

Copyright

by

Adam Benjamin Golub

2004

The Dissertation Committee for Adam Benjamin Golub Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

**Into the Blackboard Jungle:
Educational Debate and Cultural Change in 1950s America**

Committee:

Janet M. Davis, Supervisor

Shelley Fisher Fishkin

O.L. Davis, Jr.

Patricia Kruppa

Julia Mickenberg

Mark C. Smith

**Into the Blackboard Jungle:
Educational Debate and Cultural Change in 1950s America**

by

Adam Benjamin Golub, A.B.; M.A.T.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August, 2004

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents—to my first "coach,"
George Curtis, and to my best teacher, Ruth Curtis.

Acknowledgements

An outstanding faculty committee has guided me through the intricate process of turning out a doctoral dissertation in American Studies. Janet Davis supplied brilliant feedback on chapter drafts, and oversaw the completion of this project in its crucial final year. From the first day I met Shelley Fisher Fishkin, she challenged me to ask "big" questions and to answer them with close and careful research. Mark Smith mentored me in my transition from literary critic to cultural historian during my graduate career at the University of Texas. O.L. Davis, Jr. introduced me to the exciting field of curriculum history, and encouraged me to bring an American Studies mindset to bear on educational issues. Julia Mickenberg and Pat Kruppa both directed me toward a wealth of primary and secondary sources on 1950s America.

Other scholars have generously commented on various sections of this dissertation, and I would like to thank James Gilbert, Marvin Lazerson, Marjorie Murphy, and Thomas Sugrue for their astute suggestions.

This project has been supported by a Spencer Dissertation Fellowship for Research Related to Education and by a University Continuing Fellowship from the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin. Archival research was made possible by a Robert M. Crunden Memorial Research Award from the UT American Studies Department. Archivists Sean Noel and J.C. Johnson at the Mugar Library in

Boston, and Barbara Hall at the Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles, guided me through short but efficient visits to manuscript collections.

During the 2003-04 academic year at the University of Texas, my AMS 315 students wrote research papers on contemporary educational issues that often challenged me to forge links between school crises past and present. Many of our class discussions informed the conclusions that I draw in this dissertation.

For too long I worked on this project in isolation from my graduate student peers at the University of Texas. That changed last fall when I randomly happened to share my instructor office hours with Bill Bush. My conversations with Bill this past year have proved a boon to my work, and I am grateful for his insight and his friendship. Thanks are also due to Cary Cordova, Tracy Fleischman and Matt Tucker for helping me lead a relatively sane and occasionally well-rounded life in Austin. Steven Cotterill, Brian Gilmore, Bryan McGurn, and Clarence Wong offered long-distance encouragement. And on long-distance research trips to Boston and Los Angeles, Alexi Lownie and Will Thomas offered me a much-needed place to stay.

Lily Woodland tirelessly supported me as I worked on this project from prospectus to defense. I could not have realized this goal without her.

My parents—who have been wondering for some time when I would finally finish my "paper"— provided steady doses of love, reassurance, and good humor during this protracted Ph.D. chase. My debts to them are many.

**Into the Blackboard Jungle:
Educational Debate and Cultural Change in 1950s America**

Publication No. _____

Adam Benjamin Golub, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2004

Supervisor: Janet M. Davis

This dissertation examines the moral panic over America's education "crisis" in the 1950s. Unlike traditional histories of postwar education, which tend to focus on curricular debates, institutional change, and major events like Sputnik and Little Rock, this interdisciplinary project turns its attention to popular culture. It analyzes everyday depictions of the school crisis that appeared in newspapers, magazines, films, and best-selling books, and discusses these depictions in terms of cultural production and audience reception. Specifically, it explores the ways in which popular culture shaped educational debates and influenced school reform efforts in the fifties. In the final analysis, it also shows how the public school was transformed into a symbol of fear and danger in postwar American culture. My dissertation argues that the democratization of education after World War II, which was spurred by rising enrollments, desegregation, and the G.I. Bill, simultaneously engendered cultural anxieties about the prospect of achieving educational and social equality in the fifties. As public schools grew more diverse along

lines of race, class, gender, age, and ability level, they grew more dangerous in the popular imagination. Chapter one traces the origins of the education panic, while chapters two through four discuss three popular narratives about the school crisis. Chapter two offers a case study of a local school crisis in Pasadena, California that attracted national attention in the early fifties; it reads the history of Pasadena's educational conflict as an outgrowth of urban migration, McCarthyism, and the backlash against progressive education. Chapter three explains how both the novel and film versions of *The Blackboard Jungle*, which focused on racially diverse, blue-collar high school students, significantly influenced public discourse about America's "dangerous" schools at mid-decade. Chapter four studies popular depictions of the back-to-basics movement—a self-proclaimed antidote to the school crisis—and considers the movement's rhetorical appeals alongside social anxieties about masculinity, conformity, and rapid cultural change. Chapter five outlines the legacies of the postwar education crisis, demonstrating the ways in which the rhetoric of fear and schooling that was forged in the fifties continues to influence popular debates about public education today.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter 1 Consuming Education: Origins of the Postwar School Crisis..... | 16 |
| Chapter 2 The Other Pasadena Story: Anatomy of a Crisis in the "Athens of America" | 51 |
| Chapter 3 Is Your School a Blackboard Jungle?: A Cultural History of America's "Jungle Tempest" | 99 |
| Chapter 4 Getting Back to the Basics: Evil Experts, Soft Schoolboys, and the Blackboard Backlash | 137 |
| Chapter 5 Conclusion..... | 183 |
| Bibliography | 205 |
| Vita | 218 |

Introduction

In the 1940s, American public school teachers had it easy. Back then, the school problems they worried about most were talking, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, getting out of turn in line, wearing improper clothes, and not putting paper in the wastebasket. This was not the case forty years later, however. In the 1980s, teachers listed drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery and assault among the "top" school problems of the day. These, at least, were the findings of an educational study that came out in the early eighties. Over the course of the next decade, a variety of social critics and media outlets cited the so-called school survey as evidence of an educational system in decline. It was quoted by conservative commentators, including George Will, Rush Limbaugh, and Phyllis Schlafly, and by liberal journalists, including Anna Quindlen and Carl Rowan. It was mentioned in mass media sources like *Newsweek* and CBS News, and it showed up in the syndicated Ann Landers column. Even educational leaders, like the U.S. Secretary of Education, the chancellor of New York City public schools, and the president of Harvard University, referenced the survey.¹ To observers, the two lists offered proof that mass public education had become a far more complicated—and more perilous—project over the past forty years. Indeed, modern education appeared to be in a state of crisis.

Without question, the survey offered a striking contrast of two different educational eras, one seemingly simple and the other frighteningly complex. Then,

students chewed gum and ran in the halls. Now, students were violent, stoned, and pregnant. Then, schooldays were more innocent. Now, classrooms had become dangerous places. In the 1980s, the problems of society appeared to be encroaching on the classroom—sex, drugs, and violence all haunted the hallways. Conversely, the schools of the 1940s had somehow kept the world outside at bay. Then, school grounds were impervious to society's problems; they were safer, more secure. Critics wondered, what had changed? What had gone wrong? Why was schooling in the forties seemingly so uncomplicated? And why was education facing such a crisis in the eighties?

As it turns out, the lists that had raised such penetrating questions about U.S. education belonged more to the realm of folklore than fact. For the "survey" was a complete fabrication. As Barry O'Neill revealed in a 1994 *New York Times Magazine* piece titled, "The History of a Hoax," the lists were originally generated around 1982 by one T. Cullen Davis of Fort Worth, Texas.² Davis, a born-again Christian who had been acquitted six years earlier of the murder of his stepdaughter and his wife's lover, distributed the lists to other fundamentalists in an attempt to discredit the public schools and promote parochial education. The survey soon became the stuff of popular culture, widely disseminated by prominent conservatives and eventually reproduced—uncritically—in the mainstream news media. Indeed, when O'Neill finally tracked down Davis and asked him how he had conducted the survey, Davis admitted it was far from methodical: "How did I know what the offenses in the schools were in 1940? I was there.

¹ This list of commentators appears in David Berliner and Bruce Biddle, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

² Barry O'Neill, "The History of a Hoax," *New York Times Magazine*, 6 March 1994, 46-49.

How do I know what they are now? I read the newspapers."³ In other words, the "survey" that had captured the public imagination and informed more than a decade of educational criticism was in fact the polemical product of one man's memory and newspaper reading.

The notorious tale of the school survey illustrates the interconnectedness of educational debates and popular culture in the United States. For one, it is a remarkable instance of the so-called media feedback loop: T. Cullen Davis generated his present day list of school problems from his own mass media consumption, and this list in turn framed popular debates about the school crisis in the mass media. The conventional wisdom about what ailed schools in the 1980s was thus completely produced by media representations. Second, the school survey hoax demonstrates the powerful role popular memory can play in educational debates. Davis's personal recollection of the school troubles of the 1940s effectively conjured a staple of American mythology: the image of "simpler days," of a bygone era when schools were more traditional and life was less complicated. Though reductive and arguably inaccurate, this memory nonetheless resonated with education critics in the 1980s, who regularly invoked the survey's stark historical contrast to suggest that "modern" American society had changed for the worse. Finally, the survey itself reinforced a dominant theme in popular educational discourse: that U.S. public schools were in a state of crisis, that they had become dangerous places, that they were in fact something to fear. After all, this was the decade when a celebrated

³ Ibid.

report warned that America was a "Nation at Risk" due to its educational shortcomings.⁴ Conveniently, the school survey validated this crisis rhetoric.

How did Americans sustain a decade-long debate about education that was shaped entirely by mass media images, cultural mythology, and sensational rhetoric? That question propels the work of this dissertation. To answer it, I look to history, for the dynamic relationship between education and popular culture was not abruptly forged in the 1980s. If anything, that decade represents more of a historical culmination, the apogee of a dramatic transformation in educational discourse that began, curiously enough, in the more "innocent" days of gum chewing: the 1940s. In the postwar forties and fifties, a series of profound cultural changes took place that produced a noticeable change in the substance of educational debates. Indeed, it was during this period—not the 1980s—that the "crisis" in education first became a major cultural preoccupation for Americans.⁵

This dissertation makes three central claims about the education crisis of the "long fifties," the period from 1945 to 1960. First, the postwar education crisis, as conceived in the mainstream press and in popular culture, had very little to do with the material

⁴ The National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, Washington, D.C., 1993.

⁵ Several scholars have located the origins of America's perception that education is in crisis in the 1980s. In *Wisdom's Passing*, Steven Porter suggests that "A Nation at Risk" "publicly expose[d] the surface of an American dilemma which threatened then and threatens now the survival of our way of life" [New York: Barclay House, 1989]. In *The Manufactured Crisis*, op cit., Berliner and Biddle argue that the federal government and a host of school critics launched a concerted campaign to disparage public schools in the 1980s; as a result of this campaign, "Americans have come to believe that education in our country is now in a deplorable state" (5). In a similar vein, in *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*, the educational historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban ask in "Why have Americans believed in progress in education for over a century but have come to doubt it in recent years?" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, 5).

conditions of schooling in the 1950s. Public discourse about the crisis paid remarkably little attention to overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, funding inequities, and dilapidated buildings, even though these problems all plagued U.S. public schools in the years after World War II. Instead, the "education crisis" was largely defined in popular culture as a series of ever-changing threats to the social order: subversive teachers were undermining democratic ideals; blue-collar, minority delinquents were running wild in the hallways; students were losing their individuality in conformist classrooms; progressive education had produced a generation of technological illiterates; and white, middle-class boys were being emasculated by a "soft" curriculum. In other words, the cultural conversation about the education crisis invoked not classroom shortages, but dangerous classrooms. Why was this the case?

My second major claim is that the education crisis of the 1950s reflected a deeper crisis in national identity. I suggest that popular discourse about America's "dangerous schools" can be read as a cultural text, a text that opens a critical window onto fifties society. In *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*, the educational historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban contend that "conversation about schools is one way that Americans make sense of their lives."⁶ This dissertation shows how a range of social, cultural, and political anxieties about changes in American life after World War II were translated into popular debates about a "crisis" in education. In the 1950s, talking about education became an important way for Americans to make sense of new Cold War ideologies, changing gender roles and race relations, social

⁶ Tyack and Cuban, 42.

tensions between conformity and individualism, a burgeoning youth culture, and the expansion of the middle class. Mainstream educational debates thus functioned as a cultural space in which Americans mapped, monitored, resisted, and indeed agonized over the profound transformation of U.S. culture and society in the postwar era.

Third, I suggest that the postwar education crisis dramatically influenced the substance of future educational debates in the United States. A popular rhetoric of what I call "fear and schooling" was forged in the 1950s. In essence, this rhetoric transformed the U.S. public school from a symbol of hope into a symbol of fear in the public imagination. It also suspended education in a continual state of "crisis," a crisis defined less by fiscal or curricular dilemmas than by ever-changing cultural anxieties. The rhetoric of fear and schooling has profoundly shaped popular discourse about education over the past fifty years, contributing such phrases as "blackboard jungle," "death at an early age," "a nation at risk," and "dangerous minds" to our lingua franca of schooling. Today, mainstream educational debates continue to invoke dangerous classrooms more often than classroom shortages, and my dissertation relates the history of this rhetorical turn in American popular culture.

Conceptually and methodologically, this project attempts to plot a new direction in educational historiography. At the same time, it entreats American Studies scholars to conceive of the educational past as a more integral part of their field. American Studies is an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor, yet education is still largely absent from the purview of American Studies scholarship. There are a few notable exceptions—William Graebner's *Coming of Age in Buffalo*, Jill Lepore's *A is for American*, and Julia

Mickenberg's forthcoming *Learning from the Left*, for instance, all locate both formal and informal educational processes in a broader cultural context.⁷ Nevertheless, the field's general inattention to education is striking, especially given the fundamental role education has played in America's social, cultural, intellectual, and political development—starting with the very first attempts by European missionaries to convert Native Americans to Christianity.

Meanwhile, the field of educational history, which traditionally has been detached from other disciplines, is of late attempting to fashion a more interdisciplinary approach to the study of schooling. Such an approach would situate the field's trademark chronicles of curriculum development, institutional change, and school ground power relations in a broader historical context. More importantly, such an approach would open up cross-disciplinary conversations about schooling and society, and ideally make the work of history more relevant to contemporary policy debates. In 1996, James Leloudis expressed this very sentiment in *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920*, a book that challenged scholars to "integrate educational history into the mainstream of American history writing." In his preface, Leloudis urged that education be placed "in the context of larger patterns of historical change." He also invited educators, historians, and the general public to "lower the barriers" that separated them as a way to improve our collective understanding of schooling's "critical role in

⁷ William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990); Jill Lepore, *A is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States* (New York: Knopf, 2002); Julia Mickenberg, *Learning From the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

society."⁸ Similarly, at a 2000 conference on "New Directions in American Educational History," some forty historians of education gathered to express concerns about the relative isolation of educational scholarship from general U.S. history and from the "real world" of policy and practice. Attendees identified a need for more wide-reaching scholarship that could connect educational history to broader examinations of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and community in the United States. "Our challenge," concluded the conference proceedings, "is for educational history as a field to engage in a simultaneous conversation with a diversity of audiences, and to engage in research that brings together areas typically kept separate."⁹

Lowering disciplinary barriers, engaging multiple audiences, joining together "areas typically kept separate"—these are central tenets of American Studies. The challenge issued by educational historians thus appears to bear heavily upon American Studies practitioners. But once the challenge is accepted, how to proceed?

To begin, this study actively reworks traditional notions of what constitutes historical evidence in the study of education. To wit, it significantly expands the range of primary sources available to the educational historian by focusing on *popular culture* rather than traditional institutional sources. It contends that the story of American education in the postwar era cannot be told by simply parsing the rhetoric of professional educators, tallying teacher shortages and enrollment figures, and evaluating the impact of curricular debates and policy changes. Such an approach might produce a serviceable

⁸ James Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xv.

⁹ Ruben Donato and Marvin Lazerson, "New Directions in American Educational History: Problems and Prospects," *Educational Researcher* 29:8 (November 2000), 13. See also Jack Dougherty, "Are Historians

institutional history, but it paints an incomplete picture of schooling's "critical role in society." In a similar vein, recounting the McCarthy era teacher purges, the Little Rock school crisis, and the Sputnik scare certainly helps situate postwar education in a more fixed historical context. But at the same time, this "major events" approach to educational history enables a "master narrative" that marginalizes the seemingly more mundane expressions of educational ideas in everyday life. It is a central conceit of this dissertation that these popular cultural expressions were, in fact, far from mundane.

The notion that education was in "crisis" emerged as a powerful cultural narrative in postwar America. In the late forties, the historian Jacques Barzun noted with some surprise that "education has become news." Education *remained* news for the next decade. Throughout the fifties, a variety of popular periodicals published sensational stories about the school crisis. The Advertising Council started a "Better Schools" campaign in 1947 that ran for twelve years in major magazines and newspapers. At mid-decade, both the novel and film versions of *The Blackboard Jungle* generated intense public debate about the state of American education. *Why Johnny Can't Read*, a book that bemoaned the poor literacy skills of America's youth, was a top-ten bestseller in 1955. Popular sociological works, such as *The Lonely Crowd* and *The Organization Man*, also proffered sharp critiques of public education. Indeed, educational criticism became a veritable cottage industry for book publishers in the postwar era, and a string of monographs appeared, with titles like *And Madly Teach*, *What's Happened to Our High Schools*, and *Quackery in the Public Schools*. The outspoken critic Arthur Bestor, author

of Education 'Bowling Alone'?: Response to Donato and Lazerson," *Educational Researcher* 29:8 (November 2000): 16-17.

of the 1953 tome *Educational Wastelands*, even enjoyed a degree of celebrity in the fifties, appearing regularly on television and radio programs and writing for mass-market magazines.¹⁰

Fiction writers of the fifties also seemed engrossed with educational issues. J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Flannery O'Connor's *The Violent Bear it Away* each offered biting assessments of American education and its effect on young people. John Knowles's prep school novel, *A Separate Peace*, suggested that even the most sheltered of youth were in danger at school. Mary McCarthy, Vladimir Nabokov, and Randall Jarrell all published stinging satires of American higher education in the postwar era. Langston Hughes explored searing questions about race and education in poems like "Theme for English B." Howard Fast defended academic freedom in *Silas Timberman*, his Cold War allegory of a college witch hunt. And, of course, in *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac ditched his formal education at Columbia for the lessons of the highway.¹¹

Clearly, a wide range of voices participated in the historical dialogue about education in the 1950s. These voices did not just belong to professional educators or to

¹⁰ Jacques Barzun, "Teaching: Job or Profession?" *Ladies Home Journal* (March 1948), 142; Evan Hunter, *The Blackboard Jungle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954); *The Blackboard Jungle*, dir. Richard Brooks, 1955; Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It* (New York: Harper, 1955); David Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989) (orig. 1950); William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); Mortimer Smith, *And Madly Teach: A Layman Looks at Public Education* (Chicago: Regnery, 1949); John F. Latimer, *What's Happened to Our High Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1958); Albert Lynd, *Quackery in the Public Schools* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953); Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1953).

¹¹ J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951); Flannery O'Connor, *The Violent Bear it Away* (New York, Signet, 1983) (orig. 1960); John Knowles, *A Separate Peace* (New York: Bantam, 1988) (orig. 1959); Mary McCarthy, *The Groves of Academe* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1952); Randall Jarrell, *Pictures From an Institution* (New York: Knopf, 1954); Vladimir Nabokov, *Pnin* (London: Heinemann, 1957); Langston Hughes, "Theme for English B," *Common Ground* (Spring 1949), 89-90, rpt. *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (New York: Holt, 1951); Howard Fast, *Silas*

parents and students; they reverberated throughout American culture. Why was there such an expansive cultural conversation about schooling in the fifties? And why did this conversation so often turn on the idea that education was in "crisis"? To answer these questions, this dissertation studies a range of "popular" and "elite" cultural texts that collectively shaped conventional wisdom about America's school crisis. It essentially studies the ways in which the postwar mass culture industry helped produce a popular narrative about the education crisis that resonated across a variety of cultural forms—magazines, newspapers, novels, films, radio programs, professional journals, reports, best-selling books, advertising campaigns, presidential speeches, Congressional proceedings, and organizational newsletters. Whenever possible, I also discuss the audience reception of these cultural texts in order to demonstrate how the popular crisis narrative set the parameters for public debate and educational reform efforts in the 1950s. Finally, I pay particular attention to the *substance* of the school crisis narrative, explicating its central themes and closely analyzing what everyday Americans were being told about the nature of the nation's education crisis. For at its heart, this dissertation seeks to understand how postwar Americans learned what was possible in the realm of education, how they learned what was "right" with their schools, and, most importantly, how they learned what was "wrong" with their schools.

Reimagining the postwar school crisis as a *cultural* phenomenon necessarily requires that we place education in the context of larger patterns of historical change. To

Timberman (New York: Blue Heron, 1954); Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin, 1976) (orig. 1957).

that end, this dissertation offers a series of historically informed readings of the popular school crisis narrative. Chapter one traces the origins of this popular narrative to the late forties, situating its genesis in the context of atomic age anxieties, an unfolding Cold War, and a burgeoning consumer culture. Chapter two studies the first popular signifier of the crisis—the city of Pasadena, California—and reads the story of Pasadena’s educational crisis of the early fifties as an outgrowth of urban migration, domestic McCarthyism, and the backlash against progressive education. Chapter three recounts the year in which *The Blackboard Jungle* captured the popular imagination, showing how this mid-decade cultural representation of a mixed-race, working-class high school greatly influenced educational debates about America’s “dangerous” schools. Chapter four charts the rise of the basic education movement in the mid-fifties—a self-proclaimed antidote to the school crisis that I dub the “blackboard backlash”—and considers the movement’s rhetorical appeals alongside cultural anxieties over masculinity, conformity, and expertise.

