, social studies, and computer technology—to be emphasized in every public K-12 school. Second, they stressed the need for increased student performance and robust standardized testing to ensure that students met high expectations. Third, the commission suggested that the school year be lengthened to 200 or 220 days, or that existing school schedules be used more efficiently. Fourth, the report suggested that colleges raise their admission standards as a way of *forcing* students in elementary and secondary schools to perform at a higher level.

### **Link between Education and Work**

While allowing that one of the goals of education is to enrich all aspects of human life, the report emphasized far more the *vocational* objectives of schooling. One of the primary purposes of education as described by the vocational reform movement was the inseparable connection between schooling and work. In the early 1900s, manufacturers worried that the nation’s schools were not producing well-trained workers to staff factories, plants, and mills.

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<sup>2</sup> *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, DC, U.S. Department of Education, April 1983), 3.



The *Nation at Risk* report wasted no time in making the same link when calling for massive school reform. In its second sentence, the commission argued that “Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.” Thus, educational reform had come full circle in a moment of *deja vu*: the issues that plagued reformers in education and politics nearly a century earlier had returned to plague them again, as if nothing had changed.<sup>3</sup>

*A Nation at Risk* singled out Japanese, Korean, and German accomplishments in these fields. Japan was building automobiles “more efficiently than Americans.” Korea had recently constructed the world’s most advanced and efficient steel mill, surpassing any facility in the United States. American tools, “once the pride of the world,” were being replaced by superior German examples. The authors warned that the United States needed to reform its school system “if only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets.” In their “open letter to the American people” about the need for quality school reform, the authors argued that pragmatic courses in public high schools would close the gap between American and foreign accomplishments, as they had in the decades prior to World War I. Not only was America’s competitive edge slipping away because of its mediocre educational system, manufacturers and business leaders were noting in the early 1980s that they were spending significant amounts of time and money to retrain workers who had graduated high school with inadequate skills.

In a clear reverberation of concerns expressed in the vocational education movement eight decades earlier, the commission commented that “these deficiencies come at a time when the demand for highly skilled workers in new fields is accelerating rapidly.” The only difference

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<sup>3</sup> *A Nation at Risk*, 1

between the time *A Nation at Risk* appeared and the period in which occupational training reform was proposed was the type of machinery. In 1917, business and manufacturing leaders were concerned that high school dropouts would not know how to operate complex equipment in factories, plants, and mills. In 1983, the Excellence in Education commission worried that high school graduates would not be able to operate computer-controlled equipment, laser technology, and robotic machinery. By claiming that school reform was needed in order to beef up the skills of “a new generation of Americans that is scientifically and technologically illiterate,” the authors were also reflecting deep concerns expressed in the observations and debates leading up to the 1958 NDEA legislation.<sup>4</sup>

Development of human capital has been a core educational objective in the nation’s schools since the advent of the vocational education reform movement. The commission mimicked the philosophical underpinnings of this movement when it underscored “the traditional belief that paying for education is an investment in ever-renewable human resources that are more durable and flexible than capital plant and equipment.”<sup>5</sup>

The connection between education and the American economy has been a regular feature of presidential speeches on schooling since *A Nation at Risk* appeared. The occasions when presidents have coupled the purpose of schooling with growing the American economy number too many to list here. The following selections from their addresses provide examples of how deeply intertwined these two concepts are in the minds of the nation’s top political figures.

Soon after the landmark report was issued in 1983, President Ronald Reagan broached the subject of education and the economy in his annual address to Congress. In calling for

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<sup>4</sup> *A Nation at Risk*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *A Nation at Risk*, 8.

cooperation among business, educators, and organized labor, he echoed the makeup of the vocational education reform coalition that appeared before World War I:

We Americans are still the technological leaders in most fields. We must keep that edge, and to do so we need to begin renewing the basics— starting with our educational system. While we grew complacent, others have acted. Japan, with a population only about half the size of ours, graduates from its universities more engineers than we do. If a child doesn't receive adequate math and science teaching by the age of 16, he or she has lost the chance to be a scientist or an engineer. We must join together— parents, teachers, grassroots groups, organized labor, and the business community— to revitalize American education by setting a standard of excellence.<sup>6</sup>

President George H.W. Bush sounded the notes of increased efficiency, economic competition, and manufacturing output as key goals for schools. In a special joint session of Congress in early 1989, President Bush—who wanted to be known as “the Education President”— reiterated the relationship between education and economic productivity when he noted that “we must take actions today that will ensure a better tomorrow. We must extend American leadership in technology, increase long-term investment, improve our educational system, and boost productivity.” Later in the same address, President Bush observed that improvement of education was “the most important competitiveness program of all.”<sup>7</sup>