All of these readings locate the educational debates of the postwar era in a social milieu that historians have termed the “other” fifties. In recent years, scholars have engaged in a vigorous reassessment of American life and culture in the 1950s. This reassessment has largely demystified the predominant image of the fifties that portrays the decade as an uninterrupted procession of “Happy Days,” a period of suburban solace and national unity that was shattered by the cultural upheavals of the 1960s. In contrast to the fifties of popular memory, the “other” fifties emerges as a far more complex decade. According to this alternate interpretation, social ferment, civic anxiety, and cultural transformation more typically characterized the era—not complacency and

consensus.¹² The "other" fifties was punctuated by wrenching poverty, urban race riots, and labor strikes. It was a decade of robust social movements organized by women, racial minorities, and homosexuals, and a decade of important cultural innovation in art, music, and literature. This view of the "other" fifties suggests, therefore, that the 1950s and the 1960s were not such radically discontinuous periods in U.S. history, that in fact the "seeds of the sixties" were planted in the postwar era. Revisionist scholars point out, for example, that minor cultural currents of the fifties, such as the power critiques advanced by C. Wright Mills, or the multicultural themes engaged by black and Jewish writers, became major social preoccupations in the sixties.¹³

Perhaps fittingly, this historical reassessment of the postwar era is rife with its own internal debates—there is certainly no scholarly consensus about the "other" fifties. In particular, lines have been drawn over how best to appraise the impact of the Cold War on American culture. Traditional approaches have stressed just statecraft and foreign relations, while cultural and social methodologies tend to inscribe the Cold War into popular forms and everyday life.¹⁴ Rejoining this school of "Cold War culture" studies,

¹² On the "other" fifties, see, for example, Thomas J. Sugrue, "Reassessing the History of Postwar America," *Prospects* 20 (1995): 493-509; Joel Foreman, ed., *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Lary May, ed. *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); and Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

¹³ On the "seeds of the sixties" argument, see Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985) and Morris Dickstein, *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction, 1945-1970* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ For example, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Leerom Medovoi, "Democracy, Capitalism, and American Literature: The Cold War Construction of J.D. Salinger's Paperback Hero," in Foreman, op cit, pp. 255-287; Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995); and Richard J. Corber, *In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia,*

still other scholars question whether political imperatives really enjoyed such hegemonic influence over all aspects of society.¹⁵ Morris Dickstein, for example, specifically chides those scholars in American Studies who "approach the arts as expressions of social ideology [and] have tried to demonstrate that nearly every cultural phenomenon of those years, from genre films and literary criticism to abstract art, was somehow a reflex of the Cold War, a 'hegemonic' expression of the 'national security state' and the containment policy toward international Communism." Instead, Dickstein urges us to view the Cold War as only a partial explanation for the changed culturescape of the 1950s, as only one factor to be considered side by side with the demographic shifts, economic developments, artistic innovations, and social crises of the era.¹⁶

My study of the postwar education crisis advances the "other" fifties thesis by demonstrating how educational debates of the 1950s plainly revealed the cultural complexity of the era. Moreover, this project contends that the Cold War may have served as an impressionable backdrop to the school crisis, but it was not a prime mover of the decade-long educational debates. Rather, the popular school crisis narrative represented a very public response to a variety of cultural changes in the postwar era, from integration and urban transformation, to militarization and economic expansion. These changes were not only making over education in the 1950s—they were also

and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁵ See the essays collected in Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Dickstein, *Leopards in the Temple*, op cit., 2. Dickstein adds, "Such arguments, which rarely appealed to factual evidence, have given rise to a school of Cold War scholarship that takes little account of other influential factors in postwar social life, from the baby boom and economic expansion to the education boom and shifting roles of women, blacks, and ethnic minorities. Based on a presumed ideological bent

transforming the tenor of everyday life in the United States. The fact that schools became more *dangerous* in America's collective imagination speaks to the far-reaching anxieties attending this transformation. As this dissertation reveals, chewing gum and running in the halls were by no means the "top" problems facing schools in the years after World War II. America's fear of schooling in the fifties ran much deeper. As schools grew more ethnically and economically diverse, as educational opportunity was extended to a greater cross-section of the population, as democratic education became more of a social reality than an abstract republican ideal, the dangers only seemed to multiply. In the final analysis, then, this dissertation suggests that America's fear of schooling in the fifties betrayed a cultural discomfort with the prospect of achieving not only true educational equality, but with realizing fundamental democratic ideals of social equality. If the state of contemporary educational discourse is any indication, this fear has not abated.

that can hardly be verified, such arguments depend on tenuous links between politics and culture that are sometimes suggestive but too often arbitrary or reductive."

Chapter One

Consuming Education: Origins of the Postwar School Crisis

When we ask what is wrong with our schools, we merely ask what is wrong with ourselves.
Philip Wylie, "What is Your Education Worth?" 1947¹

Introduction

In 1948, Jacques Barzun remarked that "education has become news." Writing in the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal*, he observed that an "aroused American public" was now demanding an explanation for the "poor-grade education" delivered in U.S. classrooms. "Almost daily in the great metropolitan newspapers," noted Barzun, "you may read of some new critique, charge or countercharge affecting our schools." It was clear to Barzun that the causes of the present educational dilemma went back "many years." Yet the American public was only now taking notice of the "cracks in the existing edifice." Barzun regarded this sudden outpouring of criticism as a "matter of mutual congratulations," for a newly aroused public would no doubt force a "needed transformation" in America's educational system.²

Barzun's remarks effectively frame the two central concerns of this chapter: first, why did education suddenly become "news" in the postwar era? And second, what exactly was the news about America's schools? U.S. public schools had operated under distressing conditions for decades, confronted with overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, and budget crises since at least the 1930s. Yet the subject of the nation's "poor-grade education" had not become newsworthy until the late 1940s, when a spate of

¹ Philip Wylie, "What is Your Education Worth?" *Reader's Digest* (September 1947), 23.

books, magazines, and newspapers abruptly reported that education was in "crisis." Indeed, the "crisis in education" emerged as a dominant cultural narrative after World War II, a popular story Americans told themselves about the state of schooling in postwar society. What promptly aroused the American public to the "cracks in the existing edifice?"

According to historians of education, the crisis was fueled by a widespread backlash against progressive education.³ Child-centered classrooms, vocational training, life skills curricula, and even John Dewey himself had all fallen out of step with a more conservative postwar culture that was eager to get "back to the basics." The most "enduring assault," as the story goes, was "made by academics speaking from their platforms on university campuses."⁴ In other words, education became news because intellectuals campaigned mightily against anti-intellectualism in the public schools. In fact, the most frequently cited catalyst for the crisis is the appearance of two books in 1949, both critical of progressive education, that were widely discussed in the popular press: Mortimer Smith's *And Madly Teach* and Bernard Bell's *Crisis in Education*.⁵ One study even argues that these books managed to spark a "vigorous debate" across the United States, one that "indelibly [imprinted] the 'crisis in education' onto the national

² Jacques Barzun, "Teaching: Job or Profession?" *Ladies Home Journal* (March 1948), 142-143.

³ For example, see Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995), and David Angus and Jeffrey Mirel, *The Failed Promise of the American High School: 1890-1995*, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999). Similar accounts that suggest criticism of progressive education was a major impetus for the crisis can also be found in Joel Spring, *The American School: 1642-1996*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997); Wayne Urban and Jennings Wagoner, *American Education: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000); and Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁴ Kliebard, 222.

⁵ Mortimer Smith, *And Madly Teach* (Chicago: Regnery, 1949) and Bernard Iddings Bell, *Crisis in Education: A Challenge to American Complacency* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1949).

mind."⁶ Even cultural historians seem resigned to this interpretation; for example, in his analysis of American culture in the 1940s, William Graebner cites these two books—in the two total paragraphs he devotes to the school crisis—as "representative of the growing movement criticizing progressive education."⁷

Such portraits of the school crisis leave the impression that it was primarily a curricular debate, initiated among elites, that somehow captured the popular imagination. To wit: during the postwar era, "controversy about American education generally, and the high school curriculum specifically, generated more national attention than at any previous time in history."⁸ However, such explanations are not really explanations at all. They describe the *substance* of the postwar controversy—educational debates did, in fact, often turn on the relative merits of a progressive curriculum. But they elide the *context* for these debates. News about the crisis in education surfaced during a time of profound cultural change in America, an era defined by atomic age anxiety, increased class mobility, the dramatic expansion of educational opportunity, and an unfolding Cold War. Any substantive analysis of why schools became news after World War II must begin by situating the crisis within this broader cultural context.⁹

⁶ Joel David Rollins, "The Continuing Crisis: An Analysis of Educational Crisis Rhetoric from 1951-1985," Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1996, 1.

⁷ William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 28, 27.

⁸ Angus and Mirel, 104.

⁹ Lawrence Cremin perhaps comes closest to suggesting that other historical factors contributed to the crisis; in *The Transformation of the School*, he argues that the economic, political, and demographic pressures placed on U.S. public schools after World War II had the "makings of the deepest educational crisis in the nation's history." Among these pressures he lists increased student enrollments, teacher shortages, the red scare, and the demand for better trained manpower. However, Cremin fails to sketch out a more comprehensive cultural context that would explain why, as he puts it, "a spate of books, articles, pamphlets, radio programs, and television panels burst upon the pedagogical scene" during this era. See Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* [New York: Knopf, 1961], 339.

To that end, this chapter explores how and why the main themes of popular educational discourse—its leitmotifs and rhetorical appeals—resonated so strongly in postwar America. Popular depictions of the school crisis usually conjured images of dilapidated buildings, poorly-trained teachers, dated pedagogical methods, and outmoded equipment. However, commentary about these stark conditions rarely stayed focused just on educational issues. For example, critics of education wondered aloud whether the nation's schools were prepared to meet the challenges of the "atomic age." Or they implied that the nation's educational shortcomings threatened to undermine democracy. Frequently, the state of U.S. public schools provoked concurrent jeremiads about other signs of social declension, such as rising divorce rates and alcoholism. In short, a powerful undercurrent of anxiety ran through the cultural conversation about schooling. Indeed, "danger" emerged as *the* central trope of popular educational discourse. Schools were in danger, youth were endangered, teachers were dangerous, and democracy itself was endangered. Why such soaring rhetoric? Whence the danger? Such anxious portrayals of the schools, I would argue, actually had very little to do with education in and of itself. And the "danger"? Surely not the specter of progressive education. No, the education crisis may have become "news" in the late forties. But the "story behind the story," if you will, concerned a deeper crisis in national identity.

Wake Up, America!

The great sense of alarm that characterized educational debates in the postwar era was very much a recent phenomenon in popular discourse. A 1951 study of media attitudes toward U.S. schools from 1923 to 1947 found a relative degree of

contentedness, if not indifference, during this earlier time period. The study, entitled "A Study of Published Lay Opinion," analyzed 274 articles from fifteen different periodicals, selected on the basis of circulation figures, and concluded that criticisms of the U.S. public school curriculum were "so few as to seem rather insignificant."¹⁰ On the whole, it observed, the tone of the articles was well-disposed toward American education and the pedagogical methods currently in vogue: "there is a rather positive relationship between the interests of varied groups in our society and their attention to and views upon educational programs and problems."¹¹ The study noted that general-interest periodicals, such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *American Magazine*, and *Cosmopolitan*, ran relatively few articles on education in the years studied. According to the researcher, "education, in the opinion of the editors of these magazines, is not an issue of much concern to the average layman for whom they are intended."¹²

The "Study of Published Lay Opinion" was printed in the professional journal *Education*, and it may very well have evoked a sense of nostalgia in its contemporary readers. For by 1951, the overwhelming public perception was that American education was in deep crisis, and professional educators felt very much under attack by the "average layman." In fact, in 1947, the last year included in the *Education* study of lay opinion, the *NEA Journal* felt compelled to add a new subject heading to its annual index: "crisis

¹⁰ Doyle Bortner, "A Study of Published Lay Opinion on Educational Programs and Problems," *Education* (June 1951), 644.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 648.

¹² *Ibid.*, 646. By contrast, the number of magazine articles on school issues that appeared in the early fifties proved so numerous that one university M.A. thesis from 1954 focused entirely on educational criticisms published in just one fifteen-month period. The author analyzed fifty-two magazine articles that appeared between January 1953 and March 1954, and these represented only *half* of all educational criticisms published during that time. See Jack Reece Seals, "A Survey of Magazine Criticisms of the

in education." No such entry had appeared in the index before, and the number of articles cited each year after 1947 increased exponentially.¹³ Similarly, a scan of the *Education Index* under the heading "Public Schools—Criticism" shows only single-digit listings before 1947. However, ten related articles appeared in 1947. Thirteen were listed in 1949, thirty-five in 1951, and forty-nine in 1952.¹⁴ "Criticisms have mushroomed to alarming proportions," wrote the editors of *Public Education Under Criticism*, a 1954 anthology of recent media commentary on schools. In their estimate, criticism of education had established "new records for volume, breadth of coverage, and intensity" in the postwar era.¹⁵

By contrast, the "Study of Published Lay Opinion" conjured up a seeming "golden age" for education, a more innocent time when schools suffered little public rebuke in popular print. Of course, education was not without critics in the twenty-five years before the school crisis became "news" after World War II. Tomes with titles like *What's Wrong with American Education?* and *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* offered acute criticisms and pointed suggestions for U.S. public schools in the twenties and thirties.¹⁶ Upton Sinclair contributed his stinging two-cents worth in *The Goslings*, a book that called attention to rampant mismanagement and corruption in the entire

Schools, With Implications for Public School Relations," M.A. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1954.

¹³ *NEA Journal Index*, vol. 36, 1947, n.p. In 1951, as professional educators increasingly went on the defensive, the *NEA Journal* added yet another entry to its index: "Meeting attacks on schools."

¹⁴ For a tally of entries in the *Education Index* from 1942-1952, see C. Winfield Scott and Clyde M. Hill, eds., *Public Education Under Criticism* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1954), 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ David Snedden, *What's Wrong With American Education?* (Chicago: J.B. Lippincott, 1927); George S. Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (New York, 1932). Counts's work was actually a widely-discussed pamphlet that collected three separate addresses he gave on the topic of progressive education that year.

educational system—from local school boards to textbook publishers to the National Education Association itself.¹⁷ For the most part, however, published school criticism came largely from *within* the profession, in the form of elites debating policy in the pages of professional journals, or in books written by professors of education.¹⁸ The popular press generally paid little attention to educational issues. In 1945, in fact, only ten of fifty-two major metropolitan newspapers in the United States even had an education specialist on staff.¹⁹

Still, this portrait of the pre-crisis years—as a time when educational experts calmly debated policy and the popular press turned their attention elsewhere—in effect reinforces the notion, implied in the "Study of Published Lay Opinion" and the *NEA Journal* index, that the postwar school crisis just came out of nowhere. Unquestionably, the education crisis became one of the nation's top preoccupations after World War II. But the crisis itself was not new. The most prominent factors cited in late forties popular discourse—overcrowded classrooms, understaffed schools, fiscal inequities—had not

¹⁷ Upton Sinclair, *The Goslings: A Study of the American Schools* (Pasadena, Calif: Upton Sinclair, 1924).

¹⁸ Snedden and Counts were both education professors. Just because *published* criticism of education in the 1920s and 1930s was largely confined to elite circles, does not mean that laymen and the "non-elite" did not criticize schools at this time. During the progressive era, teachers often organized to protest certain administrative policies that they viewed as autocratic, and to rally against the "separation of the management of education from classroom practice" (David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980*, New York: Basic Books, 1982, 114). And laymen, particularly in urban settings, organized to make public schools more responsive to the needs of their children by demanding school meal programs, summer school classes, on-site vaccinations, school playgrounds, and other reforms. For an interesting contrast of progressive era education reforms, compare David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) with William Reese, *Power and Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements During the Progressive Era* (New York: Routledge, 1986). The former presents the "top down" perspective of the "administrative progressives" and the latter offers the "bottom up" perspective of activist citizens' groups.

¹⁹ Over the next twenty years, this number would grow to 49. See C.T. Duncan, "The 'Education Beat' on 52 Major Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* (Summer 1966): 336-38. The editors of *Freedom and Public Education*, a 1953 anthology of articles about the school crisis, point out in their preface that "many

simply appeared in the weeks and months after V-J Day. These conditions were already glaring in the thirties, and many were made worse during World War II. To be sure, the seeds of the education crisis were planted in the prewar years, even if the mainstream media took little notice.

In the 1930s, the Great Depression had a profound impact on America's public schools. Unemployed youth stayed in school longer, leading to higher enrollments and increased retention rates. In the school year 1933-34, enrollments peaked, but at the same time, total expenditures per pupil reached their lowest points.²⁰ Indeed, many property owners could not pay their taxes during the depression, causing school budget crises across the nation. By 1934, some 20,000 schools had closed because property tax collections had either dropped precipitously or had stopped completely.²¹ Meanwhile, cities like Chicago could not even afford to buy coal to heat the schools that did remain open.²² Nationwide, fiscal and programmatic inequalities abounded, but were especially manifest in rural schools, which were attended by about half of all school-going children. Half of the schools in Alabama were closed, for example, and three hundred schools in dust-bowl Arkansas closed after just sixty days of instruction.²³ As historians have noted, the gaps between urban and rural schools widened significantly during the depression,

newspapers and magazines now have education editors or consultants... It was not always thus." Ernest O. Melby and Morton Puner, eds., *Freedom and Public Education* (New York: Praeger, 1953), n.p.

²⁰ James M. Wallace, *Liberal Journalism and American Education, 1914-1941* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 109.

²¹ David Tyack, Robert Lowe, and Elisabeth Hansot, *Public Schools in Hard Times: The Great Depression and Recent Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 32.

²² Wallace, 109.

²³ Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 134.

and "educational opportunity increasingly became a function of the pupil's place of residence."²⁴

In the face of these depression-era developments, schools were forced to implement changes: average class size grew, school years were shortened, teacher salaries were cut, and vocational training programs were curtailed. Throughout the thirties, professional educators urgently tried to draw the attention of both the federal government and the general public to this unfolding crisis. Many teachers unions organized protests and forged ties with other local groups to push for reform. In Chicago, for example, twenty thousand teachers and parents marched on the mayor's office to protest "the destruction of the school system and the suffering of the teachers." In Idaho, teachers in Kellogg joined up with the local union of copper miners to pressure elected officials to secure more taxes for the schools.²⁵ But as teachers grew more militant, the press increasingly characterized them as dangerous agitators. In particular, the large national chain of newspapers owned by Randolph Hearst regularly ran cartoons and editorials that warned of the "red menace" in schools.²⁶ At the same time that educators unsuccessfully sought to win over the public to their cause, they implored the federal government to provide relief for the schools. An advisory board of educational leaders warned President Roosevelt in 1938 that public schools were becoming "a force to create class, race, and sectional distinctions... [an] instrument for creating those very

²⁴ Tyack, Lowe, and Hansot, 29.

²⁵ Ibid., 42-45.

²⁶ Murphy, 138; Tyack, Lowe, and Hansot, 63.

inequalities they were designed to prevent."²⁷ However, according to the historian Lawrence Cremin, Roosevelt's administration was generally suspicious of the "educational establishment." Consequently, Roosevelt's New Deal solutions were "inclined to bypass the formal apparatus of schooling" in favor of programs that specifically targeted youth unemployment, like the Civilian Conservation Corps.²⁸ Local school districts did secure some temporary relief, mostly for building repairs and teacher salaries, but ongoing federal aid was never an option under Roosevelt.²⁹ As a result, local educators had to continue to improvise their own solutions, and the crisis worsened.

World War II delivered another jolt to U.S. public schools. First, the war exposed schools to criticism regarding their program of study. The Selective Service reported that 676,000 men had been rejected for mental or educational deficiencies. 350,000 draft registrants had signed their name with only a mark. 1,704,000 men could not meet minimum standards of a fourth-grade education, and a great many draftees needed two to three months of special educational training just to learn basic skills.³⁰ Second, high school enrollments dropped precipitously, from 6.7 million in 1940-41 to 5.5 million in 1943-4.³¹ This decline—the result of young people entering not only military service but also the workforce—raised eyebrows about the "holding power" of public schools, and stirred some debate about whether the curriculum was sufficiently functional and work-

²⁷ The Advisory Committee on Education, *Report of the Committee* (Washington, D.C., 1938), 33-34, qtd. Tyack, Lowe, and Hansot, 27-28.

²⁸ Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 311.

²⁹ Murphy, 141-143.

³⁰ I.L. Kandel, *The Impact of the War Upon American Education* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 41-42; Kyle Crichton, "Our Schools are a Scandal," *Collier's* 12 April 1946, 4.

³¹ Kliebard, 207.

oriented to compete with full-time employment.³² The U.S. Office of Education even felt compelled to launch a "National Go-to-School Drive" for the 1944-45 academic year, contending that school offered a better opportunity for a youth's "overall development" than any work experience.³³ Finally, teacher shortages grew far worse during the war. Seventy thousand faculty members entered the armed services, and many thousands more acquired higher-paying work at factories.³⁴ By one estimate, a total of 350,000 teachers left the profession during the war years.³⁵ As a consequence, many schools could not provide services to students; in the fall of 1944, for example, some ten thousand classrooms had to be closed for lack of staffing.³⁶

Recognizing that extraordinary pressures were being placed on U.S. schools during the depression and World War II, professional educators once again attempted to awaken the public to the imminent crisis. In 1941, for example, a speaker at the annual National Education Association meeting observed that "we are confronted with the most destructive situation that the schools of America have faced." Funding problems would only grow worse as the nation went to war, he warned, and under funded schools would no doubt lead to increased criticism and an "undermining of public confidence in the schools."³⁷ This particular rhetorical appeal—invoking the "destructive situation" facing U.S. education—would become commonplace in postwar educational discourse, when

³² Ibid.

³³ See U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Office of Education, *National Go-to-School Drive 1944-45: A Handbook for Communities* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1944).

³⁴ Kandel, 37.

³⁵ "The Crisis in Education," *The American City* 62:4 (April 1947), 5. The 1947 *New York Times* series claimed that 350,000 teachers had left the public schools *since* 1940, not just during the war years.

³⁶ Crichton, "Our Schools are a Scandal," 32.

the crisis finally became "news." However, while it alarmed NEA members that year, the sentiment failed to capture the public's imagination. Bracing themselves for what they believed would be imminent public censure over the state of America's schools, the NEA even established a National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education in 1941. The commission was designed to protect educators from the "misunderstanding and unjust attack" that was sure to occur when the public became more aware of the dire challenges facing U.S. public schools.³⁸

But that awareness, and certainly that "undermining of public confidence," were both slow in coming. In 1944, for instance, a poll conducted by the National Opinion Research Center showed that 57 percent of respondents believed public schools did not need to be changed in any way.³⁹ Nonetheless, warnings from professional educators about the looming crisis persisted. In February 1946, for example, the *NEA Journal* published a piece entitled, "Wake Up, America!" It admonished the public of making a potentially "astounding mistake," the kind of mistake that had previously "dragged nations down to ruin." We "dare not fail" in educating our young people, it argued, for "the hope of the world lies in the youth of the world." The article called for higher teacher salaries, more rigorous teacher training, decreased class sizes, and greater state and federal aid to education. It also fretted that "self-satisfaction" seemed to grip the

³⁷ National Education Association of the United States, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Annual Meeting*, (Washington, DC: 1941), 767, qtd. in Stuart J. Foster, *Red Alert! Educators Confront the Red Scare in American Public Schools, 1947-1954* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 32.

³⁸ At the same time, the Defense Commission hoped to "bring to the public better understanding of the importance of education for all." Ultimately, the commission ended up serving largely as an investigative body, dispatched to look into "charges involving teachers, schools, educational methods, and procedures." See Richard Barnes Kennan, "Education: Democracy's Best Defense," *Educational Leadership*, May 1951, 458. Foster's book-length study, *Red Alert!*, offers the most comprehensive discussion of the activities of the Defense Commission.

nation, that the United States basked too comfortably in its war victory and could not see its own educational shortcomings: "One almost feels like shouting from the housetop, 'WAKE UP, AMERICA!'"⁴⁰

A few lay periodicals actually joined in this chorus in 1946. The *New Republic* published a list of troubling statistics concerning student enrollment, teacher shortages, and budgetary spending, and called the situation a "crisis in education." *Collier's* stated pointedly that "Our Schools Are a Scandal," and offered a similar roll call of what it called "the statistics of ignorance."⁴¹ *Look* discussed the "Failure of American Education." Still and all, in September 1946, a Gallup poll showed that 87 percent of parents were satisfied with the schools their children attended. When asked for criticisms of public education, 40 percent answered that they had no objections whatsoever. The remaining respondents offered only "scattered complaints with no one item standing out very much above the others." Sixty percent believed teachers were doing their job "well," and only eight percent said teachers were performing "poorly."⁴² In short, there appeared to be no public perception that education was in "crisis."

And then, suddenly, America seemed to wake up.

A wave of popular discourse about the school crisis hit in 1947. That year, the *New York Times* published a widely-discussed series on the "Crisis in Education." Based

³⁹ "Are the Schools All Right?" *School Executive* LXIII, August 1944, 23-24.

⁴⁰ Lindly C. Baxter, "Wake Up, America!" *NEA Journal* 35:2 (February 1946), 86, 87.

⁴¹ "These are the Facts About the Crisis in Education," *The New Republic*, 7 October 1946, 434-5; Crichton, "Our Schools are a Scandal," 32.

⁴² George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1972), 597-598.

on a revealing six-month survey of public schools, the expose announced that the nation's educational outlook was "not a pretty one." It reported that many of America's young people were being taught by incompetent teachers in dilapidated classrooms, and cautioned that such conditions threatened the democratic way of life. A variety of periodicals picked up on this "crisis" theme, including *Newsweek*, *American City*, and *Survey Midmonthly*.⁴³ *Nation's Business* wondered, "Are We Getting Dumber?" *Ladies Home Journal* asked "What's Wrong With High School?" The *Reader's Digest* stated, "Our Schools Need More Than Our Money." *Vital Speeches of the Day* published the talk, "Where Do We Go From Here in Education?" The *Atlantic Monthly* invited guest columnists to write about "The Schools I Want and How to Get Them." When the *Saturday Review of Literature* claimed, "Now What We Need is Education," it may as well have summed up what American audiences now desired: news about schools.⁴⁴

Elite policy makers contributed to this perception that education was in crisis. The U.S. Office of Education denounced as "deplorable" the educational discrepancies between rich and poor states, white and black schools, and urban and rural communities, and called for immediate federal aid to education.⁴⁵ In addition, the U.S. Chamber of

⁴³ Indeed, an examination of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* for 1945-1947 shows that only one magazine—*The New Republic*—featured an article with a title that specifically referenced the "crisis in education" before 1947; in 1947, the same phrase turned up in six different titles.

⁴⁴ "Business on the School Crisis," *Newsweek* 30:13, 29 September 1947, 92; "Crisis in Education," *American City*, April 1947, 5+; "School Crisis," *Survey*, March 1947, 80; L.P. Crepi, "Are We Getting Dumber?" *Nation's Business*, November 1947, 36-38+; "G.H. Henry, "What's Wrong With High School?" *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1947, 28-9+; S. High, "Our Schools Need More Than Our Money," *Reader's Digest*, December 1947, 15-17; Robert M. Hutchins, "Where Do We Go From Here in American Education?" *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 15 July 1947, 591-4; C.T. Squires, "Schools I Want and How to Get Them," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1947, 76-8; N. Cousins, "Now What We Need is Education," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 13 September 1947, 20.

⁴⁵ U.S. Office of Education, *Annual Report, Federal Security Agency, 1947* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1948), 170. The U.S. Office of Education was administered by the FSA at the time, hence the report's title.

Commerce released the following official statement to the public: "Education faces an acute crisis." It called for "immediate outlays of money" by states and communities to pay for better equipment and more teachers.⁴⁶ With the support of the business and advertising industry, the Advertising Council launched a "Better Schools" campaign in 1947. The campaign was designed to focus public attention on teacher and classroom shortages, and to persuade citizens to take what it described as a "deep, continuing, and personally contributing interest" in the welfare of the nation's schools.⁴⁷ The Ad Council—a private, non-profit organization that had been producing public service advertising since 1942—canvassed 1,610 magazines a month with one-page ads, and also mailed campaign material to 4,000 newspapers. Listeners heard "Better Schools" ads on the radio, and thousands of window posters and car cards were distributed across the nation.⁴⁸ Messages even appeared on bread wrappers, automobile license plates, and matchbooks.⁴⁹ Evidently, education had finally become newsworthy. But what exactly was the news?

According to *Newsweek*, which announced the launch of the "Better Schools" campaign, the Ad Council aimed to "inform the American public of the *dangerous deterioration* of the nation's schools."⁵⁰ This spin on the purpose of the "Better Schools" campaign mirrored a broader trend in popular educational discourse to imbue the education crisis with an ominous tone. After all, was the main design of the Ad Council's

⁴⁶ Committee on Education, Chamber of Commerce of the United States, *News and Cues*, 15 February 1947, qtd. in "The Crisis in Education," *The American City*, 5.

⁴⁷ "Annual Report of the Advertising Council, 1953-1954," 15, qtd. in Jack Malcolm Bethune, "A History of the Advertising Council, 1942-1967," M.A. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1968, 69.

⁴⁸ "Business on the School Crisis," 92.

⁴⁹ Arthur Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 112.

campaign really to tell people about the "dangerous deterioration" of America's schools? Or was it in effect meant to inspire Americans to strive for "better schools"? The Ad Council's primary campaign message actually began, "Our schools must be the best we can afford."⁵¹ Other slogans included "Education Molds Our Future" and "Better Schools Build Better Communities."⁵² Nowhere did these messages mention the nation's "dangerous" schools. Yet such doom-saying typified the approach of the mass media when it came to publicizing the school crisis. For example, *Woman's Home Companion* warned of "Danger at School." The *Ladies Home Journal* boldly announced, "Our Schools Are in Danger." The *New York Times Magazine* asked, "Crisis in Education—Opportunity or Disaster?" *Newsweek*, stoking the furnace yet again, reported on "Our Disintegrating Schools."⁵³ And this was just in 1947.

In subsequent years, such rhetoric would become standard fare in educational discourse. Not only did education become news after World War II—it also emerged as something to fear. Indeed, the cultural conversation about America's postwar education crisis was characterized by a "dangerous school" discourse that depicted the school as a site of profound menace. The school crisis was more than just a material dilemma, a morass of teacher shortages and budgetary shortfalls. It was something less tangible, but all the more threatening: in postwar popular culture, dangerous schools threatened the hearts and minds of America's youth, the pillars of American democracy, and the very

⁵⁰ "Business on the School Crisis," 92. Emphasis added.

⁵¹ "Annual Report of the Advertising Council, 1953-1954," 15, qtd. in Bethune, 69.

⁵² "The Need for Better Schools: An Interview with Theodore S. Replier," *NEA Journal* 49:2 (February 1960), 29.

⁵³ Kenneth E. Appel, "Danger at School," *Woman's Home Companion*, April 1947; Dorothy Thompson, "Our Schools are in Danger," *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1947, 11+; O.C. Carmichael, "Crisis in

survival of civilization. Such rhetorical excess, coupled with the fact that education suddenly became news in the late forties, has to make one wonder: was all of this fear and anxiety really just about overcrowded classrooms?

Fear and Schooling in the Atomic Age

When the *New York Times Magazine* covered the topic of overcrowded classrooms and teacher shortages in 1947, it gave readers a much broader context in which to consider these school ground dilemmas. "Crisis in Education: Opportunity or Disaster?" announced that America's "overwhelming needs" at the "beginning of the atomic era" were "enlightenment and leadership of future American citizens." According to the article, teachers were the ones who could provide this enlightenment and leadership, yet, alarmingly, the shortage of qualified instructors presently stood at somewhere between 125,000 and 500,000. Failure to redress this situation "could mean disaster to society itself." More and better teachers must be recruited if "our civilization is not to suffer serious loss." If schools should fall short in providing qualified leadership for young people "in these first post-war years," then "society will suffer."⁵⁴

In a similar tone, Robert M. Hutchins, long-time president of the University of Chicago and a prominent public voice on educational issues, stated that schooling must be a "serious and urgent business" in the atomic age. In a 1947 pamphlet entitled, "The Atom Bomb and Education," Hutchins declared, "The great problems before us are first, can we survive, and second, what kind of life are we going to lead if we do?" For too

Education: Opportunity or Disaster?" *The New York Times Magazine*, 26 January 1947, 7+; "Our Disintegrating Schools," *Newsweek*, 21 July 1947, 74.

long, he argued, Americans had paid too little attention to what transpired in their schools. But now was the time to focus on education, for civilization urgently needed a "moral, intellectual, and spiritual revolution to match the scientific, technological, and economic revolution in which we are now living." In Hutchins's estimate, this had to be done in the next five years, or civilization might not be saved. If Americans were to learn "how to exist at all in the world which science and technology have made," then education must help people "understand the nature, the works, and the destiny of man." To that end, Hutchins encouraged Americans to challenge themselves to truly find out "what education can accomplish."⁵⁵

A tall order for education in the postwar era, it would seem: producing enlightened citizens, jumpstarting a spiritual revolution, preventing societal suffering, making legible the very destiny of man. And schools were asked to accomplish this in a relatively short time period—the *New York Times Magazine* estimated this had to happen "in these first post-war years," while Hutchins set the timeframe more definitely at five years. This powerful sense of urgency stemmed from the fact that, in both cases, the school crisis had been set squarely in the context of the *atomic age*. Indeed, the first wave of popular discourse about the education crisis notably did not invoke the specters of John Dewey and progressive education. In the late forties, the news about schools was that they were ill-prepared to meet the challenges of the atomic era. And this lack of preparedness was remarkably dangerous—the nascent crisis threatened not only the nation's schools, but civilization itself.

⁵⁴ Carmichael, 47, 45, 7.

For the American public, the "atomic age" dawned in August 1945, when the United States first dropped a uranium bomb on Hiroshima, and then a plutonium bomb on Nagasaki. One year later, a survey conducted by the Social Science Research Council found that "knowledge of the existence of... the atomic bomb has penetrated to even the most isolated members of the American adult population." Despite the fact that seven percent of respondents reported they read no newspapers and magazines and owned no radios, and that another thirteen percent admitted only limited access to such news sources, 98 percent of those surveyed in 1946 professed knowledge of the atomic bomb.⁵⁶ The historian Paul Boyer, in his study of U.S. culture in the atomic age, argues that this widespread knowledge was also tinged by a great deal of fear and anxiety. Boyer describes the months following Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a "time of cultural crisis when the American people confronted a new and threatening reality of almost unfathomable proportions."⁵⁷ In the immediate postwar period, writes Boyer, a "profound uneasiness," even a "surge of fear," swept the nation.⁵⁸ This uneasiness issued from a growing awareness of the atom bomb's destructive power, as well as from the fear that another country might acquire this devastating weapon. In 1946, for example, many readers of John Hersey's graphic account of Hiroshima confessed to sleepless nights and disturbing dreams after learning about what the Japanese had actually experienced on

⁵⁵ Robert M. Hutchins, "The Atom Bomb and Education," (London: National Peace Council, 1947), 6, 1, 4, 9, 10, Special Collections, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.

⁵⁶ Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr., and Sylvia Eberhart, *American Opinion on World Affairs in the Atomic Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 15.

⁵⁷ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985/1994), 25.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

August 6.⁵⁹ And in the survey conducted by the Social Science Research Council, some sixty percent of respondents agreed that "there is a real danger that atomic bombs will... be used against the United States."⁶⁰ President Truman seemed to speak to this dual nature of atomic age anxiety when he described the bomb as an "awful responsibility," but added, "We thank God that it has come to us instead of to our enemies."⁶¹

In *Life Under a Cloud*, the historian Allan Winkler suggests that in the postwar years, the atom bomb's "dramatic and near universal impact on public consciousness ensured its influence in all areas of life."⁶² Education was no exception. Between 1945 and 1950, 260 articles on either atomic energy or the atomic bomb appeared in education journals.⁶³ Professional educators constantly advised themselves of their new obligations in the wake of the bomb. Teachers were reminded repeatedly that citizens "must be trained to play their proper role in the atomic era."⁶⁴ At the 1946 National Council of Teachers of English convention, a speaker warned that "fiery headlines detail the path to a seemingly inevitable destruction of our civilization and culture. The youth of the nation sit before us and in almost blind trust await our guidance to happiness." He strongly advised that education's central aim should be "indoctrinating for the democratic way of life." A high school teacher himself, the speaker declared that the "sacred duty" of educators was "to probe the ills of our day and... to diagnose our sickness and dissipate

⁵⁹ Hersey's *Hiroshima* first appeared in the *New Yorker* on August 31, 1946. It subsequently reached a much wider audience, as it was read on radio programs, distributed to Book-of-the-Month-Club members for free, and published as a best-selling book. See Allan M. Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31.

⁶⁰ Cottrell and Eberhart, 107.

⁶¹ qtd. in Boyer, 6.

⁶² Winkler, 33.

⁶³ Florence Gelbond, "The Impact of the Atomic Bomb on Education," *The Social Studies* 65 (March 1974): 110, 111.

the anguish so close to our sorely troubled hearts." Absent this soul-searching, the nation's schools would be ill-prepared to "perpetuate our American ideals of democracy."⁶⁵

Like the Hutchins pamphlet and the *New York Times Magazine* article, such pronouncements about education in the atomic era often turned on the theme of preparedness.⁶⁶ However, this idea of preparedness was not necessarily framed in concrete terms—commentators were not yet laying out civil defense plans for schools. In fact, the popular image we have today of postwar schools practicing duck and cover drills more closely matches what transpired in schools of the fifties than in schools of the mid to late forties. The Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA), for instance, was not created until 1950, a year after the Soviets detonated their own atomic bomb. Educational materials such as the pamphlet *Survival Under Atomic Attack* and the "Bert the Turtle" comic book were first distributed by the FCDA in 1950. By November 1951, only a quarter of the nation's schools had initiated atomic air-raid drills; similarly, identification programs were not implemented en masse until 1951, when New York City lead the way by supplying 2.5 million children with army-style dog tags.⁶⁷ In the immediate postwar years, by contrast, educators and lay critics seemed to worry more

⁶⁴ Boyer, 154.

⁶⁵ The address is reprinted in George W. Sullivan, Jr., "Indoctrinating for the Democratic Way of Life," *English Journal* 36:3 (March 1947), 121.

⁶⁶ The historian Laura McEnaney argues in *Civil Defense Begins at Home* that the idea of "preparedness" pervaded American culture in the years after World War II. As an outgrowth of the postwar militarization of American society, the concept of preparedness "encompassed a set of political views about the U.S.-Soviet contest, a pledge from private citizens as volunteers... and a particular mood." McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 6.

⁶⁷ On civil defense in the public schools, see Michael J. Carey, "The Schools and Civil Defense: The Fifties Revisited," *Teachers College Record* 84:1 (Fall 1982): 115-127, and JoAnne Brown, "A is for Atom, B is

about the public school's ability to defend abstract ideals, not panicky children. Could American education protect the "democratic way of life" in the atomic era? Could it cure society's ills and guide the youth of the nation to happiness? Could it train enlightened citizens and thus guarantee the survival of the republic? The "awful responsibility" of the atom bomb clearly spurred such questions about America's educational—and moral—preparedness for the atomic age. But popular discourse about the school crisis was also shaped by another dramatic development of the postwar era: the unfolding Cold War.

In 1947, the U.S. Office of Education stated pointedly that strengthening American education was not only "in the interest of national security," but that it should be the nation's "Number One security requirement" because of the many "obvious threats to the peace" around the world.⁶⁸ The educational jeremiads that flourished that same year in the mass media no doubt resonated with an increasingly tense geopolitical situation that appeared to spawn "threats to the peace" almost daily. For 1947 turned out to be a year of significant escalations in the Cold War, as relations between the United States and the Soviet Union deteriorated steadily. In February, the Soviet Union rejected a U.S.-sponsored plan proposing United Nations control of atomic weapons. The Russians also rejected the Marshall Plan, proposed later that year by the United States to provide economic aid to Western European nations. The Truman Doctrine, formulated to help Greece and Turkey fight communism, made it American policy to "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside

for Bomb': Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948-1963," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 68-90.

pressures."⁶⁹ The National Security Act, signed into law in July, created a Secretary of Defense, a Joint Chiefs of Staff, a National Security Council, and a Central Intelligence Agency, all to coordinate defense policy with information gathering and diplomacy. That same month, an influential article appeared in the journal *Foreign Affairs* that argued that the containment of communism should be America's primary foreign policy objective. On the domestic front, security became a preoccupation as well in 1947: Truman signed Executive Order 9835, which instituted a loyalty program for all federal employees. And the House Un-American Activities Committee opened an investigation into the motion picture industry.

As America's foreign and domestic Cold War policy took shape in 1947, popular discourse about the education crisis focused on the ideological imperatives of this evolving worldview—now more than ever, schools had to uphold the principles of democracy. A *New Republic* article on the school crisis pulled no punches: "the present strengths and weaknesses of American democracy are in large part the result of the strengths and weaknesses of its educational system." The *Ladies Home Journal* warned that underpaid and demoralized teachers might begin to doubt "whether the American democratic system is really anything but a whited sepulcher," and thus be tempted to poison their students' minds with subversive ideas. The *New York Times* series on the "Crisis in Education" called public schools "the most important means in our possession

⁶⁸ *Annual Report, Federal Security Agency, 1947*, 170.

⁶⁹ On Truman's "spring offensive" of 1947, see H.W. Brands, *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 17.

for preserving and extending the democratic way of life." It even went so far as to describe education as the "first line of defense against attacks from within or without."⁷⁰

President Truman and other politicians would subsequently echo this sentiment about schools—that they constituted America's "first line of defense" in the Cold War. Yet a close reading of the popular school crisis narrative forged in the late forties suggests that Americans fretted more about the enemy *within* than without. Indeed, against the backdrop of the atomic age and the unfolding Cold War, school critics increasingly wondered whether the education crisis betrayed a deeper crisis in the national character. In the years after World War II, popular educational discourse hinted that America's educational dilemmas essentially exposed a moral weakness unbecoming of a nation that was atomically armed and about to engage in a global struggle between good and evil. In fact, the *New York Times* "crisis" series offers perhaps the best example of how early school crisis rhetoric located the precise source of danger and anxiety right at home—not on the global stage.

Our Children are Cheated

The "Crisis in Education" series was written by Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Benjamin Fine, education editor for the *New York Times* and occasional lecturer in education at New York University, the New School for Social Research, City College, and other institutions. His 1947 series, which ran from February 10 to February 21, was so popular among readers that the articles were published collectively as a pamphlet, and

⁷⁰ "These are the Facts About the Crisis in Education," 434; Thompson, "Our Schools are in Danger," 243; Benjamin Fine, *The Crisis in American Education: A Reprint of Twelve Articles from the New York Times*

then again as a book entitled *Our Children Are Cheated: The Crisis in American Education*.⁷¹ Fine's work on this project won him a commendation from the National Education Association and the New York Board of Regents.⁷² In subsequent years, after the critical success of this expose, he would write about yet another moral panic in America—juvenile delinquency. His controversial book, *1,000,000 Delinquents*, appeared in 1955.⁷³

In the "Crisis" series, Fine repeatedly invoked Cold War imperatives and atomic age anxiety in pressing his case for why America's schools "stand as the most important means in our possession for preserving and extending our democratic way of life."⁷⁴ The main theme of the series was that public schools were an integral part of democracy: good schools were necessary if the democratic way of life was to flourish. However, unless schools improved—unless they were brought out of what Fine called their "horse and buggy" state into the atomic age—then democracy itself would be gravely endangered.

To highlight the consequential connections between democracy and education, Fine cited the results of a survey conducted by the *New York Times*, which was reportedly based on nation-wide interviews with thousands of teachers, school officials, and lay leaders. The "Crisis in Education" series unquestionably employed the rhetoric of fear and schooling; it stands as an early example of dangerous school discourse in popular

(New York: 1947), 63.

⁷¹ Benjamin Fine, *The Crisis in American Education*, op cit, and Fine, *Our Children Are Cheated: The Crisis in American Education* (New York: Henry Holt, 1947). In subsequent notes, citations are from the pamphlet edition.

⁷² "Fine, Benjamin," *Who's Who in America*, Vol. 26, 1950-51 (Chicago: A.N. Marquis Co., 1950), 868.

⁷³ Fine, *1,000,000 Delinquents* (Cleveland: World, 1955).

⁷⁴ Fine, *The Crisis in American Education*, 63.

culture. Fine merged sobering facts with soaring oratory to depict America's schools as profoundly menacing places. Moreover, America's youth were described as perilously endangered. The twelve-part series combined statistics and first-hand reports from the field to paint a harrowing picture of America's schools: Seventy thousand teaching positions remained unfilled. One out of seven teachers served on an emergency or substandard certificate. Six thousand schools would have to close because of lack of teachers, and seventy-five thousand children would have no schooling whatsoever that year. The morale of teachers had dropped to a new low. School buildings across the nation were in deplorable states. Two million children would "suffer a major impairment in their schooling" because of inadequate teachers.⁷⁵

As if these gloomy statistics were not enough to inspire worry, the series also emphasized the grave danger this education crisis posed to democracy. Americans should not just be concerned—they should be afraid. Fine explained the perils that broken down school facilities and incompetent teachers posed to America's future voters. He sought to learn how many subversives had infiltrated the country's classrooms. He noted the alarming rise in teacher strikes and the growing militancy of educators. He described young people who were "suffering" in their schools. He framed the education crisis as a threat to national security. And the context for all of these threatening circumstances? The atomic age.

Over and over again, Fine suggested that the nation's schools were ill-prepared to meet the challenges of the atomic age. "Although we are living in an atomic age," he wrote, "our children are receiving a horse and buggy education." This context was

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

continually invoked, no matter what the problem. Poor-quality teachers? Instructors on emergency certificates "do not measure up to the standards expected of teachers in an atomic age." Lack of equipment? Fine quoted a superintendent as saying, "We haven't made any reasonable purchase of science supplies in ten years. What do our children know about the atomic age?" Outdated textbooks? Teachers everywhere begged for modern materials, "so that they can interpret the atomic age to the future voters of America." Ineffective teaching methods? "Too many schools are still teaching along horse and buggy methods," wrote Fine, "seemingly unaware of the atomic age."⁷⁶

Time references similarly pervaded the *New York Times* series. Schools were in worse shape than before the war. The teaching profession had "lost much of the ground it had won in the last half century." The "hoped-for post-war improvement" of education had not yet occurred. Too many schools were "still geared to the last century." School buildings resembled "relics of the nineteenth century." Many rural schools were "Rip Van Winkles" that were "still sleeping soundly, unaware of a new world come to life." Methods were "archaic." Procedures "outmoded." Textbooks "ancient." Schools needed "modern" supplies, "modern" methods.⁷⁷

As a result, the "Crisis in Education" series repeatedly stirred anxiety about whether or not America's schools were sufficiently *modern*. Did they measure up to the present historical moment? Were they fit for the atomic era, or were they still "traveling along a gas-lit road in a horse and buggy?"⁷⁸ Clearly, this cultural text appealed to Americans' sense of uncertainty and anxiety in the immediate postwar years. The United

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 6, 20, 32, 55, 64.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 5, 61, 42, 46.