President Bill Clinton forged links between schooling children and adolescents and the need for a strong economy in 1993 when he said that “education...[is] inadequate to the demands of this tough, global economy.” Later in the same speech, Clinton made remarks that echoed the philosophy of the vocational education movement and *A Nation at Risk*:

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<sup>6</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union”, January 25, 1983, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=41698>

<sup>7</sup> George H.W. Bush, “Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress”, February 9, 1989, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=16660>

We have to recognize that all of our high school graduates need some further education in order to be competitive in this global economy. So we have to establish a partnership between businesses and education and the Government for apprenticeship programs in every State in this country to give our people the skills they need.

In 2008, President George W. Bush's last official policy address was on education, delivered in a public school in Philadelphia. Bush said that schooling and the economy were intertwined:

There is a growing consensus across the country that now is not the time to water down standards or to roll back accountability [in public education]. There is a growing consensus that includes leaders of the business communities across America who see an increasingly global economy and, therefore, believe in standards and accountability.<sup>8</sup>

In 2014, President Barack Obama, speaking at a Nashville high school, told his audience that “you’ve found new ways to identify and reward the best teachers. You’ve made huge strides in helping young people learn the skills they need for a new economy—skills like problem-solving and critical thinking, science, technology, engineering, math.” He went on to make an even more concrete association between education and the economy: “Research shows that high-quality early education is one of the best investments we can make in a child’s life. We know that. And not only is it good for the child, it’s a smart investment. Every dollar you put into

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<sup>8</sup> George W. Bush, “President Discusses No Child Left Behind,” White House Archives, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2009/01/20090108-2.html>.

early childhood education, the government will— taxpayers will save seven dollars because you have fewer dropouts, fewer teen pregnancies.<sup>9</sup>

President Obama’s purpose for education continues to reflect the belief that a major objective for public schooling is to prepare human capital:

In today’s global economy, a high-quality education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite to success. Because economic progress and educational achievement are inextricably linked, educating every American student to graduate from high school prepared for college and for a career is a national imperative. The President has articulated a goal for America to once again lead the world in college completion by the year 2020, and all of President Obama’s education efforts aim toward this overarching objective. To create an economy built to last, we need to provide every child with a complete and competitive education that will enable them to succeed in a global economy based on knowledge and innovation.<sup>10</sup>

In every case, presidents since *A Nation at Risk* have co-opted the language of education that links the classroom with economic growth and school reform. Public schools are the maidservants to business and manufacturing, to technological development, and to keeping the United States ahead of other nations in the global marketplace. President Obama’s education policy website is titled, “Education: Knowledge and Skills for the Jobs of the Future.”<sup>11</sup> His “Race to the Top” program has been designed as an initiative to strengthen schools, deepen accountability, and prepare children and youth for the rigors of life in the adult economic world. According to the Obama White House policy statements on education, Race to the Top “has ushered in significant change in our education system, particularly in raising standards and

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<sup>9</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on a World-Class Education”, McGavock Comprehensive High School Nashville, Tennessee, January 30, 2014, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/31/remarks-president-world-class-education>.

<sup>10</sup> The White House, “Issues: K-12 Education,” <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12>.

<sup>11</sup> “Education: Knowledge and Skills for the Jobs of the Future.” The White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/k-12>.

aligning policies and structures to the goal of college and career readiness.” The links between public schooling and preparing children for work as lively participants in the American economic system were forged originally by vocational education reformers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and they endure today as repeated tropes.

### **The Birth of “24/7 School Reform”**

This dissertation has attempted to extend the history of American schooling by examining and evaluating the attempts of lawmakers, educators, and individuals outside government from the early Republic through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to procure federal support for local public elementary and secondary schools. A chronological examination of primary Congressional documents, lawmakers’ correspondence, educational journals, and the minutes of school conventions has revealed that the chief obstacles to releasing Congressional money to support education were:

1. The desire to preserve states’ rights in the realm of public schooling, and
2. Anxiety that the central government would increasingly intrude in the local schoolhouse and undermine democratic community prerogatives.