States had come of age as a global power after World War II. It had ascended to a dominant economic and political position in the world. It possessed atomic capability. And it had assumed the role of global policeman in the fight against communism. But did its educational system measure up to these other feats? Apparently not, according to Fine's report.

And if the nation's educational system did not measure up to these challenges, then what did this say about the American character? The *New York Times* series went to great lengths to establish a clear relationship between the nation's democratic aspirations and its educational accomplishments. Consequently, its interrogation of education's providence can also be read as an expression of uncertainty about democracy itself. Even as an expression of *insecurity* about the national psyche. In this way, the first wave of popular discourse about the school crisis can be viewed as a very public meditation on America's preparedness for the Cold War and the atomic age. The nation's schools did not appear ready for the challenges of the postwar era. Was America?

This question, I would argue, inspired the sense of urgency found in news about the "dangerous deterioration" of America's schools. It helps us understand why the long-standing problems of teacher shortages and run-down classrooms suddenly garnered popular attention in the late forties. Educational debates tapped into the culture of apprehension and insecurity that characterized American society in the years immediately following World War II—a time period that one scholar has labeled "mood maybe."⁷⁹ Educational debates provided a place in the public sphere to express uncertainty, and

⁷⁸ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁹ Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade and After: America, 1945-1960* (New York: Vintage, 1960).

even thinly veiled disappointment, over the state of American culture at the dawn of the atomic age and the Cold War. Hence, a discussion of school funding in *Collier's* also pointed out that "millions of citizens in the richest country in the world reach voting age without being able to read the names of the candidates on the ballots." A *Woman's Home Companion* piece on low teacher salaries, titled "Danger at School," also mentioned that "mental disease is now striking one person in every twenty" and "alcoholism and divorce are at new peaks." While criticizing education in *This Week* magazine, writer Philip Wylie also lamented America's "self-infatuated" and "junk-loving" preoccupation with soap operas, comics, and automobiles (which he described as "big baby carriages"). A *Reader's Digest* reprint on the topic of high school drop-outs slighted schools for offering a "slingshot education in a hydrogen-bomb age." In the *New York Times*, Benjamin Fine wondered aloud whether there was any connection between juvenile delinquency and the "harsh methods" used by some teachers. *Life* offered a critique of public schooling that also included remarks on religion: "About all that most Americans possess nowadays in the way of religion is a number of prejudices." And, "perhaps half of them—not more—go once in a while to some church which they joined with only a foggy idea of its tenets or requirements."⁸⁰

Wealthy yet illiterate? Mentally ill? Self-infatuated and junk-loving? A nation of divorcees and alcoholics? A nation of delinquents and atheists? A nation obsessed with comics and soap operas? Was it really *education* that was in crisis?

⁸⁰ Crichton, 25; Appel, 189; Wylie, 25; Blake Clark, "Denver Schools Connect Learning With Life," *Reader's Digest*, February 1951, 89; Fine, 19; Bernard Iddings Bell, "Our Schools: Their Four Grievous Faults," *Life*, 16 October 1950, rpt. *Reader's Digest*, January 1951, 124.

In the years after World War II, popular educational discourse articulated an emerging crisis in national identity. Any analysis of the education crisis must begin by situating it within this context of widespread cultural anxiety. While educational debates over progressive schooling certainly provided a historical backdrop to the school crisis, especially as it unfolded in the early 1950s, these debates insufficiently account for the sudden eruption of education "news" after World War II. Early crisis discourse articulated a palpable fear, but John Dewey did not provoke this initial anxiety. Ironically, it was America itself—confused, doubtful, and in despair in a world made over by science and politics—that proved the greatest terror. The challenges of the "atomic age" had forced a crucial re-examination of the relationship between schooling and society. And to many observers, the fact that education was in crisis implied that America itself was in crisis.

Crisis and Opportunity

Such ominous rhetoric about democracy "endangered" by education appeared at the very moment in history when education itself was becoming more democratized in America. More Americans than ever before were being educated in the years after World War II, due in large part to increasing public school enrollments and the educational benefits provided by the G.I. Bill. Indeed, education was finally becoming a truly public institution in the fifties, yet a sharp contrast emerged between the rhetoric of crisis and the social reality of educational opportunity.

The democratization of education after World War II was prompted in part by the G.I. Bill. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act was signed into law by President Franklin

D. Roosevelt in 1944. It was designed to compensate veterans for their service, and to facilitate their gradual integration into the postwar economy after rapid demobilization.⁸¹

Veterans who had served at least ninety days after September 16, 1940 could take advantage of the law's education entitlements and resume or extend their formal schooling. Commonly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, the act covered educational expenses for one year plus duration of military service, for a maximum of forty-eight months. It provided for tuition, fees, books, and monthly sustenance, and granted servicemen the choice to select their schools.

Over the next seven years, some 7.8 million veterans used these benefits to complete high school, attend vocational school, or pursue a college degree. Over two million chose to attend college during this time, and in the fall of 1946 veterans nearly doubled America's college student enrollment.⁸² 1947 marked another record-setting year: Enrollment shot up by 600,000; servicemen comprised 49 percent of the total university enrollment, and 69 percent of all college men.⁸³ To be sure, the G.I. Bill also helped make education "news" after World War II. In fact, the phenomenal enrollment figures greatly surprised both government officials and educators. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act provided a variety of benefits, including medical care, free transportation home, and low mortgage rates. "College was not supposed to be the main

⁸¹ Cremin, *American Education*, 250.

⁸² Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 14. Total enrollment in institutions of higher education stood at 1,677,000 in the 1945-46 school year; in the fall of 1946 this figure rose to 2,078,000, and a year later total enrollment reached 2,338,000. See National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, ed. Thomas D. Snyder, January 1993.

⁸³ "Bulging Schools," *Newsweek*, 29 September 1947, 92; Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 189.

item on the list," according to one scholar, who adds, "nobody had any inkling of how many veterans would use the G.I. Bill to educate themselves."⁸⁴ Contemporary commentators "confidently predicted that veterans would shun higher education after their years on the battlefield."⁸⁵ Record enrollments in 1946 and 1947 proved them wrong, and also indicated that education would become a central concern of the postwar era. Indeed, one periodical listed the "absorption of higher education enrollments one million above pre-war peaks" as one of the "big ten educational events of 1947."⁸⁶

According to the historian Mark D. Van Ells, "higher education in the United States would never be the same again" after the G.I. Bill.⁸⁷ To be sure, the G.I. Bill helped popularize, and even democratize, education after World War II. That 7.8 million veterans took advantage of its educational provisions no doubt suggests that the G.I. Bill represented a postwar "success story." At the same time, however, this dramatic expansion of educational opportunity paralleled a profound shift in cultural attitudes toward schooling. Any optimism about the G.I. Bill was, without question, overshadowed in public discourse by the anxious perception that education was in crisis. In other words, at the very moment when education was becoming democratized as never before, schools were being made *dangerous* in the popular imagination.

Conclusion

⁸⁴ Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 59.

⁸⁵ Ravitch, 13.

⁸⁶ "Ten Major Education Events of 1947," *Senior Scholastic*, 5 January 1948, 6-T.

⁸⁷ Mark D. Van Ells, *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America's World War II Veterans Come Home* (New York: Lexington Books, 2001), 139.

I would argue that the concurrence of these social and cultural developments should be framed, and indeed best understood, within the broader rubric of consumption. At the same time many Americans began consuming ominous news about the school crisis, they were also becoming mass consumers of higher education. Education had not only become news: it was now the stuff of popular culture. Consider, for example, that Jacques Barzun, a professor at Columbia University and a noted public intellectual, was writing about teaching in the pages of a mass market periodical—the "Magazine That Women Believe In"—with a circulation of nearly nine million. Or that *Life* magazine's special issue on education reached an audience of nearly twenty-four million in 1950.⁸⁸ Consider the fact that the Ad Council's "Better Schools" slogans appeared on bread wrappers and matchbooks. Or that many magazines and newspapers first started employing education editors and specialists in the 1950s.⁸⁹ Clearly, after a long period of benign neglect by the culture industry, educational debates were now being packaged for mass consumption. "Editors of many lay magazines [now] consider critical treatments of education good grist for their mill," observed the editors of *Public Education Under Criticism*.⁹⁰ To be sure, the education "crisis" became a *product* as much as a *problem* in post-1945 America: it was at once a dilemma to be solved by conscientious citizens, and a commodity to be consumed by the masses.

Alongside education *news*, educational *credentials* also became a popular commodity in the postwar era. In 1945, the author of an advice manual for returning veterans encouraged G.I.'s to pursue an education to improve their earning potential:

⁸⁸ Scott and Hill, 4.

⁸⁹ Melby and Puner, preface, n.p. and Duncan, op cit.

"There is an inescapable connection between the school bell and the cash register."⁹¹ In the words of one scholar, the G.I. Bill "turned a college degree into a required consumer product, mandatory for all classes of Americans."⁹² Indeed, amidst the rapid postwar expansion of white collar employment opportunities—the growth of managerial, professional, and technical occupations—employees increasingly sorted candidates on the basis of their educational credentials.⁹³ By 1952, some 60 percent of big business leaders were college graduates; a generation earlier this share had been only 30 percent.⁹⁴ By effectively inflating the market value of a college diploma, the G.I. Bill thus rendered other forms of cultural capital, such as a terminal high school degree, obsolete. This, in turn, placed greater pressure on high schools to prepare America's youth for entrance to college. As more Americans began to consider education "an indispensable ingredient for social and material advancement," attention inevitably turned to the question of educational quality at *all* levels.⁹⁵ "With the vast numbers in college," wrote one contemporary observer, "the opportunities for improvement of the entire educational system are great."⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Maxwell Droke, *Good-by to GI: How to Be A Successful Civilian* (New York: Abington-Cokesbury Press, 1945), 75, qtd. in Van Ells, 140.

⁹² Murray Sperber, *Beer and Circus: How Big-Time College Sports is Crippling Undergraduate Education* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 8.

⁹³ Stanley Aronowitz, "A Different Perspective on Educational Inequality," in Henry A. Giroux and Patrick Shannon, eds., *Education and Cultural Studies: Toward a Performative Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 187.

⁹⁴ Dewey W. Grantham, *The United States Since 1945: The Ordeal of Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 150.

⁹⁵ Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 201.

⁹⁶ Carmichael, 7.

Simply put, another reason why education became news in the postwar era was because more Americans were being educated than ever before. More Americans were literally consuming education. Not only did the G.I. Bill double college enrollments in the late forties, but the baby boom effected a noticeable change in the public schools as well: between 1947 and 1952, the number of young people aged seven to thirteen enrolled in school increased by three million.⁹⁷ As might be expected, these increased enrollments—at *all* educational levels—caused classrooms to become more diverse along lines of race, class, gender, age, and ability level. School populations consequently grew more heterogeneous in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹⁸ In the context of this transformation—this postwar democratization of education—popular notions of what exactly was *dangerous* about education grew more dubious. In the late 1940s, at the dawn of the atomic age and the Cold War, educational debates reflected the general uncertainty and anxiety of "mood maybe." However, by the early fifties, the precise source of this anxiety came into clearer focus. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the news about schools changed. In the 1950s, popular educational discourse invoked not so much the specter of democracy endangered, but the specter of *too much* democracy—the fear of the integrated classroom.

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Current Population Reports: Popular Characteristics," Series P-20, No. 45, 22 October 1953 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1953), 2.

⁹⁸ The baby boom cut across all classes and ethnic groups. See Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

Chapter Two

The Other Pasadena Story: Anatomy of a Crisis in the "Athens of America"

As education became "news" after World War II, a growing chorus of educational leaders and lay critics called on the federal government to help solve the school crisis. Namely, they called for federal aid to education. The National Education Association, with the support of dozens of professional organizations, implored Congress to supplement state financing of schools in order to ensure educational equity across the country.¹ One Gallup Poll found that 55 percent of respondents were willing to pay higher taxes to support federal aid to education.² As the *New Republic* pointed out, "for this urgent problem, there is no state by state solution."³ Inundated with popular reports of education in crisis—reports of schools in shambles, of teacher shortages, of suffering children, of an atomic age endangered—how did members of Congress respond?

They bought lunch.

The School Lunch Act of 1948 was the only piece of school-related federal legislation to pass during the Truman era. It made permanent the temporary, emergency provision of school lunches that had started during the depression. Thanks to this measure, expenditures for the National School Lunch Program grew from just \$12

¹ R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence Cremin, *A History of Education in American Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953), 536.

² George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, Vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1972), 780.

³ "State of the Union: A Program for Liberal America," *The New Republic*, 10 January 1949, 13.

million in 1940 to \$92 million in 1949.⁴ Some seven million children benefited from the program, which reportedly improved the health, "mental awareness," and even academic performance of America's youth.⁵

While the federal government generously fed young stomachs, however, it steadfastly starved school coffers. The same year that the School Lunch Act passed, the Senate approved of a federal aid to education bill that would have distributed \$300 million in federal funds to individual states. The bill would have guaranteed state—not federal—control over schools, and placed a minimum floor under yearly expenditures-per-child. If states could not meet that minimum, the federal government would make up the difference. However, this bill, known as the Educational Finance Act, proceeded to languish in the House. In fact, three different school aid bills were introduced between 1946 and 1952, but none was successfully navigated through both houses of Congress. Given the growing urgency of the school crisis, why was the federal response so limited?

Partisan politics certainly bore some of the blame. President Truman and the 80th Congress were famously antagonistic toward one another. As a result of the 1946 congressional elections, Republicans controlled both the House and Senate for the first time since 1928, and they initiated a concerted effort to dismantle many New Deal policies. What's more, Congressional Republicans tried to block many of Truman's "Fair Deal" proposals, which focused on public housing, civil rights, national health insurance, and various extensions of New Deal benefits. Federal aid to education was also an important element of Truman's domestic program. On the campaign trail for re-election

⁴ Butts and Cremin, 581.

⁵ George J. Hecht, "Save the School Lunch Program," *Parents' Magazine* 33:3 (March 1948), 14.

in 1948, Truman chastised the House for sitting on a school aid bill while the nation was burdened with overcrowded schools and underpaid teachers.⁶ In his 1949 State of the Union address, Truman stated that it was "shocking that millions of our children are not receiving a good education." He declared, with a clear jab at Congress, "I cannot repeat too strongly my desire for prompt Federal financial aid to the States to help them operate and maintain their school system."⁷

But the legislative impasse was not *just* about party politics. A larger ideological debate informed this "Congressional shadowboxing," as the historian Paul Carter has described it. The issue of federal funding "adroitly [fused] the biases of Southerners who didn't want the aid to support desegregation, urban Catholics who didn't want it to go only to public institutions, and Republicans who didn't want education to be an activity of the national government."⁸ Indeed, the proposed bills each ignited fierce debates, particularly in the House, over which children should be the benefactors of federal funding. In states that supported segregation, should federal funds be apportioned evenly to all-white and all-black schools? Should the aid go to parochial schools? Should federal money be used to transport Catholic school students, or to pay for their textbooks? Should Congress even be in the business of supporting education? After all, schooling had traditionally been a matter of state and local concern. Why should Uncle

⁶ David McCulloch, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 629.

⁷ Harry S. Truman, "State of the Union Address, January 4, 1949," rpt. Dennis Merrill, ed., *Documentary History of the Truman Presidency, Vol. 15* (University Publications of America, 1997), 59.

⁸ Paul A. Carter, *Another Part of the Fifties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 194-5. On this battle over federal aid to education, see also Sean J. Savage, *Truman and the Democratic Party* (University Press of Kentucky, 1997), pp. 159-162.

Sam interfere? Such irresolvable issues repeatedly stymied passage of any school aid bill.

It is important to note here that Congress was not necessarily deliberating curricula, classrooms, or teachers during the early years of the education crisis. Instead, legislative skirmishes over federal aid to education turned on broader questions of race, religion, and state sovereignty—this was a culture war as much as an educational debate. In fact, Congressional debates of the Truman era essentially reinforced the message, already circulating in the wider world of popular culture, that the school crisis had very little to do with schooling itself. As chapter one demonstrated, popular discourse about the education crisis revealed widespread cultural anxieties about postwar society. Debates in Congress certainly followed suit. In this sense, the federal government's failure to act decisively on the school crisis surely resonated *culturally* as much as it did politically. Absent a federal solution—which would have "officially" defined the nature of the crisis and mandated a centralized response—the "education crisis" remained a fluid symbol in American culture. The crisis was still an urgent but entirely vague dilemma, one subject to a host of different interpretations. And when the federal government seemed reluctant to tackle educational issues, local communities improvised their own definitions—and responses—to the postwar school crisis.

This chapter offers a case study of how one community came to see its own schools as "in crisis." At the same time, this chapter considers how and why that particular community became a prominent popular symbol for the "crisis" in education. In the late forties, Pasadena, California experienced an educational crisis that culminated

in the controversial discharge of its nationally renowned superintendent. "Pasadena" subsequently captured the public's imagination as the foremost signifier of the nation's educational emergency. Indeed, popular narratives about Pasadena helped to construct a cultural "common sense" about the "reality" of the postwar education crisis. Yet at the same time, the story of what exactly happened there was subjected to a range of contrasting interpretations—popular accounts of the Pasadena story seemed to differ wildly in their explanations for the crisis. Because so much controversy attended the Pasadena case, it is tempting to conclude that this particular school crisis must have laid bare the core educational conflicts of the day. However, as I will argue in this chapter, popular discourse about Pasadena essentially produced the *appearance* of controversy even as it set the parameters for acceptable educational debate within a very narrow context that elided the race and class dimensions of the postwar school crisis.

The "Crisis" in Pasadena: A Cautionary Tale of the Cold War

At its annual meeting in 1951, the National Education Association declared that American public schools were under attack. The organization pointed to cases all across the country in which professional educators and well-organized lay groups had clashed over curriculum and finances. An official of the NEA's Commission for the Defense of Democracy claimed that "the current campaign" against public schools had begun in Pasadena, California.⁹ A 1951 issue of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, which reported on "The Public School Crisis," imbued Pasadena with a similar significance: it was "the

⁹ As reported in "The Public School Crisis," *Saturday Review of Literature*, September 1951, 7.

first community to find its school system in the national spotlight." ¹⁰ Also in 1951, *The Nation* cited Pasadena as one of the "fever spots in education," spots which have "developed into ugly sores that betray an infection lying deep in the body of society."¹¹ That same year, a book titled *This Happened in Pasadena* was published and widely discussed in the media and among educators. Written by the journalist David Hulburd, it chronicled the events that had recently propelled Pasadena into the popular imagination.¹² According to Harvard president James Conant, who reviewed the book for the *New York Times Book Review*, the importance of what happened in Pasadena was "the light the events shed not only on the exposed position of public educational systems but on the nature of certain reactionary forces at work in our democracy in these days of uncertainty and fear."¹³ In another review, the writer John Hersey warned that "what happened in Pasadena could happen in any community," and he urged Americans to read Hulburd's account so as to "prevent tragedies like Pasadena's from recurring in other places."¹⁴

To educators and laymen alike, in popular culture and at professional conferences, "Pasadena" was all of a sudden synonymous with the postwar crisis in education. Throughout the late forties, the mass media seemed to be casting about for a concrete representation of the school crisis—a name, a place, a *plot*—rather than a statistical snapshot of teacher shortages and crumbling classrooms. By 1951, Pasadena had become that symbol. What's more, popular discourse about Pasadena invoked the same sense of

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Morris Mitchell, "Fever Spots in American Education," *The Nation* 173:17 (27 October 1951), 344.

¹² David Hulburd, *This Happened in Pasadena* (New York: Macmillan, 1951).

¹³ James Conant, "The Superintendent Was the Target," *New York Times Book Review*, 1951, rpt. Ernest O. Melby and Morton Puner, eds., *Freedom and Public Education* (New York: Praeger, 1953), 149.

danger and anxiety that characterized early crisis rhetoric—note how Conant connects Pasadena to a culture of "uncertainty and fear," and *The Nation* calls the crisis there an "infection." The school crisis now had a new standard-bearer. But why Pasadena? What exactly happened in the city that was so dangerous?

In 1948, the Pasadena Board of Education appointed Dr. Willard E. Goslin as its new superintendent following the retirement of his predecessor. When it began its search, the board had made it clear that it wanted to find "the best superintendent in the United States."¹⁵ Goslin arrived that summer with strong credentials, having served as the superintendent of the Minneapolis school system and as president of the American Association of School Administrators. The NEA considered Goslin "one of the country's outstanding superintendents," and he reportedly received a "hearty welcome" in Pasadena.¹⁶ During his first year as superintendent, Goslin ushered through a new bond to pay for school construction. Pasadena voters overwhelmingly approved the bond, and subsequently two new junior high schools were built. Goslin also organized teacher-training workshops in the summer of 1949 and 1950. Other noted changes initiated by Goslin included a reshuffling of administrative personnel, and the rezoning of one of Pasadena's school districts. Goslin also proposed a plan to fund the schools more effectively by raising taxes. However, voters defeated this second budgetary proposal by a two-to-one margin in a bitterly fought election. Shortly after this election, Goslin's

¹⁴ John Hersey, "The Friends of Public Education Rallied—Too Late," *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 1951, rpt. Melby and Puner, 144.

¹⁵ National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education, *The Pasadena Story: An Analysis of Some Forces and Factors that Injured a Superior School System* (Washington, D.C., June 1951), 9. Hereafter, cited as *The Pasadena Story*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10

resignation was tendered by the Pasadena Board of Education. He resigned in November 1951.

Such are the basic facts concerning the Pasadena case. However, tremendous controversy attended the circumstances of Goslin's discharge, and contrasting interpretations of what really transpired during his brief tenure emerged over the next several years. Many observers attributed the controversy to redbaiting, concluding that Goslin had been unjustly attacked by a community gripped by communist paranoia. According to this interpretation, Pasadena civic groups had accused Goslin of being a communist because of his proclaimed support for UNESCO and federal aid to education; his administrative style, which favored group decision making and consensus building; his philosophy of progressive education; and even, oddly enough, his advocacy of camping retreats for students.¹⁷ At the same time, supporters of Goslin's dismissal offered evidence that he was simply out of touch with the needs of the Pasadena community. This view painted Goslin as an aloof administrator who failed to indulge local businessmen and reporters with their demands and his time. More severely, he was portrayed as an instigator of class warfare and racial agitation—a zealot trying to push a massive property tax hike as well as a radical program of social engineering on the citizens of Pasadena.¹⁸

Still other views circulated in popular narratives about Pasadena. Many professional educators interpreted the Pasadena crisis as a referendum on progressive

¹⁷ For example, see Hulburd, *op cit.*, and Arthur D. Morse, "Who's Trying to Ruin Our Schools," *McCall's* 78 (September 1951) 102, 109-09.

education, a sign that the long-revered principles of John Dewey had become subject to increasingly caustic criticism by the general public. To that end, Pasadena served as a rallying point for the educational elite, who felt that the very survival of progressive education was at stake in the rising wave of postwar "attacks" on public schooling.¹⁹ For others, however, Pasadena represented a significant victory for the middle class layman. After all, a so-called educational "expert," one with professional ties to the "Columbia cult of progressive educators," had been defeated by concerned citizens. In this way, Pasadena became a symbol for the postwar rise of the layman in educational debates. It served as an object lesson: experts best beware—the *people* had the power to wrest back control of their local schools from intractable educators.²⁰

All of these explanations set Pasadena squarely in the context of two broader cultural narratives that dominated public discourse in the postwar era. The first of these narratives was the Cold War. The mainstream "Pasadena story" that circulated in the 1950s clearly demonstrated how the unfolding Cold War was impacting public education in the United States. For many postwar Americans, the public school classroom was seen as the center of an ideological struggle between communism and the American way of life.²¹ The school was perceived as the one institution that affected every citizen in a

¹⁸ See Mary Allen, *Education or Indoctrination* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1956), and also the views expressed by Lewis Haney on ABC radio in "The Crisis in American Education," "America's Town Meeting of the Air," ABC Radio, 13 November 1951, rpt. Melby and Puner, 183-199.

¹⁹ See Conant, as well as the many essays and news articles collected in Melby and Puner, op cit.

²⁰ Frank Chodorov, "Educators Should Be Warned by the Pasadena Revolt," *Saturday Evening Post*, July 14, 1951.

²¹ Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare! Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), 155.

community, and it had to be policed carefully for subversion. Indeed, in 1946, a U.S. Congressman warned that the nation was being "communized" through its schools.²² The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) officially became a standing committee of Congress in 1945, and its investigations of "propaganda activities" in America often focused on educational institutions. In 1949, for example, HUAC wrote to eighty-one colleges and high schools requesting lists of the textbooks used in humanities and social science classes.²³ That same year, HUAC distributed hundreds of thousands of copies of the pamphlet "100 Things You Should Know about Communism and Education." Written as a series of questions and answers about subversion in the schools, the pamphlet declared that the presence of communists in the U.S. educational system was a "deadly danger." It warned that communists had "always found the teaching group the easiest touch of all the professional classes for actual Party zealots and fellow travelers," and it urged citizens to be vigilant.²⁴

This federal scrutiny of the schools was further amplified on the state level. In 1950, state legislatures passed over three hundred laws concerning subversive practices, and many of these laws affected teachers.²⁵ By 1953, thirty-two states required loyalty oaths for educators.²⁶ California, home to the Pasadena crisis, was especially watchful of

²² Ibid., 154.

²³ Lisle A. Rose, *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press,), 37.

²⁴ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Un-American Activities, *100 Things You Should Know About Communism and Education*, 81st Cong, 1st sess., 1949, pp. 7 and 18.

²⁵ Stuart J. Foster, *Red Alert! Educators Confront the Red Scare in American Public Schools, 1947-1954* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 10.

²⁶ Ronald Lora, "Education: Schools as Crucible in Cold War America," in Robert Bremmert and Gary Reichard, eds., *Reshaping America: Society and Institutions, 1945-60* (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1982), 230.

its schools. The state legislature established a Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in the early 1940s. The Tenney Committee, as it was more commonly known—Jack B. Tenney served as chairman from 1941 to 1949—actively sought to purge California schools of communist teachers. In 1946, for example, it tried to secure the dismissal of two Los Angeles high school teachers for allegedly teaching "disrespect for the capitalist system of the government of the United States."²⁷ In 1947, the committee introduced eight bills that would prevent the teaching of controversial subjects in the elementary schools; one of these bills eventually became law. In 1949, Tenney himself introduced seventeen antiradical bills in the State Senate. The committee's efforts were bolstered by a 1950 act signed by Governor Earl Warren, which stated that public employees should now be considered "civil defense workers," and be required to swear in writing that they did not advocate the violent overthrow of the government. In the early 1950s, the Fact-Finding Committee also placed agents on the campuses of the University of California; their mission: to expose subversive professors. By 1953, the committee could boast that more than one hundred dangerous teachers had been discharged in the past year alone.²⁸

What happened in Pasadena was clearly placed in this national—and regional—Cold War context. In popular discourse, Pasadena represented either the successful removal of a subversive superintendent, or the vicious redbaiting of a politically harmless educator. Either way, the Pasadena story was cast as a broader Cold War narrative. Yet this story also had a discernible subplot, one that drew on another dominant cultural

²⁷ David Cate, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 425.

narrative of the postwar era. There is a second context to consider here: contemporary interpretations of the Pasadena school crisis were also shaped by an emerging public debate over the relative merits of progressive education.

For much of the first half of the 20th century, the tenets of progressive education were by and large accepted as conventional wisdom in American schooling.²⁹ Most commonly associated with John Dewey—though by no means derived solely from his work—progressive education emerged as the dominant philosophy of schooling by the 1920s. At its core, this philosophy extolled child-centered learning, pedagogical experimentation, and schooling for democracy. On an administrative level, progressive education also became analogous with the scientific management of schools by educational experts. Professional organizations such as the Progressive Education Association, which was founded in 1921, and a growing number of teachers colleges, most notably Columbia, actively disseminated progressive principles in the decades before World War II. And for the most part, Americans appeared supportive of this educational movement. Indeed, according to the educational historian Lawrence Cremin, for half a century progressive education "enlisted the enthusiasm, the loyalty, the imagination, and the energy of large segments of the American public and the teaching profession."³⁰

This extended honeymoon came to an abrupt end in the postwar era, when progressive education became the subject of fierce public debate. Indeed, progressive

²⁸ Ibid., 426, 341, 424.

²⁹ Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 328.

schooling often served as scapegoat for the nation's erupting education crisis. The most common charges were that progressive education was anti-intellectual, overly permissive, socially conformist, aggressively secular, and morally relativistic. Books like Mortimer Smith's *And Madly Teach* and Bernard Bell's *Crisis in Education*, both published in 1949, took progressive education to task for many of these alleged transgressions. They excoriated progressive education for removing intellectual standards from the schools, and they lashed out at educational experts for lording themselves over the layman. Such rhetoric typified popular discourse about progressive education in the late forties and early fifties. Progressive education was allegedly dumbing down America's youth. And advocates of progressive education were characterized as intractable experts who imagined schooling to be some kind of esoteric science that only the elite could comprehend. At times, Dewey and his disciples were even branded communists. According to this more radical view, progressive educators were trying to re-engineer society along collectivist lines by eliminating competition and independent thought from the schools. In this way, Cold War harangues about "REDucators" and the "little RED schoolhouse" merged with debates over progressive education.³¹

No matter what their complaint about progressive schooling, critics tended to agree on the solution: it was time for the layman to take a more active role in local education. Citizens had to challenge educational experts, root out subversives, and demand a more rigorous academic curriculum for their tax dollars. Pasadena fit easily

³⁰ Lawrence A. Cremin, "What Happened to Progressive Education?" *Teachers College Record* 61:1 (October 1959), 23.

into this cultural conversation. To one observer, writing in the *Saturday Evening Post*, the Pasadena crisis raised the all-important question of whether "parents, as taxpayers, have any right to express an opinion on the curriculum or teaching methods in the public schools."³² Indeed, the Pasadena school crisis was commonly portrayed as the upshot of insoluble tensions between experts and laymen. In popular educational discourse, the firing of Superintendent Goslin seemed to symbolize a referendum on Dewey himself.

The Pasadena story thus conveniently reinforced mainstream narratives about the Cold War and progressive education. So conveniently, in fact, that one must ask whether these two interpretive frameworks sufficiently explained what happened in Pasadena. What was left out of this cultural conversation about the Pasadena school crisis? Might there have been an alternative context for interpreting the Pasadena story? And if so, then why was this symbol for the education crisis *not* aligned within that particular social framework?

This chapter suggests that one of the most telling contexts for the Pasadena story is the city of Pasadena itself. After all, a complicated process of social and cultural change greatly transformed the so-called "Athens of America" in the 1940s. Indeed, the city experienced profound demographic shifts during and after World War II—namely, an influx of minorities and a revamping of the local economy. Yet popular accounts of the Pasadena "crisis" consistently ignored the fact that at mid-century, Pasadena was

³¹ Kitty Jones and Robert Olivier, *Progressive Education is REDucation* (Boston: Meador, 1956). See also Mary Anne Raywid's discussion of this book in *The Ax-Grinders: Critics of Our Public Schools* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 35-49.

³² Chodorov, 10.

being remade by the dynamic interplay of race and economics.³³ Instead, popular discourse cast Pasadena primarily in the context of Cold War politics and progressive education in decline. To better understand why this was the case, this chapter necessarily pursues an overlapping approach to the Pasadena story: it aims to construct a *social history* of a local school crisis, while at the same time seeking to understand the *cultural history* of a popular signifier for America's educational woes. In particular, it explicates the race and class dimensions of the Pasadena crisis that were consistently elided in the popular crisis narrative. Such an approach should help us make better sense of what happened in Pasadena—and of what the "education crisis" did and *did not* mean in postwar popular culture.

I attempt this analysis despite a seemingly prescient warning issued by James Conant to future historians in his 1951 review of the book *This Happened in Pasadena*: "The immediate causes for a final rupture between an educational administrator and a lay board can never be adequately assessed. No meticulous historian with access to a mass of documents can satisfactorily portray the growing tensions within an educational system in times of stress nor the reactions of those individuals directly concerned with the decision to drop the pilot."³⁴ Perhaps scholars have heeded Conant's admonition, for history seems to have forgotten about the Pasadena school crisis. In contrast to the overabundance of interpretations that appeared in the early fifties, there are few historical analyses of the Pasadena story. In educational histories, Pasadena either serves as a brief

³³ For a case study of how one city was transformed by postwar demographic and economic shifts, see Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³⁴ Conant, 149.

anecdote folded into the long history of progressive education, or as an example of the many school ground witch-hunts that characterized the early Cold War.³⁵ Yet this scholarship essentially reaches the same conclusions about Pasadena that contemporary observers reached. Such studies uncritically reproduce fifty-year old accounts of "what happened" in Pasadena. As a result, this practice perpetuates the same marginalization of race and class issues that characterized postwar narratives about Pasadena. Thus, this chapter not only intends to complicate the story of what exactly happened in Pasadena, but to reinscribe this story into the complex history of the "other" fifties. By reconstructing the social history of Pasadena—and in effect offering a third context for considering "Pasadena" as popular icon—I aim to show that communism and John Dewey may not have been the only school ground threats that drove anxious citizens to depose their superintendent in the fall of 1950.

The "Athens of America"

To understand the extent to which Pasadena changed in the 1940s—and the extent to which the Pasadena narrative failed to acknowledge this change—we need to consider the city's longer history. Pasadena lies at the foot of the Sierra Madre Mountains, just

³⁵ For example, see Arthur Zilversmit, *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), and Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). While Zilversmit concedes that "the Pasadena story was more than a struggle over progressive education, it revealed in microcosm many of the problems of American education in the postwar period," he nonetheless uses Pasadena as an example of progressive education under fire in the 1950s. One notable exception is Stuart J. Foster, *Red Alert*, op cit., which offers the most comprehensive treatment of the Pasadena crisis to date. Foster provides a detailed discussion of the NEA's investigation of Pasadena, and he evaluates the effectiveness of its conclusions. He ultimately finds fault with the NEA's investigation for *playing down* the extent to which the red scare influenced what happened in Pasadena, and this is where our analyses differ: in revisiting the Pasadena crisis, I focus more on the social/cultural context—rather than the political context—in trying to grasp what occurred there.

northeast of the city of Los Angeles. To the south lies the San Gabriel Valley; to the west, Glendale and Burbank. The land on which Pasadena resides was originally home to Hahamogna Indians, who were conquered by the Spanish when they established the San Gabriel mission there in 1771. From Spain, ownership of the territory passed to Mexico, and then to the United States when California was admitted to the union in 1852. In 1859, title of the land was transferred from its Mexican landowners, who had defaulted on their loans, to their American lenders. These men in turn sold their holdings to a group of settlers and orange growers in 1873. Many of these settlers were retired businessmen from the Midwest who came to Pasadena to find "new life and new interests in the new community."³⁶ Hence Pasadena from the start garnered a reputation as a retirement community. The city was chartered in 1886.³⁷

Thanks to Pasadena's warm climate and its position along the newly completed Santa Fe Railroad, which extended from Chicago to Los Angeles, the city quickly grew into a haven for tourists and retirees at the turn of the century. Pasadena earned national renown for its annual Tournament of Roses, a New Year's Day tradition that had begun in 1890. The city also became home to the California Institute of Technology, the Pasadena Playhouse, Busch Gardens, and the Huntington Library and Art Gallery. In one celebrated 1939 study of the "good life" in America, Pasadena was rated the most desirable U.S. community in which to live.³⁸ Reportedly, a visitor to Pasadena once

³⁶ Pasadena, Calif., Cooperative Survey of the Pasadena City Schools, *Report of the Survey of the Pasadena City Schools: A Cooperative Study, 1951-1952*, 55. Hereafter cited as *Report of the Survey*.

³⁷ This early history of Pasadena was gleaned from the *Report of the Survey*, op cit., as well as "Pasadena on the Web," the official website for the city of Pasadena [<http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us/>].

³⁸ *The Pasadena Story*, 7.

dubbed it the "Athens of America," and the moniker stuck with locals.³⁹ Less generously, another visitor once described the city as home of the three "R's": "Rich, Reactionary, and Republican."⁴⁰ Reportedly, Pasadena tended to attract "many men of wealth who had retired from active life."⁴¹ In 1941, a Works Project Administration guide to Pasadena described it as a "quiet" and "conservative" community punctuated by "'arge and often pretentious houses" and "extensive estates centering on great mansions."⁴² Indeed, in 1940, Pasadenans conceded that, at least to outsiders, the city was thought to be a "Millionaires' Playground," and one particularly lavish street was even dubbed "Millionaire's Row."⁴³

Outsiders may have viewed Pasadena as a "Millionaire's Playground," but not all of the city's *insiders* necessarily lived a "rich" and "quiet" life there. Indeed, a very different portrait of Pasadena in the prewar years emerges in the early life history of one of the city's soon-to-be famous residents: young Jackie Robinson. Robinson's family moved to Pasadena in 1920, after realizing that their economic prospects in Georgia were increasingly bleak and after taking note of worsening race relations in the South. Robinson's mother, Mallie, decided to relocate her five children after hearing a relative

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Hulburd, 13.

⁴¹ *The Pasadena Story*, 7.

⁴² Work Projects Administration in South California, sponsored by Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, *Los Angeles: A Guide to the City and its Environs* (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 261.

⁴³ Pasadena, Calif., Superintendent of Schools, "The Kindergarten-Six-Four-Four Plan of Public School Organization: Fifty-Third Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1939-1940," December 1940, 17; "Pasadena," *Los Angeles A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County*, ed. Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 385.

boast, "If you want to get closer to heaven, visit California."⁴⁴ She soon found employment as a maid for a wealthy Pasadena family. After sharing a home with her half-brother for two years, Mallie bought her own house. In 1922, the Robinsons moved to Pepper Street, an all-white block in a working-class district of Pasadena. Two years later, Mallie's youngest child, Jack Roosevelt Robinson, enrolled in kindergarten. This was the beginning of Jack's formal education in the Pasadena school system. It was 1924. Twenty-three years later, the same Jack Robinson would sign with the Brooklyn Dodgers and become the first African American to play baseball in the major leagues.

Jackie Robinson lived in Pasadena from 1920 to 1941. His memories of growing up in the city, however, suggest that Pasadena was not necessarily the "most desirable" place to live at that time. Indeed, years after he left Pasadena, Robinson declared, "If my mother, brothers and sister weren't living there, I'd never go back. I've always felt like an intruder, even in school. People in Pasadena were less understanding, in some ways, than Southerners. And they were more openly hostile."⁴⁵ Robinson's brother Mack echoed this assessment of Pasadena: "What my mother didn't know when she brought us here, what none of us knew, was that Pasadena was as prejudiced as any town in the South. They let us in all right, but they wouldn't let us live."⁴⁶ During their time on Pepper Street, the Robinsons witnessed a cross burning on their front lawn. White neighbors constantly complained to the police about the children making too much noise and signed petitions to try to evict them. According to Jackie's sister, "When we first moved to Pepper Street we had a bad time. Nobody wanted us out there since the neighborhood

⁴⁴ Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Ballentine, 1997), 16.

⁴⁵ Qtd. in Rampersad, 61.

was all white... They did everything they could to get us out of there." One day, eight-year-old Jack was taunted by a white girl from down the street, who yelled "Nigger! Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!" Jack's retort—he called her a "Cracker"—lead to a stone-throwing encounter between Jack and the girl's father.⁴⁷ "We went through a sort of slavery, with the whites slowly, very slowly, getting used to us," recalled Jackie's sister.⁴⁸ Years later, while a student at Pasadena Junior College, Robinson and a friend were arrested one night by a policeman who was upset that the two young men were singing loudly while walking home from a movie. Throughout his amateur athletic career in Pasadena, Robinson endured racial epithets from opposing crowds and players. And on team road trips, he was often denied restaurant and hotel service.⁴⁹

Robinson once said, "I always thought Pasadena was a great place, until I got more experience of life." The whole time Jackie lived in Pasadena, not a single African American was employed as a fireman, policeman, teacher, or municipal employee—except in the park, street, and refuse department. The municipal pool was whites-only six days a week; the seventh day, dubbed "International Day," the pool was open to anyone, but it was immediately drained afterward and refilled. The Pasadena schools, according to Robinson biographer Arnold Rampersad, were no haven from such racism: "the idea of white supremacy was entrenched in the school system." In a 1940 confidential survey of Pasadena schoolteachers, for instance, "almost half would express a preference for

⁴⁶ Maury Allen, *Jackie Robinson: A Life Remembered* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987), 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25. See also Jackie Robinson, as told to Alfred Duckett, *I Never Had it Made* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1972), 17-18.

⁴⁸ Rampersad, 23.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 50, 48.

schools with no black students at all." During all his years as a student, Robinson had only white teachers.⁵⁰

Jackie Robinson left Pasadena in 1941, just as a series of economic and demographic changes were starting to work a profound transformation on the city. During the Second World War, industry came to Pasadena, mostly in the form of pharmaceuticals and lightweight precision instrument manufacturing. The number of manufacturing enterprises thus expanded from 110 in 1939 to 300 in 1951, and the number of manufacturing employees similarly grew from 1,000 to 12,000 in that time period.⁵¹ What was once primarily the home of retired industrialists was now becoming a base for industry.

Population growth in Pasadena during the 1940s was also facilitated by the construction of California's—and America's—first freeway, the Arroyo Seco Parkway. Known today as the Pasadena Freeway, this 8.2 mile parkway linked Pasadena to downtown Los Angeles. It opened on New Year's Eve 1939, just in time for the next day's Rose Bowl festivities.⁵² The four-to-six lane motorway helped spur a housing boom in the postwar years, and made possible the creation of a new shopping district just outside Pasadena city limits.⁵³

These wartime developments changed the city's demographics considerably. In 1940, the population of Pasadena stood at 88,717; by 1950, this figure would grow to

⁵⁰ Ibid., 35, 22, 21, 26.

⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

⁵² Historical American Engineering Record, "Arroyo Seco Parkway," HAER No. CA-265 (1995), 7.

⁵³ "Pasadena," *Los Angeles A to Z*, 385.

106,049.⁵⁴ What's more, the nonwhite population was now increasing more rapidly than the white population. In the 1920s, African Americans comprised only 2 percent of Pasadena's population, and most blacks, like Jackie Robinson's mother, worked at resort hotels or private residences.⁵⁵ From 1940 to 1950, however, the percentage of nonwhite Pasadenans increased from 5.95 to 9.4 percent as the region's economy changed.⁵⁶ To be sure, the racial tensions that the Robinson family felt in the twenties and thirties did not abate in the wake of wartime migration. For example, the infamous L.A. "Zoot Suit" riots of 1943, which pitted white sailors against Mexican American youth in clashes across the city for nearly a week in June, ended up drifting into Pasadena when sailors were finally denied furlough in Los Angeles. In Pasadena, groups of sailors reportedly singled out African American residents on the street and asked them what their feelings were toward Mexican American "zoot suiters." Several altercations then ensued.⁵⁷ As in Los Angeles, these clashes in the "Athens of America" were the upshot of both racial and cultural conflict, and spoke to the changing social landscape of wartime Pasadena.

In sum, in the 1940s, in less than a decade, Pasadena's percentage of resident wage earners increased, the mean age of Pasadenans declined, and the city grew more racially and culturally diverse. What was once primarily a resort community was now

⁵⁴ *Report of the Survey*, 52.

⁵⁵ Charles Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1976* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 138.

⁵⁶ *Report of the Survey*, 53.

⁵⁷ "Clashes Few as Zoot War Dies Down," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 June 1943, A:2; "Zoot Suit War Runs Course as Riots Subside," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 June 1943, A:2; Lawrence Brooks de Graaf, "Negro Migration to Los Angeles, 1930 to 1950," Ph.D. diss, University of California, 1962, 201.

home to "industry by invitation," as civic leaders liked to call the city's new dependence on manufacturing.⁵⁸ What did all of this mean for Pasadena's schools?

In practical terms, these wartime changes meant that Pasadena's schools became more crowded and more racially diverse. The Pasadena School District was comprised of the city of Pasadena as well as the surrounding metropolitan area. The entire district increased by 60 percent from 1930-1950, owing largely to population growth just outside the city limits. In the same twenty-year span, the number of African American children enrolled in Pasadena schools doubled in number, to 1,344 in 1950.⁵⁹ In a few neighborhoods, white students suddenly found themselves in the minority.⁶⁰ In response to this unexpected demographic shift in the schools, Pasadena created "neutral zones" in certain neighborhoods that were becoming more populated and more integrated. In theory, parents residing in neutral zones could opt to send their children to any school in Pasadena; they were not bound to their district school. However, the historian Charles Wollenberg has maintained that only the transfer requests of white parents were actually honored.⁶¹ As a result, some of Pasadena's elementary schools quickly became predominantly black or Mexican American.⁶²

⁵⁸ *Report of the Survey*, 56.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁰ Wollenberg, 139.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Josh Sides corroborates Wollenberg's claim about Pasadena's neutral zones: "In reality, white students were given transfers easily, while black requests for transfers, in the words of the president of the board [of education], 'would probably be refused.'" See Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 160.

⁶² *The Pasadena Story*, 11.