Second, this work has examined why vocational education succeeded in prying open the federal pocketbook to pay for local public schooling for the first time in the nation’s history. I argue that vocational education reformers achieved this victory because high school occupational training was widely viewed by Washington politicians, community-based and nationally recognized business leaders, union bosses, and many Progressive educators as an easy-to-implement pragmatic cure-all for a range of real and perceived crises at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including:

1. High drop-out rates in public high schools;
2. The “problem” of assimilating immigrants;
3. The perceived need for trained laborers in expanding industrial and retail establishments, and;
4. The challenge of equipping young people to participate in America’s growing economy.

In a time of confusing and seemingly uncontrollable change, many policymakers at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century embraced the practical philosophy presented by vocational education reformers. The reformers’ arguments were straightforward, easy-to-digest, filled with common sense principles, and clearly articulated.

Third, exploring the vocational education movement is important because vocationalism changed the purpose of public education from a moral one to an economic one. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the objective of tax-supported schooling in the states had largely been to prepare youth to participate in the obligations of a representative democracy and to communicate Protestant moral values. Janet Y. Thomas has observed that “Republican virtues and Protestant ethics served as the basis of education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During that time, the purpose of schooling was widely seen to provide a civic education and to mold the character of those would ultimately become the leaders of society.” Its overarching goal was not to prepare students for the workplace. The ethics communicated by teachers and textbooks included honesty, thrift, punctuality, Protestant religious faith, and hard work. As John Westerhoff points out, textbooks such as the popular editions of *McGuffey’s Eclectic Reader* reflected one of the public school’s primary objectives: to teach morality and civic-mindedness. Federally funded vocational education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, proposed a new purpose for education: training young people to participate in the nation’s growing workforce and preparing them to take their proper place in America’s world-leading economy. Federal funding for vocational education

inspired the commitment of Washington politicians and many school policymakers to the concept that the primary objective of education is to efficiently develop America's human capital and strengthen its economic competitiveness.<sup>12</sup>

Fourth, this dissertation has attempted to show that vocational education's history is worth investigation not only because it was the first federally supported public school reform, but also because it changed the composition and purpose of the high school curriculum, creating what is today known as the comprehensive high school. Prior to the successful implementation of vocational reform, the curriculum in most schools emphasized traditional learning in the classics, English, the physical sciences, and mathematics. Secondary education was perceived as a training ground for those who planned to enter college and the professions. The introduction of practical occupational training on a national scale buttressed by federal dollars converted the high school into an institution that attempted to appeal not only to the elite and the academically inclined, but also to working class students, newly arrived immigrant learners, and students who had no desire to enter college.

Fifth, the preceding chapters have presented vocational education as a lens through which to examine the intellectual history of public schooling at a critical period in the public school's past. The vocational reform movement sparked debates over the central purpose of schooling America's youth. Vocationalism created a national stage from which to assess, debate, and redefine the role education should play in the lives of young people and in the rapidly changing American society at large. John Dewey, David Snedden, George Counts, W.E.B. DuBois, Jane Addams, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Anna Julia Cooper, Booker T. Washington, Theodore

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<sup>12</sup> Janet Y. Thomas, "The Public School Superintendency in the Twenty-First Century: The Quest to Define Effective Leadership," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education), 2001, 1. John H. Westerhoff, III, "William Holmes McGuffey: Studies on the World-View and Value System in the First Editions of the Eclectic First, Second, and Third Readers", Ed.D. diss., Columbia University, 1975.



Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Samuel Gompers were among the nationally appreciated leaders who participated in the conversation. Leading organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) joined the discussion as well. Local groups, including Progressive women's clubs, churches, and community-minded civic associations also took part in debating the virtues and drawbacks vocationalism.

Sixth, this work has probed the issue of the vocational education movement's proclivity for using the emerging "science" of empirical exams and inventories that were meant to measure students' academic and occupational potentials. Although they remain controversial, standardized tests and inventories to measure the progress of schools, teachers, and students in public education are widely used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are pinned to school success and to the progress of individual students. A century ago, vocational counselors and teachers employed standardized tests to determine the academic potential of learners and to measure their occupational preferences. Thus, vocationalist reformers helped establish the century-long practice of testing young people to reveal academic, occupational, and intellectual talent.

In this work, I have sought to demonstrate that the vocational education movement established a set of patterns that carried forward into other school reforms in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and persist in the 21<sup>st</sup>. These attributes include the following:

1. The perception among policymakers, educators, and the general public that when the nation is in crisis public schools are tools to help extricate the nation from the grip of a dire situation. In some cases, public schools are blamed for helping to cause the crisis. In other cases they are faulted for not being nimble enough to respond to it quickly and efficiently.