Reshuffling students did not necessarily solve the problem of overcrowding, and Pasadenans came to realize that new facilities were urgently needed. Indeed, within two months of Willard Goslin's appointment as superintendent in 1948, the community voted on a \$5 million bond to fund new school construction. The bond issue passed by an overwhelming majority, and Pasadena soon built two more junior high schools. However, with the addition of the new schools, Goslin was now faced with the prospect of re-zoning students. In 1950, he proposed the elimination of one of the neutral zones, and suggested redrawing the school district based on geographic distance, not social differences. Goslin's position drew immediate fire from citizens' organizations and real estate groups, but the school board eventually accepted his proposal. Still, other neutral zones remained intact—and new ones were created—as Pasadena continued to grow in size. And when Goslin's second budget proposal faced voter approval later in 1950, it was overwhelmingly rejected. Between 1933 and 1951, Pasadena had held eight citywide elections to vote on proposed tax increases for education, and only one ever failed—in 1950. Voter turnout to decide on—indeed, to defeat—Superintendent Goslin's second proposed budget was 38 percent, the highest in Pasadena's history.⁶³ Interestingly enough, from 1934 to 1950, the greatest single-year increase in Pasadena's black student population was registered right before the election, in the school year 1949-1950.⁶⁴

Clearly, Pasadena emerged as a city—and a school system—transformed in the years after World War II. But what role did this changed culturescape play in the school

⁶³ *Report of the Survey*, 22-23.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

crisis? How did these dramatic demographic and economic developments inform the educational debates that would propel Pasadena into the national spotlight? If popular accounts of the Pasadena story are to be believed, such changes had little to do with the crisis that gripped the "Athens of America." Powerful forces had worked their influence on the citizens of Pasadena, but according to contemporary interpretations, these forces were more political than social in nature. Superintendent Goslin was either the innocent victim of domestic redbaiting, or a genuine proponent of the communist agenda. In either case, the central debate that reportedly divided Pasadenans against themselves concerned the pros and cons of progressive education.

Popular discourse about Pasadena began and ended within this narrow interpretive framework. However, the Pasadena story could not completely contain the dynamics of race and class. Indeed, it would be a mistake to assume that cultural narratives about the Cold War and progressive education enjoyed such hegemonic influence over the Pasadena story. For there were points at which the dominant narrative about Pasadena ruptured, contradicted itself, and even subverted conventional wisdom about the education crisis. Three accounts in particular demonstrate the inherent instability of the mainstream Pasadena narrative: David Hulburd's *This Happened in Pasadena*, Mary Allen's *Education or Indoctrination*, and an ABC radio broadcast of a debate between Willard Goslin and one of his detractors. A close reading of these three cultural representations of the Pasadena story demonstrates the underlying complexity of the postwar crisis in education.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ At this juncture, I draw on the methods of literary and popular culture analysis to pursue a close reading of "Pasadena" as cultural text. My approach to textual analysis here has been particularly influenced by

Re-Reading the Pasadena Story

One of the most popular Pasadena stories to circulate in postwar culture was David Hulburd's 1951 book, *This Happened in Pasadena*. Hulburd, a journalist, visited Pasadena after Goslin's dismissal to try to determine what had caused this highly regarded community to fracture so fiercely. His account was the first book-length treatment of the story; Hulburd's publisher described it as the "first blow-by-blow account of the issues, personalities, and sequence of events involved in the Pasadena school controversy." *This Happened in Pasadena* was widely reviewed and discussed in the mainstream media, and to many contemporaries (and indeed, to many future historians), Hulburd's account was taken as gospel.

In his book, Hulburd concedes early on that Pasadena is a community changed, citing recent growth in the city's minority and working population. He states that this growth, which transformed Pasadena into a "thriving industrial community," was "normal and healthy." However, he adds that "any such growth of lower-income and nonwhite groups, even though not large, is never greeted happily by those who are interested in maintaining residential property values; and in a place like Pasadena, where tradition and conformity play such a large role, this unhappiness is most apparent." Yet right after pointing out this "unhappiness," he avows that "there has never been a race riot in Pasadena. Its Negroes and its Mexicans, like its whites, live in dignity, privacy, and

Jean E. Howard, "The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1988): 13-43 and Lawrence W. Levine, "The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences," *AHR* 97:5 (December 1992): 1369-1399.

peace."⁶⁶ But what about Pasadena's own "Zoot Suit" riots of 1943? What about the city's whites-only pool and the cross burning on the Robinson's front lawn? This social history is absent from Hulburd's city portrait, which is already somewhat oblique and contradictory. Indeed, the reader is left wondering how to reconcile Hulburd's various statements—cultural change in Pasadena has been "healthy," but the influx of minority and working-class residents has caused obvious "unhappiness" among certain Pasadenans, but then again everyone lives in "dignity" and "peace."

Hulburd even shifts gears a fourth time, admitting in the next paragraph that the city is "beginning to show signs, beneath its placid exterior, of restless social change and of an acceptance of a changing world." However, this talk of "change" all but disappears in Hulburd's subsequent narrative. *This Happened in Pasadena* is noticeably reluctant to connect such social ferment directly to the school crisis. Throughout his account, Hulburd consistently directs readers to *another* culprit: in the Pasadena case, political philosophy—not sociology—is to blame. In short, Hulburd argues that well-meaning Pasadenans were swayed by an aggressive propaganda campaign launched by far-right zealots.

The publisher's introduction to *This Happened in Pasadena* sets the stage for this kind of intellectual, rather than sociological, explanation. According to the publisher, what happened in Pasadena "provides a lesson of grave importance: any school system in the country is alarmingly vulnerable today to attack from outside the local community as well as from within." The introduction makes it clear that the predominant theme in this story is subversion. Readers are told they must guard against the enemies of public

⁶⁶ Hulburd, 12-13.

schooling: "It is a fact that certain forces, vicious, well organized, and coldly calculating, would like to change the face of education in the United States." But who exactly are these enemies? In Hulburd's account, the prime mover is one Allen Zoll, founder of the National Council for American Education (NCAE). Zoll, a one-time supporter of the divisive radio priest Father Coughlin, started the Manhattan-based NCAE in 1948 with the goal to eradicate "Socialism, Communism and all forms of Marxism from the schools and colleges of America, and to stimulate sound American education." In the course of his investigation in Pasadena, Hulburd learns that many of Zoll's pamphlets have found their way into the hands of Willard Goslin's major opponents. According to Hulburd, NCAE pamphlets such as "Progressive Education *Increases* Juvenile Delinquency" were "paraphrased with remarkable fidelity" by a spokesperson for Pasadena's School Development Council (SDC), an organization formed to protest Goslin's proposed tax hike.⁶⁷

Hulburd treats the link between Pasadena's School Development Council and Allen Zoll as his smoking gun, and this evidence was frequently echoed in public discourse about the Pasadena school crisis. In *This Happened in Pasadena*, the SDC becomes the central villain in an "Us versus Them" plot, and its members are even depicted with the requisite calumny. For instance, a founder of the SDC is described as one of those "highly cultured garden-club species of political plant life... the kind of Republicans who talk about American heritage as though it were a special privilege belonging to the privileged few." In laying out his case, Hulburd takes pains to chronicle every action of the SDC. In the summer of 1950, for example, the SDC called for "an

⁶⁷ Ibid., ix, 88, 90.

ideological investigation of curriculum, methods and personnel within the Pasadena School District." It demanded loyalty oaths for administrators and teachers. And it proposed a survey to determine the "politico-social aims of the present school administration—in curriculum, methods, and personnel," further recommending that "such patriotic organizations as the American Legion and Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution be called upon to... assist the [School] Board in the study." The SDC defended its requests by citing examples of alleged subversion at school: for instance, students were being taught that Rome was a "failed democracy." This prompted the SDC to ask, "Is this part of a campaign to 'sell' our children on the collapse of our way of life and substitution of collectivism?"⁶⁸

In all fairness, Hulburd is persuasive in stating the case against Allen Zoll and his Pasadena disciples. Indeed, the National Education Association, in its subsequent investigation of Goslin's discharge, corroborated that the major arguments put forth by the SDC were not of local origin and in fact came from "pseudo-patriotic national groups."⁶⁹ To be sure, the SDC unquestionably spearheaded the public campaign to defeat Goslin's tax hike; it exploited the local media with much success in order to spread its message; and it pressured the school board to request Goslin's resignation. In many ways, the actions of the SDC, which claimed to represent 4,000 parents, seemed to be at the center of the Pasadena story. Still, how can we reconcile Hulburd's portrait of a populace essentially brainwashed by far-right propaganda—propaganda that traveled all

⁶⁸ Ibid., 59, 105, 106.

⁶⁹ *The Pasadena Story*, 22.

the way from the east coast, no less—with the occasional asides about race and class that are peppered throughout *This Happened in Pasadena?*

For instance, in his coverage of the debates over Goslin's proposed elimination of neutral zones, Hulburd writes that opponents to redistricting "made no bones about the fact that rezoning would reduce some of their property values." Further, he editorializes that, "What they did not say in so many words, but what was perfectly plain, was that they were afraid those property values would decline because children in the affected neighborhoods would have to attend classes with Negro and Mexican children." When the school board finally agrees to implement Goslin's rezoning proposal, Hulburd states, somewhat ominously, that "the matter had been settled to Mr. Goslin's complete satisfaction. But he was not to hear the end of it. Some property owners were not to let him forget in a hurry what they thought he had done to them. Neither were some parents who did not like the prospect of their children mingling in school with nonwhites." Lastly, Hulburd points out that "downtowners"—those Pasadenans with "big real-estate interests"—were anti-Goslin because they opposed any rise in tax rates. Yet he further characterizes "downtowners" thusly: "much as they welcomed new industry as a means of bringing in new revenue, they abhorred the social changes new industries create—particularly the influx of nonwhites who must be housed, fed, their children educated, and absorbed into the community."⁷⁰

Such asides seem to imply that social tensions may have played some kind of role in the gathering crisis, but Hulburd reserves any and all overt blame for Zoll and the SDC. Indeed, race and class run through Hulburd's narrative as barely recognizable

minor currents, presumably immaterial to the more important theme of political subversion. In effect, Hulburd suggests that some Pasadenans may have harbored distasteful attitudes toward integration, but the *real* story here turned on the SDC's communist witch-hunt. Yet how can Hulburd be so sure? After all, *This Happened in Pasadena* offers no accounts of the school crisis from the perspective of African American or Mexican American residents. And the very history of Pasadena's "Zoot Suit" clashes in 1943 belies Hulburd's claim that there were no race riots, or that all races necessarily lived in "dignity, privacy, and peace." Hulburd's reluctance to more fully examine the social context for the Pasadena story consequently contributed to the popular impression that racial or class politics had little to do with the crisis.

Another published version of the Pasadena story takes this elision one step further. *Education or Indoctrination*, penned several years later by a self-described Pasadena housewife named Mary Allen, states pointedly that race and class conflict *never even existed* in Pasadena before Willard Goslin came to town. Allen's book-length study of the school crisis, designed as a scathing rebuke to Hulburd's less-than-flattering portrait of her community, recounts how "socialistic" progressive educators launched a "full-scale invasion" of the schools under Goslin's leadership. According to Allen, the superintendent radically tried to re-engineer the community. For example, he recommended that a course in "human relations" be introduced into the core curriculum in the upper grades. Allen argues that human relations was simply a thinly-veiled synonym for "race and class consciousness." Goslin's human relations programs allegedly "created race and class awareness" because "tension, prejudice, and

⁷⁰ Hulburd, 71, 81, 120.

discrimination were emphasized." She also mocks Goslin for propagating the notion that "a classroom without all races represented was not supposed to be democratic because it failed to provide intercultural experiences for children." Further, Allen observes that under Goslin, neutral zones were "condemned as evil," and as a result, "all classes and races were to be forced to accept each other on an equal basis whether they wanted to or not." She then accuses Goslin of fostering "discrimination against minorities." Thanks to the new superintendent, "racial awareness and feeling were created where none existed before."⁷¹

Whereas Hulburd considerably marginalizes the influence of race and class consciousness on the school crisis, Allen rejects the premise outright, arguing that social tensions never even existed before that "social planner" Goslin created them. Yet just by naming Pasadena's social dynamic as a nonfactor in the crisis, both texts in effect unintentionally privilege the importance of race and class. By denying that a different set of power relations may have been at work in *this* particular school crisis, these texts implicitly acknowledge that power can indeed be exercised along lines of race and class. To resolve this narrative tension—which threatened to render the Pasadena story a far more culturally complex phenomenon—both accounts consistently redirect the reader to the same type of explanation for the crisis: Hulburd accuses Zoll of political subversion; Allen censures Goslin for the same offense. As a result, in the 1950s, both texts reinforced the popular understanding that "what happened" in Pasadena was not at all the upshot of social change, but the consequence of an ideological impasse born of Cold War politics and progressive education on trial.

⁷¹ Allen, 54, 72, 76-77, 78.

Attempts to contain the popular Pasadena story within a narrow interpretive framework were perhaps most directly challenged—and then quickly recontained—in a radio debate broadcast by ABC on November 13, 1951. In honor of American Education Week, ABC's current events program, "America's Town Hall Meeting of the Air," featured a moderated conversation between Willard Goslin, the now-former superintendent, and Lewis Haney, an economics professor at New York University. The program was broadcast on 227 stations, and the subject of the debate was the "crisis in American education."

Haney's position on the crisis was that progressive education had "gone to some extremes considered undesirable by many educators and parents." These "extremes" included a move by educators to redefine the "good society" as one in which the individual is subordinated to the group. Haney asked, "Are the schools to take from the family and the church the responsibility for personal adjustments and to condition the whole child for the organized educators' notion of a good collectivist society?" He also rejected the suggestion that local school crises in Pasadena and in other cities across the nation were part of a radical "plot" to destroy public education. Instead, these crises were the upshot of the "honest indignation of local citizens."⁷²

According to Goslin, however, the education crisis was not the consequence of progressive education gone awry, but of the "terrific handicaps" that public schools faced in the postwar era. These handicaps included a lack of federal funding, an astounding teacher shortage, a paucity of classrooms, and a growing student population. What's more, Goslin argued, the recent dramatic increase in destructive, rather than constructive,

lay criticism was having a negative effect on public discourse about education. What was at stake in the crisis was "how we decide educational matters." Goslin advocated greater civic engagement with public schooling, and suggested that Americans "find the largest areas of common agreement on which to stand while we debate our differences."⁷³

The debate proceeded largely along these lines, with Haney asserting that curriculum was the foremost problem, and Goslin concentrating his comments on the social and material aspects of the education crisis. At times, though, Haney tried to focus the debate specifically on what had happened in Pasadena the year before. Yet Goslin refused to engage Haney on this point, reminding him that the two were on air "to discuss the crisis in American education, and that covers a lot of territory beyond Pasadena." Despite Goslin's protests, the radio program ended up being as much about Pasadena as about the general crisis in education, and in this sense it helped construct the broader popular narrative about the Pasadena story. Indeed, Haney's comments faithfully reproduced conventional wisdom about Pasadena. For example, he quoted a "well-known communist-fronter" who had lamented the fact that the "battle for control of public education" in Pasadena had been won by the "enemy."⁷⁴ Were the good, patriotic citizens of Pasadena the "enemy," wondered Haney? Did it not trouble Goslin that a communist-fronter had sided with him? Later, in explaining a general shortcoming of progressive education, Haney again invoked Pasadena:

Well, I don't know what the people of Pasadena think about this progressive education, but I do know that there is connected with it the idea of a collectivist philosophy essentially and necessarily connected with the education that comes

⁷² "The Crisis in American Education," rpt. Melby and Puner, 183, 185.

⁷³ Ibid., 187, 188.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 190.

down through Karl Marx, to John Dewey... which is essentially the idea of taking the whole child out of the influence of the family and the church and subjecting him to a conditioning process, subordinating him to the group.⁷⁵

Like the writers David Hulburd and Mary Allen, Haney framed the Pasadena story squarely in the context of the Cold War and debates over progressive education. And yet, like Hulburd and Allen, Haney sometimes compromised his own attempts to contain Pasadena in this framework. For example, at one point in the debate, Goslin observed that U.S. public schools were plagued by overcrowding and a dearth of teaching materials. In response, Haney immediately characterized Goslin as an advocate of race and class warfare:

Well, Dr. Goslin, you say the main source of the school problem as you observe it consists or results from religious differences, racial issues, labor versus capital, party politics and so forth. Now I think that in that you are wrong, because in my town I find no religious issues, no labor capital issues, no racial issues, no party issues in the school question, or in the election of the school board. There is only one line of cleavage there, only one issue, and that is the issue of progressive education closely connected with the idea of a socialist slant.⁷⁶

Earlier in the debate, Goslin had remarked that "this nation is in the midst of a period of evolution and adjustment in many of the relationships between citizens of different racial backgrounds," adding that the public school system was striving to "live with this issue and all of its manifestations."⁷⁷ This statement certainly compromised the popular view of what happened in Pasadena, for it laid bear the racial dimensions of the school crisis. Haney, of course, had to find a way to respond so as to reinforce the dominant narrative about education in the postwar years. Now, Haney finally found this opportunity.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 195.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 192.

Haney patently rejected the notion that America could be at all socially fragmented. Indeed, the long list of factors that Haney claimed did *not* contribute to the school crisis was telling. Race, economics, religion, partisan politics—none of these "issues" were related to the "school problem." Haney's proof? "My town." It was unclear what "town" Haney resided in, but presumably it lay outside of New York City, where he worked as a professor. Haney portrayed his home town as an oasis of social harmony with "only one line of cleavage," the issue of progressive education. If, as Haney had already suggested, the broader crisis in American education was being *caused* by progressive education, then Haney's town must have been representative of this broader crisis. By extension, this implied that the broader crisis was also divorced from social conflict. Moreover, this meant that "solving" the education crisis would not involve any attempt to reconcile "racial issues" or the problems of "labor versus capital." There were still other assumptions embedded in Haney's statement. If citizen dissatisfaction with progressive education had caused the crisis in Pasadena, then Pasadena must resemble Haney's town in some way. In other words, there must not have been social tensions in Pasadena, either. Pasadena, like Haney's town—and like America in the midst of a school crisis—had only "one line of cleavage": progressive education.

Goslin responded to Haney's charges by saying "In the first place, I didn't say that the major issue had to do with these conflicts, but I did identify it as one of the areas contributing to the crisis in American education." At this point, however, the debate's moderator redirected the conversation: "All right, gentlemen, I think that seems to

⁷⁷ Ibid., 187-88.

dispose of your major issues at this time."⁷⁸ He then took questions from the studio audience, which focused exclusively on two topics—progressive education and citizen involvement in local schooling. One man wondered how collectivism related to progressive education; a woman asked how citizens could ensure that their local curriculum reflected "sound democratic methods." The broadcast then concluded.

There are several ways to read the significance of this radio broadcast. By featuring Goslin as one "side" in an educational debate, this episode of "America's Town Hall Meeting of the Air" pointedly placed Pasadena at the center of the cultural conversation about schooling. The program clearly related Pasadena to the broader education crisis, and even depicted the two as synonymous. Consequently, the broadcast reinforced conventional wisdom that the postwar school crisis was largely a conflict over educational philosophy. The show also contained—literally—any alternative explanation for the crisis. By curtailing Goslin's response to Haney on the issue of race and class conflict, and focusing the question and answer session primarily on progressive education, the broadcast narrowly defined the parameters for acceptable debate about the school crisis.

In *Cold War Civil Rights*, the historian Mary Dudziak suggests a framework that might help explain the apparent disconnect between rhetoric and reality in the Pasadena story. Dudziak demonstrates how the Cold War led to a "narrowing of acceptable civil rights discourse" in the United States. During the postwar era, the U.S. government consistently attempted to negotiate its avid promotion of democracy abroad with its tacit

⁷⁸ Ibid, 192.

approval of Jim Crow practices at home. According to Dudziak, one consequence of this indelicate balancing act was that "discussions of broad-based social change, or a linking of race and class," were largely absent in public discourse about civil rights in the 1950s.⁷⁹ Instead, Cold War ideologies propagated an image of American democracy that stressed cultural unity as the natural corollary to capitalism. According to this American exceptionalist view, social fragmentation simply did not exist in the United States. In a similar vein, discussions about social change and a "linking of race and class" were absent in educational debates of the early fifties. Popular accounts of the Pasadena crisis repeatedly insisted that there was no social unrest in the "Athens of America." These accounts also narrowed the range of "acceptable civil rights discourse" such that the controversy turned entirely on whether the rights of everyday Pasadenans had been violated by subversive politics and a suspect educational philosophy. However, while this narrow discursive framework may have projected a certain image of American democracy in support of Cold War ideologies, cultural texts like *This Happened in Pasadena*, ABC's "Town Hall Meeting," and *Education or Indoctrination* could not contain the social ferment of the "other" Pasadena completely. In fact, these three cultural representations of the school crisis essentially articulated a social problem by denying its very existence, thus giving us a glimpse, however fleeting, of the complex and often contradictory nature of postwar educational debates.

⁷⁹ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 13.

Pasadena Faces the Future

At the height of the Goslin controversy, the Pasadena Board of Education ordered that a comprehensive study of the Pasadena school system be undertaken to determine its strengths and shortcomings. The final report, issued in February 1952, ran 939 pages. Numerous community leaders and civic groups contributed sections for the survey, and the report is rich in charts, tables, and maps, as well as narrative accounts of Pasadena's past, present, and future educational needs. In this way, the 1952 "Report of the Survey" offers a curious window onto Pasadena's self-assessment in the wake of its school crisis. For example, in one section, titled "Characteristics of the School Districts," the survey offers a "profile" of the Pasadena community. In contrasting prewar Pasadena with postwar Pasadena, the report makes a telling observation: "Founded by men of means, of culture and good education, of personal integrity and high ideals, of conservative judgment and farsighted deliberation, Pasadena for many years largely attracted citizens of like kind." The survey then continues to chart the city's wartime transformation: "With the passing of time, this characteristic underwent gradual, then accelerated change."⁸⁰ Specifically, the report notes the influx of "younger" people and more "wage-earners." Arguably, this version of Pasadena's history implies that the city's newer residents were without "culture," and that they were lacking in "personal integrity and high ideals." Indeed, these emigrants were not necessarily Pasadenans of "like kind."

Another section of the survey seems to corroborate this insinuation. In a profile of the city's changing geography, the report describes Pasadena's "areas of blight." These areas are typified by "low family income, low rent and low assessed valuation," as well

as by the prevalence of "minority groups." Such districts make up 10 percent of the area of the city, and 23 percent of the city's population. Many residents in these "blighted" areas do not own their own homes. Moreover, "the cost to the City for furnishing the survey areas with health and welfare services and police protection is disproportionately high in comparison to the taxes received from these areas." The report proceeds to embellish the portrait of these "areas of blight" by noting that 65 percent of the city's reported venereal disease cases, 37 percent of its tubercular cases, 41 percent of its welfare cases, and 51 percent of its juvenile delinquency cases issue from these districts. In addition, the report observes that "there was a definite relationship" between these social work cases "and the areas populated predominantly by minority groups."⁸¹

In stunning contrast to popular discourse about the Pasadena story, this local report delineated the city's cultural transformation in intimate detail, effectively providing a social context for interpreting the school crisis. Pasadenans were clearly aware of the social and economic forces that were remaking the "Athens of America," and if this report was any indication, they were not happy about it. A great deal had changed since "men of means" founded the city some seventy-five years ago. The city's geography was increasingly peopled by emigrants like Jackie Robinson and his family, who were not considered Pasadenans "of like kind." Further, these demographic changes were producing a noticeable strain on the health and wealth of the city. And in the midst of this social transformation, a newly-hired progressive superintendent had proposed the elimination of the city's segregated neutral zones.

⁸⁰ *Report of the Survey*, 55.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

Clearly, the survey's portrait of social fragmentation did not match America's presentation of itself to the world in the early fifties, and thus it could not be acknowledged in the broader school crisis narrative. For the report's manifest unease about cultural change—even its ready acknowledgment of "areas of blight"—ran counter to American exceptionalist discourse during the Cold War. Consequently, in popular educational discourse, the only "blight" that could possibly threaten Pasadena's schools was a subversive political ideology.

An abridged version of the encyclopedic "Report of the Pasadena School Survey" was also released in 1952; this one bore an alternative title: "Pasadena Faces the Future." In the future, the report concluded, "so-called neutral zones or neutral territory [should] be eliminated." The Board should "reconsider and redefine its policy and rules concerning the issuance of permits whereby a pupil may attend the school of his choice." Rezoning should be pursued throughout the city, especially when "the educational interests and welfare of children would be better served by such changes."⁸² This recommendation comes as a surprisingly honest postscript to the Pasadena school crisis. One has to wonder—did Pasadena's educational and civic leaders finally come to accept that change, however unsettling, was nonetheless inevitable? Indeed, might "Pasadena," post-crisis, now become the new byword for visionary educational and social progress in the postwar era?

In the coming years, Pasadena would face its future, but not without a fight. For as it turned out, the rezoning recommendation of the school survey report would not be

⁸² Pasadena, Calif., Cooperative Study of the Pasadena Schools, "Pasadena Faces the Future: Abridged Report," 1952, 156, 151.

implemented. At least not before the California State Supreme Court tried to force the city's hand a decade later. And certainly not before the U.S. Supreme Court had its say another fifteen years after that.

In *All Deliberate Speed*, a 1976 study of racial segregation in California schools, the historian Charles Wollenberg states that nowhere in California have questions about desegregation "been raised more often or debated more fully than in Pasadena." In fact, Pasadena became the first test case for the California State Supreme Court after *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled segregated education unconstitutional in 1954. In 1963, in the case of *Jackson v. the Pasadena City School District*, the state court ruled that Pasadena had manipulated school boundaries "for the purpose of instituting, maintaining, and intensifying racial segregation at Washington." According to Wollenberg, this decision effectively found Pasadena "guilty of purposeful, de jure segregation."⁸³

The case involved the parents of thirteen-year-old Jay Jackson, an African American student who attended Washington Junior High in Pasadena. Washington was located in one of Pasadena's "neutral zones." Many white parents had transferred their students out of Washington starting in the 1940s. As a consequence, the student population of Washington Junior High changed from 10 percent black in 1946, to 52 percent in 1958, to 84 percent in 1964. The situation was further complicated when one of Pasadena's communities, which was located outside of the city limits, decided to leave the school district in 1961. This action was allegedly taken so that children in this area

⁸³ Wollenberg, 137, 142.

would not have to attend Pasadena's John Muir High School, which had become predominantly black. After this defection, the Pasadena school district lost one of its junior high schools, and many more white parents faced the prospect of having to send their children to Washington. However, their children were allowed to transfer to predominantly white schools elsewhere in the district.⁸⁴

Jay Jackson's parents also requested a transfer for their son, arguing that years of segregation had transformed Washington into an inferior school. With the assistance of the local chapter of the NAACP, their case was eventually argued before the California Supreme Court. Applying criteria established by the *Brown* decision, the court ruled that Washington was indeed a "racially segregated school which is inherently inferior to the other junior high schools in the district."⁸⁵ It concluded that Jay Jackson had the right to transfer.

As Wollenberg points out, *Jackson v. Pasadena* did not settle the issue of neutral zones once and for all. In fact, the Pasadena School Board refused to take action to desegregate its schools. In 1967, even after being censured by the California Department of Education for violating the state's guidelines for racial balance, the board rejected a proposed plan to reassign portions of white Pasadena students to one of the city's predominantly black high schools. Parents of three students involved in this particular case, two white and one black, pressed the courts to implement the plan that had been rejected by the school board. This case was eventually tried in federal district court, after the U.S. Department of Justice entered the case on behalf of the plaintiffs. According to

⁸⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 142.

Wollenberg, this was the "first federal action against school segregation in the western United States" and it "focused national attention on Pasadena." As a result of this trial, the board of education was ordered to implement a "plan of correction of the racial imbalance" by September 1970. Further, added the court, the plan must be designed such that no Pasadena school would have a "majority of minority students."⁸⁶

The Pasadena school board immediately appealed this decision, and the case was soon tried before the U.S. Supreme Court as *Spangler v. Pasadena*. The school board argued for the freedom to implement a program of *voluntary* integration, rather than continue the forced busing for racial balance mandated by the district court. And in fact, the 1976 U.S. Supreme Court decision, penned by Justice William Rehnquist, removed the stipulation that no school in Pasadena should have a majority of minority students. Further, it concluded that demographic changes in the schools were the consequence of "normal patterns of people moving in and out."⁸⁷ In other words, the board was not held responsible for any existing racial imbalances in the schools, and it would not be obligated to maintain any kind of balance in the future.

How does the Pasadena school crisis of the 1950s fit into this subsequent history? Willard Goslin may have been the first superintendent to tangle with a community reluctant to eradicate its "neutral zones," but he was by no means the last. In the 1960s and 1970s, Pasadena garnered national attention for its school desegregation battles. From 1945 to 1970, in fact, the white proportion of the school population in Pasadena

⁸⁶ Ibid., 151, 153.

⁸⁷ "High Court Voids Part of Pasadena Integration Plan," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 June 1976, 6+.

declined from 90 percent to under 60 percent, while the black proportion rose from less than five to more than 30 percent.⁸⁸ The Pasadena crisis erupted just as these demographic shifts were becoming manifest in the late forties. Could it be that what was happening *to* Pasadena when Jackie Robinson lived there—in the years when he felt like an "intruder" in school—was laying the cultural foundation for its postwar educational debates? Moreover, could it be that what happened *in* Pasadena in 1950 inaugurated thirty years of fierce debate over what this city's schools literally should *look* like? Evidence certainly suggests as much. The broad social history of the "Athens of America" thus reveals how narrowly the Pasadena story was told in postwar popular discourse.

Conclusion

David Hulburd ends *This Happened in Pasadena* with a warning to readers:

In these uneasy days, honest, well-meaning citizens are often vulnerable to the campaigns of all sorts of infiltrating minority pressure groups. Unless these citizens learn to recognize such dangers and awaken to what free public-school education should mean to them and to their children, many of them will swallow all too willingly—hook, line, and sinker—the kind of bait sold by propagandists like Zoll.⁸⁹

It is important to note Hulburd's language here. The postwar school crisis is placed in the context of an anxious age—these "uneasy days." Further, the crisis is depicted as less a problem to be solved than a specter to be feared. Dangers abound; citizens beware. Even more striking, however, is the fact that the education crisis has

⁸⁸ Wollenberg, 149.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

become a purely ideological dilemma. In the late forties, popular periodicals offered a spate of reports about classroom shortages, teacher shortages, budget shortfalls, and dilapidated school buildings. To be sure, commentators rhetorically related these shameful conditions to broader cultural anxieties about America's preparedness for the Cold War and the "atomic age." Nevertheless, in early crisis discourse, the school problem was still tangible, and it could be solved with more money. However, with Pasadena as the new symbol for the education crisis, the discursive boundaries shifted in the early fifties. The "new" crisis had nothing to do with leaking classrooms or uncertified teachers. It was now a philosophical debate about progressive education waged out of necessity in the dangerous early days of the Cold War. And it could only be solved when vigilant citizens resolved to resist the seductive lure of what Hulburd called the "Zoll pattern" of public school attacks.

Despite this popular recasting of the education crisis, the "old" problems still remained. In many ways, Pasadena was an unfortunate choice as standard-bearer for the crisis. For instance, the educational conditions in Pasadena were not necessarily representative of what was happening in California's schools during the postwar era. According to reports issued by the California State Department of Education in 1951, one-eighth of the teachers in California held emergency credentials. Eight thousand teachers would not return to the classroom next fall. The State Department estimated that 11,082 new teachers would have to be hired for the 1951-52 school year. California's kindergarten-age population had increased 151.4 percent since 1940.⁹⁰ From 100,000 to 150,000 elementary children reportedly attended only half-day sessions. To meet present

demands, California would have to build three thousand new classrooms a year until 1960.⁹¹ In contrast, Pasadena's schools were fully staffed. It had hired only teachers with regular credentials for the year 1949-50.⁹² Its children attended full-day sessions. And Pasadenans easily found the money to build new facilities for their growing student population.

In other words, Pasadena experienced a different kind of local crisis than many of the schools in California. The "reality" of Pasadena was not necessarily the "reality" of many public school systems in the United States. Further distorting the meaning of the education crisis was a popular narrative about Pasadena that told an incomplete story about what happened there, a story that elided the city's social transformation and tried to contain the dynamics of race and class. By constructing a cultural narrative of the postwar school crisis with Pasadena now at the center, popular discourse thus marginalized a range of pressing educational—and social—issues in the early 1950s.

When we consider the Pasadena story in this broader cultural context, what happened in the "Athens of America" emerges as much more than a cautionary tale of the Cold War, or a symbolic headstone for the death of progressive education. Above all, a close analysis of "Pasadena" as popular narrative helps us understand why the *next* signifier to emerge for the education crisis generated such intense controversy. Indeed, Pasadena offers an important context for understanding the cultural response to another famous school story of the postwar era. In popular discourse of the early 1950s,

⁹⁰ California State Department of Education, *Bulletin* 20:3 (April 1951), 24, 31, 28.

⁹¹ California State Department of Education, *Bulletin* 20:11 (December 1951), 6, 5.

Pasadena's educational woes were attributable to political and philosophical—but not social—conflict. However, in the mid-fifties, *The Blackboard Jungle* shattered this cultural perception. This wildly popular tale of a novice teacher in an urban vocational school pointedly challenged conventional wisdom about the education crisis. And its cast of racially diverse, blue-collar juvenile delinquents suggested that parents and children had more to fear at school than just ideological subversion. There was now a new kind of danger in the classroom, one born of terrifying—and uncontrollable—social ferment. The next chapter thus charts America's plunge into the blackboard jungle.

⁹² Ibid., 15.

Chapter Three

Is Your School a Blackboard Jungle? A Cultural History of America's "Jungle Tempest"

"We are haunted, not by reality, but by those images we have put in place of reality."
Daniel Boorstin, *The Image*¹

"It's got to be me or that picture." ²

So began the *affair Luce*.

In August 1955, U.S. Ambassador to Italy Clare Boothe Luce pressured organizers of the Venice Film Festival to withdraw *The Blackboard Jungle* from exhibition. Luce announced that she would not attend the festival if the film was shown, because she felt it did not offer an accurate portrait of education in the United States. Though the ambassador had never actually seen the motion picture, she claimed to trust the opinions of close advisors who had. According to a member of her delegation, *The Blackboard Jungle* imparted "an unflattering and unrealistic view of American school life." Luce was concerned that communists in Italy would try to exploit the movie as anti-American propaganda, and she believed her presence at the screening would only give it official sanction. Back in the United States, the film's producers at MGM cried censorship and filed a protest with the Secretary of State. However, the U.S. State

¹ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1961), 6.

The following abbreviations are used in the notes for chapter three:

BJ-AMPAS: *Blackboard Jungle* clippings file, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hollywood, Calif.

EH-BU: Evan Hunter Papers, Special Collections, Mugar Library, Boston University, Brookline, Mass.

MGM-AMPAS: MGM Turner Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hollywood, Calif.

RB-AMPAS: Richard Brooks Papers, Special Collections, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hollywood, Calif.

² "Ambassador Luce Bounced 'Jungle,'" *Variety* (daily), 29 August 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

Department supported Luce's decision, confirming that it was her diplomatic responsibility to speak out against any film that was "not... truly representative of America." The Secretary of State agreed with Luce's assessment that *The Blackboard Jungle* advanced a "seriously distorted impression of American youth and American public schools." As a result of this public relations imbroglio, festival organizers acceded to Luce's demands and pulled the film.³

The *affair Luce* crowned a year of controversy surrounding *The Blackboard Jungle*. Between 1954 and 1955, *The Blackboard Jungle* circulated in various popular forms—it appeared as a magazine story, a novel, a film, and even as a stage production. In the United States, as in Venice, there was widespread concern that this popular text "seriously distorted" the postwar school crisis. According to its many critics, this fictive story of a novice teacher and his unruly students, set in an urban vocational school, propagated an "unrealistic" view of American public schools. Yet what educational "reality" did *The Blackboard Jungle* challenge so boldly? As I demonstrated in chapter two, conventional wisdom in the early fifties held that the education crisis was at root a curricular debate over progressive education. However, as we learned from a close analysis of the Pasadena story, this "version" of the crisis was itself a distortion of the everyday "reality" facing U.S. public schools. So how should we assess the cultural impact of *The Blackboard Jungle*? Did it further distort the distortion? Or did it

³ "'Blackboard Jungle' Gets Ax; Schary Irked," *Citizen-News*, 27 August 1955; "State Dept. Upholds Luce's 'Blackboard' Blast in Answer to Arthur Loew's Complaint," *Variety* (daily), 22 September 1955; "The Affair Luce," *Motion Picture Herald*, 10 September 1955; BJ-AMPAS. Venice Film Festival organizers permitted Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to substitute another picture, *Interrupted Melody*, in place of *The Blackboard Jungle*. The press commonly referred to this entire episode as the "affair Luce."

somehow *correct* the earlier distortion? Did it finally represent the current "reality" of the crisis, even though contemporaries dismissed it as unrealistic?

On the one hand, *The Blackboard Jungle* effectively exploded the boundaries of acceptable educational discourse that had been established—and rigorously policed—by the Pasadena story. After all, it symbolically placed race, class, and youth culture at the center of the public debate about education. Yet, on the other hand, it also shifted the cultural conversation even farther away from issues like teacher shortages, school budget deficits, and dilapidated classrooms, and focused attention almost exclusively on school violence. But because *The Blackboard Jungle* overtly suggested a socioeconomic context for the education crisis, this new cultural image of the violent school was necessarily tinged by race and class. This left the impression, I would argue, that the foremost challenge facing teachers and concerned citizens was how to manage and *tame*—but not necessarily how to educate—poor, minority, vocational education students.

Ultimately, *The Blackboard Jungle's* supposedly "distorted" view of education ended up reshaping the terms of educational debate in the mid-fifties. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the "unreal" *Blackboard Jungle* became the new standard against which "real" schools were measured, and the education crisis was once again recast in the popular imagination—this time, as a struggle to impose order on the chaotic school. To unpack this complicated cultural dynamic, this chapter forges a comprehensive cultural history of *The Blackboard Jungle*. At its core, it seeks to understand why *The Blackboard Jungle* emerged as a prominent signifier of the education crisis in 1950s America, and to explicate the various cultural meanings that were affixed to this popular story. To that end, it examines the complex interaction of

authors, editors, texts, advertisers, and audiences that ultimately determined how *The Blackboard Jungle* would—and would not—be discussed in the public sphere. By focusing so intently on the creation, distribution, and reception of *The Blackboard Jungle* as a cultural *product*, this chapter aims to further disclose the ways in which the culture industry shaped educational debates in the postwar era. In the final analysis, it hopes to explain how and why *The Blackboard Jungle*—which was widely denounced by contemporaries as an "unrealistic" depiction of the education crisis—dramatically redefined the "real" terms of an already "unrealistic" educational debate even as it concealed the "real" changes that were transforming American culture and society in the 1950s.

The Blackboard Jungle Revisited

To date, *The Blackboard Jungle* has primarily been studied as a cultural artifact of the postwar juvenile delinquency scare. Scholars such as James Gilbert and Thomas Doherty, for example, inscribe the film into the broader history of America's moral panic over youth pathology.⁴ In their view, *The Blackboard Jungle* exemplifies an emerging cinematic genre, known as the "juvenile delinquency film."⁵ The controversy surrounding the film is thus interpreted as an upshot of the mass culture debates that consumed postwar society—namely, the debate over whether "teenpics" like *The Blackboard Jungle* were corrupting America's youth. This controversy "provided a

⁴ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986) and Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

glimpse of the audience division between generations and cultures," writes Gilbert, for the film reportedly inspired young people to dance in the aisles to its rock 'n' roll soundtrack, even as it allegedly inspired acts of juvenile delinquency that shocked parents across the country.⁶ The central question that thus divided Americans against themselves in the wake of this film was whether *The Blackboard Jungle* typified an increasingly hostile cultural environment that was coming between family and child in the 1950s.

Without question, *The Blackboard Jungle* was absorbed into public discourse about juvenile delinquency in the postwar era, and Gilbert's work, in particular, shows the extent to which it became a flashpoint for social controversy. But this popular text also had a dramatic effect on educational debates in the 1950s. Indeed, only one scholar has thus far analyzed this popular school story in the context of educational history. In "Imagined Authority: *Blackboard Jungle* and the Project of Educational Liberalism," Daniel Perlstein argues that the film addresses broader social anxieties over the ability of the school, "and the state more broadly," to "simultaneously insure individual freedom and contain social conflicts."⁷ Perlstein discusses the film's narrative and visual technique in tandem with its popular reception, and incisively suggests that a careful study of *The Blackboard Jungle* can reveal much about the cultural conflicts that pervaded postwar American society. Focusing almost exclusively on the film version, he ultimately reads it as an articulation of the social ambiguities surrounding male and state

⁵ As does Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983) and Mark Thomas McGee and R.J. Robertson, *The J.D. Films* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1982).

⁶ Gilbert, 184. On *The Blackboard Jungle* as a singular episode in the history of U.S. youth cultures, see the opening pages of William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

authority in the 1950s. In the final analysis, however, Perlstein is studying the school as an institutional arm of state power, a move that inadvertently detaches the school from its more immediate educational context—the context of the postwar crisis in education.

My work in this chapter thus diverges from the existing scholarship in several ways. First, it seeks to construct an alternative historical context for considering *The Blackboard Jungle* besides the juvenile delinquency scare. Second, in terms of methodology, I am less concerned with textual analysis and more focused on cultural production. In other words, while Perlstein provides the necessary historical context to better analyze the ideological content of the film, I explore how *The Blackboard Jungle* circulated as a socially meaningful *product* that in fact influenced historical circumstances.⁸ Finally, I focus on the production and reception of the magazine and novel versions, not just the film version. Indeed, *The Blackboard Jungle* seems to exist only as a motion picture in our historical memory, even though the story circulated in a variety of cultural forms in the 1950s. In what follows, I recreate the full cultural history of *The Blackboard Jungle*, demonstrating the multiple ways in which it shaped public discourse about America's "crisis" in postwar education. I loosely organize this history around two themes that reflect the interpretive frameworks that were applied to *The Blackboard Jungle* by contemporary audiences. Generally, the story was treated either as a sociological document that realistically depicted the problems facing America's schools,

⁷ Daniel Perlstein, "Imagined Authority: *Blackboard Jungle* and the Project of Educational Liberalism," *Paedagogica Historica* 36:1 (2000), 407.

⁸ Several other scholars have offered a textual analysis of the film version, employing cultural theory to read its ideological content in terms of race and gender dynamics. See Leerom Medovoi, "Reading the Blackboard: Youth, Masculinity, and Racial Cross-Identification," in Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel, eds., *Race and the Subject of Masculinities* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), and Beth

or as an irresponsible exaggeration that exploited social anxieties about youth and schooling. In short, the cultural conversation turned on whether *The Blackboard Jungle* was a work of sociology or sensationalism—a work of fact or fiction. As we will see, however, the incredible controversy generated by this mass culture phenomenon effectively blurred the boundaries between these two categories, and, in the process, transformed the "school crisis" into an even more slippery symbol in postwar popular culture.

The Education of Evan Hunter

The plot of the *Blackboard Jungle*, originally conceived by author Evan Hunter in a short story he wrote in 1953 and developed more fully in his 1954 novel, remained virtually unchanged as it was reproduced on screen, on stage, and in the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal*. *The Blackboard Jungle* tells the story of Rick Dadier, a young army veteran and recent college graduate who lands his first teaching job at an inner-city vocational high school called North Manual Trades. His all-male, racially diverse students are academically unmotivated and disrespectful, mockingly calling him "Daddy-O" on the first day of class and asking, "Hey teach, you ever try to fight thirty-five guys at once?" One cynical older teacher tells Dadier that Manual Trades is the "garbage can of the education system," and their job is simply to sit on top of the lid. Dadier's idealism and mettle are quickly tested after he rescues a fellow teacher, Lois Hammond, from an attempted rape in the school library; he is subsequently beaten in a back alley by a group

McCoy, "Manager, Buddy, Delinquent: *Blackboard Jungle's* Desegregating Triangle," *Cinema Journal* 38:1 (1998): 25-39.

of students upset by his heroics. The novice teacher struggles with thoughts of quitting, but he needs the job to support his pregnant wife. Moreover, he is determined to try to help his students, and in particular he reaches out to one of his African American pupils, Gregory Miller. Miller resists his instructor's overtures, even while Lois Hammond sets out to seduce Dadier. The students take notice of Hammond's designs on their teacher, and someone starts sending Dadier's wife "poison pen" letters implying that her husband is having an affair. Dadier eventually achieves small victories in the classroom, but when his wife has a miscarriage after reading one of the letters (in the film version, her baby survives), he finds himself ready to leave the school for good. The climactic scene pits Dadier in a classroom fight against a knife-wielding student, who, as it turns out, is the same boy who has been sending the noxious letters. To Rick's surprise, the other students, lead by Gregory Miller, intervene and end up restraining the troublemaker. This show of loyalty inspires Dadier, and he and Miller both agree not to give up on the school.

Though not strictly autobiographical, *The Blackboard Jungle* is based on author Evan Hunter's experience as an English teacher at Bronx Vocational High School. The author taught at the school for six weeks in the fall of 1950. He had just graduated from college the previous June with the help of the G.I. Bill, earning honors in English and a minor in Education. The BVHS job was a substitute position acquired with an emergency license; Hunter's only previous experience consisted of one semester of supervised student teaching at another vocational school while he was still an undergraduate. By his own accounts, Hunter found teaching both challenging and deeply disheartening, and he was "shocked" by the vocational school situation. He recalled how

absolute "disorder" began the moment he came into school, and "it did not end until I went home at the end of the day."⁹ He had one student who could not write his name, and many more students who could not read a single word. Hunter himself never experienced the violence that the novel's protagonist encounters, but claimed such incidents were all "within the realm of realistic plausibility" and were not "unheard of in many vocational high schools."¹⁰

Hunter had always viewed teaching as a temporary career, for his ultimate goal was to become a professional writer. Indeed, soon after he quit BVHS, he landed a job with the Scott Meredith Agency as an editor. After a few months, the literary agency began selling Hunter's fiction—mostly detective and science fiction tales—to various pulp magazines. By May of 1953, Hunter had managed to save enough money to leave the agency and freelance. It was during this period that he began working on *The Blackboard Jungle*. Despite his short tenure as a teacher, he found the vocational school experience rich with material: "I saw enough and heard enough in those six weeks to fill another novel" he claimed in a 1954 interview.¹¹ This second novel never did materialize, but it is clear that Hunter's teaching experience inspired some of his early writing. For example, a yarn Hunter sold to *Famous Detective Stories* in 1952 is set in a New York City vocational high school. Titled "Wrong Number" and written under the pen name Hunt Collins, the story features one of Hunter's recurring detective characters going undercover as a teacher to solve the murder of a friend who had been substituting

⁹ Evan Hunter to Ephraim London, n.d., Box 19, EH-BU.