2. The answer to the perceived problems of public education is federal money for local schools. More dollars means more programs, greater effectiveness, and better adjustment of pupils to anticipated future needs of the nation.
3. Federally backed school reform initiatives come with standardized student testing to determine academic acuity and measure the effectiveness of teachers and schools in carrying out federal funding objectives.
4. The purpose of education is to develop human capital so children and youth can take their rightful place in the American economy. The objective of schooling is to prepare the next generation of workers who will advance the United States' economy in the world market and strengthen its national security. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the goal was to compete successfully against the dominating Germans. In the 1950s, schools were charged with the duty of helping the United States "beat the Russians." In the 1980s, policymakers enlisted schools to combat Japanese resurgence in the world economy, while in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century schools are needed to train the next generation to gain the edge on the growing Chinese economic powerhouse, which is expected to surpass the United States as the world's leading economic engine.

In 2008, Paul Tough wrote that America was obsessed with "24/7 school reform" activities. He observed that policymakers, parents, and politicians were constantly tinkering with the nation's school system and that sharp differences between Democrats and Republicans revealed how deeply divided Americans are over when, why, and how to change America's K-12 public schools. Tough noted that "The American social contract has always identified public schools as the one place where the state can and should play a role in the process of child-rearing. Outside the school's walls (except in cases of serious abuse or neglect), society is seen to have neither a right nor a responsibility to intervene."<sup>13</sup>

The federal government began intervening with funding in 1917 in an effort to rear young people to take their place in the American economy and to help strengthen the national defense. Since that time, the public school has been co-opted as an institution not only to prepare children and youth for the world of work, but also in many cases to feed, clothe, and counsel children in

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Tough, "24/7 School Reform, *The New York Times Magazine* (sept. 5, 2008), M17.

initiatives that are supported by federal funding, the funding that was pioneered by the national reform movement that changed the arrangements between the federal government and the local K-12 public school: vocational education.

The legacy of vocational education's reform efforts a century ago can still be appreciated in contemporary efforts to retool K-12 public education, specifically in the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). Created by the National Governors Association (NGA) and heads of state departments of education between 2007 and 2009, the initiative was launched in 2010 amid a new round of criticisms that American public education did not measure up to foreign schools. When comparing U.S. students to those in China, CCSSI leaders found American learners to be less prepared for future jobs.

Thus far, 45 states, the Department of Defense schools, and various U.S. territories have adopted the standards and are requiring their teachers to design curricula that reflect CCSSI rubrics. Like their vocational education counterparts a century earlier and their predecessors in the late 1950s, Common Core State Standards have been presented as the 21<sup>st</sup> century method to enlist the schools in alleviating the nation's perceived lack of competitive prowess on the international stage. Common Core leaders have crafted a simple, straightforward message to convince the nation that their reform initiative is the key to improving America's position in "a world that is getting more and more competitive every day."

A national coalition of CCSSI leaders, drawn from education experts, state offices, K-12 public school teachers, and parents, have argued that educational inequalities result from a mishmash of learning goals across school districts and states. They have noted that until the Common Core State Standards were developed, it was "pretty hard to tell how well kids are

competing in school and how well they are going to do when they get out of school.” Like their ancestors in 1917 and 1958, CCSSI advocates promise to improve public education, making children and youth more competitive in finding jobs and increasingly competitive with foreign learners, who are perceived to be more advanced academically. The organization cites China as an example of a foreign power whose students outperform Americans: “Is a graduate in St. Louis as prepared to get a job as a graduate in Shanghai? It turns out that the answer is no,” because American benchmarks do not match up with ones that are perceived to be superior in other countries.<sup>14</sup>

While the federal government was not involved in establishing Common Core State Standards, its Department of Education has supported them through funding efforts to create standardized tests in the states that are aligned with CCSS guidelines. Additionally, Department officials have called on states to align at least 85% of their educational classroom objectives to CCSS rubrics in order to qualify for the competitive Race to the Top funding.

Given the presence of No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and Common Core State Standards, it seems clear that federal funding and intervention, the concept that K-12 schools are institutions that should sharpen American competitiveness, and the perception that schooling is preparation for productive participation in the nation’s economy are here to stay, and that school leaders at every level will continue to retool the school to ensure that these conceptions of educating young Americans persist in the future.

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<sup>14</sup> Common Core State Standards: Preparing America’s Students for College and Career, <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/development-process/>.

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