¹⁰ Hunter to Scharf, 22 January 1955, Box 26, EH-BU.

¹¹ *Journal American*, 15 October 1954, Box 121, EH-BU.

at the school.¹² While at the literary agency, Hunter wrote another story about a vocational high school that is essentially an early version of *The Blackboard Jungle*. This piece, called "To Break the Wall," features a teacher character named Richard "Daddy-O" Dadier, and a classroom fight scene that clearly inspired the novel's climactic battle.

The Scott Meredith Agency offered "To Break the Wall" to thirty different magazines, but editors were not interested in buying it. One rejection letter suggested that the work was too narrow in scope: "I'm sure that teachers will applaud this piece, but how much the average reader will take to it is debatable."¹³ Finally, *Discovery* magazine agreed to buy the story in January 1953. It was published in October, and by then Hunter had evidently managed to convince editors that his writing about teachers would reach the "average reader": a month earlier, he had secured a publishing contract for a full-length novel based on "To Break the Wall." With only a book outline and about a hundred pages written, Hunter and his agent sold the book to Simon and Schuster. They negotiated an 18,000 copy print run, with the publisher committing five times its usual sum to promotion.

Hunter conducted extensive research as he proceeded to finish his first novel. His teaching experience had left an indelible impression on him, and he wanted the story to be realistic. He was certain that anyone who had not previously been in a vocational high school would be as shocked as he was by the situation, so he wanted the novel to ring

¹² Hunt Collins, "Wrong Number," *Famous Detective Stories* 12, no. 5 (August 1952): 10-31.

¹³ John Bender to Scott Meredith, 27 July 1951, Box 19, EH-BU.

true.¹⁴ In fact, while writing *The Blackboard Jungle*, he enlisted the help of the teacher who had supervised him during his student practicum. Hunter had a long conversation with his former mentor, and "she supplied me with a good deal of technical dope for the novel." She also agreed to read the manuscript before it was submitted to Simon and Schuster, to "check it for accuracy."¹⁵ Further, Hunter claimed his research for the novel included talks with dozens of teachers.¹⁶ In 1955, when he had to write a letter to a lawyer at MGM assuring him that the characters and incidents in the book were fictional—the movie studio wanted to be exempt from any libel charges that might result from the film adaptation—Hunter confided to his agent that "this was a difficult letter to write, simply because I wanted it clear the characters and incidents were all fictional—but at the same time, I didn't want them to think the book was just so much horse-manure."¹⁷

In short, Hunter very much wanted his novel to be viewed as a mirror of the actual conditions in many urban schools, not a distortion of them. If his book seized on the view that America's schools were in crisis, it was only because the author and former teacher felt that this perception was accurate. In fact, when brainstorming titles for the novel, Hunter playfully suggested to his publisher that it be called, "THE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL PROBLEM IN NEW YORK CITY AND THE VALIANT FIGHT OF ONE MAN AGAINST IT IN AN ATTEMPT TO SOLVE IT."¹⁸

¹⁴ Hunter to Ephraim London, n.d., Box 19, EH-BU.

¹⁵ Hunter to Scott Meredith, 6 November 1953, Box 19, EH-BU.

¹⁶ Barry Gray, column, *New York Post*, 8 April 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

¹⁷ Hunter to Scott Meredith, 22 January 1955, Box 26, EH-BU.

¹⁸ Hunter to Peter Schwed, 29 November 1953, Box 19, EH-BU.

Overseeing Hunter's efforts to render a realistic portrait of one man's "valiant fight" against the "vocational school problem" was Simon and Schuster editor Peter Schwed. As it turns out, Schwed played an active role in shaping the novel. Hunter's original notes for *The Blackboard Jungle* reveal that Schwed made several important editorial decisions during the writing process that affected the final product. Most significantly, the editor advised Hunter to rethink Rick Dadier's relationship with the teacher character Lois Hammond. Originally, Hunter intended for Dadier to have an affair with Hammond; in the published version, Dadier develops a close relationship with her but resists her seductive overtures. While Hunter's notes list the "major" plot as "Rick's battle with the kids," the first of four "minor" plots described is "Rick's affair with Lois—unresolved in his own mind, and preferably reaching resolution through something that happens at school." In the initial plan for the book, Rick was to rescue Lois from her teenage attackers, and then have an affair with her "which is discreetly hidden from the eyes of the teachers and students of Manual Trades" except for the pupil Gregory Miller, who catches them together. Hunter envisioned this affair as a way to further complicate Dadier's character. His notes on Rick explain the teacher's "dual problem": "He wants to reach the kids, and at the same time he is tortured by his infidelity."¹⁹

The affair between Rick and Lois was to "be of major importance to the book" but "was dropped at the suggestion of Peter Schwed," according to Hunter.²⁰ This plot change represents an important creative decision that significantly impacted the overall vision for the novel. Dropping the affair unquestionably kept the primary plot focus on

¹⁹ Evan Hunter, notes on *The Blackboard Jungle*, undated, Box 19, EH-BU.

²⁰ Hunter to Ephraim, undated, Box 19, EH-BU.

Dadier's struggle to reach his students. It certainly helped construct the protagonist as a more sympathetic, and less morally disagreeable, character. And most likely it anticipated Simon and Schuster's impending promotional campaign: it would be difficult to market the book as an important sociological expose if the main character's scandalous personal life was given equal time with his valorous attempt to teach in a troubled urban school. Schwed seemed to sense that the real story here was teacher as both professional *and* domestic hero, not teacher as flawed man with the "dual problem" of being a faithful husband and an inspiring pedagogue.

After Hunter submitted his final manuscript to Simon and Schuster in late November 1953, pre-publication buzz about *The Blackboard Jungle* sparked a rapid series of lucrative deals. In February 1954, *The Ladies Home Journal* bought the book for magazine condensation. The *Journal* planned to publish the condensed version in October for a special issue on American education. Simon and Schuster arranged book publication to coincide with the *Journal* issue. By early April, three Hollywood studios were interested in buying the motion picture rights to Hunter's story; Metro Goldwyn Mayer closed a deal on April 12. Soon thereafter, Pocket Books made an offer for the paperback rights. Hunter appeared genuinely surprised by the series of events. In a letter to his former teaching supervisor, he conceded that "all in all the book is doing fantastically well, considering the fact that it hasn't even reached print yet."²¹

The remarkable pre-publication interest in *The Blackboard Jungle* raises several important questions about the relationship between the story and its historical moment.

Why did Simon and Schuster commit substantial promotional fees to a first novel by a relatively unknown writer?²² Why did three major studios haggle over the film rights? Why was it assumed that there would even be an audience for a paperback edition? In other words, why were these various mass cultural producers so confident that a tale about an earnest schoolteacher would strike such a popular and profitable chord with American consumers?

Certainly, the public's preoccupation with America's "school crisis" had something to do with this spate of pre-publication deals. By 1954, the flap over Pasadena had subsided, but the "crisis" in education remained the subject of extensive media coverage. For example, in February 1954, *Collier's* published the first in a series of articles on "The Struggle for Our Children's Minds" that would run through the summer. An array of books that tendered particularly harsh criticisms of the nation's schools had appeared in recent years, and they were still being widely discussed in the popular press when *The Blackboard Jungle* was set for publication. These included Arthur Bestor's controversial *Educational Wastelands*, Albert Lynd's *Quackery in the Public Schools*, and Robert Hutchins's *The Conflict in Education*, all published in 1953. Some of America's preeminent fiction writers had also taken aim at the educational system. J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Mary McCarthy's *Groves of Academe* (1953), and Randall Jarrell's *Pictures from an Institution* (1954) all established literary precedents for Hunter's novelistic treatment of schooling.²³ Without question, the cultural climate of

²¹ Hunter to Gertrude Alper, 17 April 1954, Box 25, EH-BU.

²² At the time, the Evan Hunter was better known in pulp magazines by his pseudonym, Richard Marsten.

²³ "The Struggle for Our Children's Minds," *Collier's*, 5 February, 19 March, 14 May, and 6 August 1954; Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Chicago:

mid-century America was ripe for a story that could further explore the shortcomings of the educational system.

Notwithstanding its obvious connection to America's ongoing educational debates, *The Blackboard Jungle* possessed another quality that would likely appeal to postwar consumers. Publishers and producers never viewed Hunter's tale as *just* a story about a heroic teacher. Even though Hunter intended his major plot line to be Rick Dadier's efforts to reach his students, Simon and Schuster, MGM, and Pocket clearly understood that the *students* themselves could just as easily become the main attraction. Indeed, the teenage characters in Dadier's classroom were not of your typical Archie and Jughead variety: they were obnoxious, callous, violent juvenile delinquents. This focus on the student characters was especially obvious in the marketing of the film, which emphasized the boys' violence against the teachers, and the Pocket paperback, which added a subtitle to Hunter's book: "A Novel of Juvenile Delinquents." As James Gilbert demonstrates in *A Cycle of Outrage*, juvenile delinquency was a near obsession for American society in the fifties.²⁴ Popular belief traced the roots of juvenile delinquency to wartime dislocations of the traditional family, and commentators further blamed the mass culture industry for inculcating impressionable youth with violent comic books, films, television shows, and radio programs. Federal law-enforcement officials rolled out a steady stream of statistics showing the increase in juvenile criminality since World War II, and the mass media contributed its share of sensational articles. Clearly, *The*

University of Illinois Press, 1953); Albert Lynd, *Quackery in the Public Schools* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953); J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951); Mary McCarthy, *The Groves of Academe* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1952); Randall Jarrell, *Pictures From an Institution* (New York: Knopf, 1954).

²⁴ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, op cit.

Blackboard Jungle was auspiciously poised to tap into these social anxieties. In fact, the novel was published the same year that Frederic Wertham's famous study of juvenile delinquency, *Seduction of the Innocent*, captured the popular imagination. What's more, *The Blackboard Jungle* appeared in print just months after the U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency held public hearings in New York City on the possible links between comic books and youth violence.²⁵

"A Crowbar for Reform"

Given postwar society's fascination with the education crisis and juvenile delinquency, as well as *The Blackboard Jungle's* heavy corporate backing, Hunter's story was practically guaranteed success. The editor of the *Ladies Home Journal* wrote Hunter just before the October issue appeared to tell him, "I have a feeling that [the novel] is going to make quite a splash with a good deal of pro and con excitement."²⁶ Indeed, the *Journal's* special education issue, which introduced *The Blackboard Jungle* to the reading public, similarly hoped to generate robust debate about schooling in the United States. The magazine cover proclaimed, "What do we want of our schools? Our school problems, financial and philosophical, must be solved by informed citizens. We offer these stories and articles, not as a cross section or endorsed solution, but to stimulate those who must grapple with similar situations in their own communities." The issue included profiles of two teachers, one who had quit the profession and one who boasted "Teaching is my life!" Other articles asked, "Educating Our Children—Do We Know

²⁵ These public hearings were held April 21, April 22, and June 4, 1954. See U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency*, 84th Congress, 1st Session, 1955.

What We Want?" and "Must We Send Our Children to Private Schools?" One piece advised, "Let's Attack the Problems, Not the Schools," and yet another story offered parents tips on teaching their children how to read.

Hunter's work received a mention on the cover as a "revealing novel about schools," and inside it was listed at the top of the table of contents. In their introduction to the book condensation, the editors framed the story as "a novel dealing with a crisis in the lives of thousands of America's rejected children today." *The Blackboard Jungle* was described as "shocking" and "frightening," yet "based on reality." The *Ladies Home Journal* was publishing this novel "to awaken and warn the majority of parents and citizens whose children are more fortunate. It shows what conditions can produce juvenile delinquency and even crime among school children."²⁷ By running Hunter's work in a special issue that asked "What do we want of our schools?," the *Ladies Home Journal* significantly shaped the cultural meaning that its five and a half million readers should attach to the story: when it first appeared in print for public consumption, *The Blackboard Jungle* was characterized as an important book about schooling and society in America. Despite the "shock" and "fright" the tale might induce, the *Journal* editors suggest that Hunter's story could happen "in many of our great American cities." Further, it is described as a "realistic" novel that approaches the "crisis" from a sociological standpoint: *The Blackboard Jungle* addresses the environmental concerns—the "conditions"—that aversely impact America's "rejected children." Without question, both the magazine condensation and the unabridged novel created a public sensation, but this

²⁶ Bruce Gould to Hunter, 24 September 1954, Box 25, EH-BU.

²⁷ *Ladies Home Journal*, October 1954, p. 59.

initial response was tempered by an appreciation for the story's realism and Hunter's compassion for educational issues. Indeed, reviewers and fans generally responded to the book as a sociological, rather than a sensational, work of literature.

As part of its publicity campaign for *The Blackboard Jungle*, Simon and Schuster took out full-page print ads likening the book to other American novels that had "opened fire on major problems," such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.²⁸ Critics similarly characterized Hunter's work as a sociological novel that dealt with pressing educational topics. One reviewer even compared *The Blackboard Jungle* to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* for its potential to spur social reform; in this case, as a prod to improve the vocational school system. *Time* affirmed that Hunter had written a "nightmarish but authentic" novel "about the problem that should scare the curls off mothers' heads and drive the most carpet-slipped father to vigilant attendance at the P.T.A." It also praised Hunter for actually doing something about juvenile delinquency in an age when everyone else seemed content to just talk about the problem. *The New York Herald Tribune* described the book as "that rare combination—a problem novel in which both the problem and the novel are intensely interesting." While Hunter gives a "shocking picture of dullness, profanity, disrespect and violence among both the students and the faculty," the author "has not used his shocking material merely to appall." Instead, the book evokes a "tolerant and tough-minded sympathy" for its subject. *The Nation* credited Hunter for "[breaking] through the verbiage which has long clouded the facts of vocational teaching." *The New York Times Book Review* went so far as to compare *The Blackboard Jungle* and its treatment of the vocational high school to a

"monograph on the subject put out by the National Education Association," adding that "nothing that could conceivably be said about vocational high schools has been left out." A critic in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, who happened to be a former teacher, testified that the story was "the most realistic account I have ever read of life in a New York City vocational high school." The novel "more than matches the sensations in some of the stories we have seen recently" in newspapers, but it is "free of their distortions and dishonesty."²⁹

Readers of *The Blackboard Jungle* similarly praised the novel's realism, and expressed high hopes for the social good it might accomplish. A fan from Boston wrote to tell Hunter that his book was "remarkable and important." She lamented that "there seem to be more and more of these unfortunate and unhappy kids wandering about," and declared, "something must be done for these people, and it seems to me you *have* done something, and something important, by writing *The Blackboard Jungle*." A librarian told the author that his book was "a wonderfully powerful study of the public schools and I know it will certainly start a reform movement." A music teacher found the story "stirring and exciting" and said it matched her own teaching experience. She wrote, "I hope that it shocks and stirs readers outside of the teaching profession as much as it interests those who have lived through some of the same experiences." Another reader avowed, "Certainly for me it had much more impact than anything factual that has been

²⁸ Advertisement featured in *The New York Times Book Review*, 10 October 1954, Box 121, EH-BU.

²⁹ Review of *The Blackboard Jungle*, *The New York Times*, n.d., Box 121, EH-BU; Review of *The Blackboard Jungle*, *Time*, 11 October 1954, p. 134; Barbara Klaw, "Garbage Can of the Schools," *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, 17 October 1954, p. 4; Stanley Cooperman, "Violence in Harlem," *The Nation*, 4 December 1954, p. 493; Gilbert Millstein, "Teacher's Ordeal," *The New York Times Book Review*, 24 October 1954, p. 43; Nathan Rothman, review of *The Blackboard Jungle*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, 9 October 1954, p. 16.

written on the conditions of the public schools." She added, "the story has great verisimilitude and it should arouse readers and make them aware of what problems the teacher has." Yet another fan told Hunter that he thought the book "says exactly what needs to be said at the right time." He confidently predicted that the novel "will be used as a crowbar for reform of vocational schools."³⁰

Although critics and fans praised *The Blackboard Jungle* as a sociological work with the potential to spur needed educational change, Evan Hunter was far more ambivalent about this characterization of his novel. As a serious young novelist, he very much wanted *The Blackboard Jungle* to be judged on its literary merit as much as its sociological worth. In fact, Hunter worried that critics were focusing too much on the school setting and not enough on the other elements of his novel. In one pre-publication interview, Hunter anticipated the possibility that critics might reduce his main character to a symbol for all embattled teachers: "Rick Dadier, even though he is a teacher in my novel, could just as well have been a tugboat captain, or a groundhog, or a file clerk, or any man with a job to do and a sense of responsibility toward that job."³¹ While Dadier's character happened to be a teacher, Hunter imagined him more as a man trying to take his job and his new marriage seriously. Indeed, when one reader wrote to say that he had especially enjoyed the way Hunter "beautifully" depicted the relationship between the protagonist and his wife, the author nearly gulped down the sentiment as so much fresh air: "I was particularly pleased that you enjoyed the Rick-Anne relationship," he wrote

³⁰ Antonia P. Hanlon to Hunter, 10 October 1954; Virginia Moran to Hunter, n.d., (Hunter replied on 14 October 1954); Mrs. George Alley to Hunter, 2 October 1954; Kathryn Bourne to Hunter, 27 October 1954; George A. Sentman to Hunter, 3 October 1954, Box 25, EH-BU.

back, "a portion of the novel which was overlooked by many reviewers in favor of the more pressing school problem presented."³²

Hunter was also markedly averse to leading any kind of educational reform movement. While he sincerely hoped the book would raise awareness of the troubling conditions in city vocational schools, he was quite reluctant to assume the role of public firebrand. Numerous interest groups invited Hunter to speak as an "expert" on education and juvenile delinquency, but he turned down nearly all of them. Indeed, as the book grew in popularity and the subsequent film adaptation became a huge box office hit, Hunter increasingly withdrew from the controversy that his story provoked. As more and more educators labeled him an "enemy of public schools," Evan Hunter progressively curtailed his interviews and public appearances, and simply focused on his writing career. Just after the film came out, he finally told his agent, "I don't want to go on any of these things where we sit down and have an off-the-cuff discussion about schools, juvenile delinquency or the State of the Union. I can no more discuss these things than I can discuss the Moon."³³

"A Sociological Study"

Hunter's disinclination to engage in contemporary educational debates or to be regarded as a writer activist obviously constrained his ability to control the way *The Blackboard Jungle* was perceived or misperceived by different constituents. Metro

³¹ From Kroch's & Brentano's *Book Chat* (Chicago and Evanston, n.d.; most likely sometime in May or June, 1954 based on chronological position in folder), Box 25, EH-BU.

³² Hunter to John Pitcherale, 13 December 1954, Box 25, EH-BU.

³³ Hunter to Scott Meredith, 16 March 1955, Box 26, EH-BU.

Goldwyn Mayer, on the other hand, aggressively tried to manage the reception of the film adaptation. The studio carefully reimagined Hunter's story to appeal to a broad audience—while also appeasing censors in the Production Code Administration. The director conducted extensive research for the film in an attempt to make it seem realistic. MGM invited educational leaders to preview the film before its release, and took out full-page press advertisements listing the various professional groups that had endorsed the picture. Despite these efforts, the film still generated incredible controversy when it premiered in March 1955, dwarfing whatever excitement had surrounded the book publication. Indeed, the film version of *The Blackboard Jungle* had a profound cultural impact in the mid-fifties, accruing massive box office receipts, generating a vast media frenzy, drawing widespread condemnations by professional educators, and greatly influencing the ways Americans talked about the school crisis.³⁴

Director Richard Brooks apparently took great pains to produce a film that would faithfully reflect the sociological elements of Hunter's novel. For example, when writing the screenplay, he consulted a range of sources on juvenile delinquency, progressive education, vocational schooling, and youth culture. He researched newspaper and magazine articles that showcased examples of juvenile crime and evaluated the sociological causes of such criminality. Other sources included the 1954 *Collier's* series on America's school crisis, a *Saturday Evening Post* essay by a psychiatrist who treated adolescent criminals, and a *New York Times Magazine* piece critical of "universal

³⁴ According to one observer, "Special attention to M-G-M's 'The Blackboard Jungle' is being accorded by the mass communication media of television, radio, newspaper and magazine in a concentrated surge the likes of which have rarely been broadsided for a topical motion picture." "'Blackboard Jungle' Theme Stirs Controversy, Supplies Bally Aides," *Independent Film Journal*, 16 April 1955, n.p., BJ-AMPAS.

instruction" titled, "Education for All is Education for None."³⁵ Along similar lines, casting for *The Blackboard Jungle* was done in New York City, and many of the boys who appeared in supporting roles had no previous acting experience. A good number of them, however, had actually attended vocational school, and this educational background was more important to Brooks and his casting director than an acting background. In fact, Vic Morrow, who was cast as Dadier's main nemesis in the classroom, attended vocational school but had no film or television experience.³⁶

In short, Brooks tried to piece together the film using images and ideas already circulating in popular discourse about education. Moreover, he made a point to cast real vocational school students to play Dadier's charges. To what extent, then, might *The Blackboard Jungle* have seemed familiar, or even "true," to postwar audiences? Comments culled from preview screenings in February 1955 give us a sense of how the viewing public may have positioned *The Blackboard Jungle* within the context of contemporary educational discourse. One audience member called the film "very timely" because it dealt with a situation "very much alive at this time." She added, "I wish that it will bring a better understanding of teachers' problems." Another viewer suggested that the movie "helps us understand the school problem." Yet another patron requested that the studio "make more films that contain equal acting and support of public moral needs."

³⁵ Juvenile Delinquency file #1, RB-AMPAS.

³⁶ Al Altman to Pandro Berman, 21 October 1954, Box 16, MGM-AMPAS. Interestingly enough, Steve McQueen was originally considered for the role of West; correspondence between the casting director in New York and MGM in Hollywood noted plainly that McQueen had not attended vocational school. See also "Talent Hunt: Comparative Unknowns Cast in New Movie," *New York Times*, 6 March 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

Other commentators found the film "educational" and believed "it has a lot to teach the public."³⁷

Such comments by test audiences must have bolstered MGM's feeling that its film did indeed have a lot to teach the public. While the motion picture was still in production, one executive assured a New York theater manager, "I think *Blackboard Jungle* will alert many people all over the country in making sure that schools like that shown in *Blackboard Jungle* will cease to exist."³⁸ Even when educators and local censors fought hard to try to ban the film after it was released, MGM still maintained that they had performed a social service by producing the film. In a manual that MGM sent to studio managers in the United States and abroad for use as a "guide" should they have difficulty with censor boards, *The Blackboard Jungle* was described as a "sociological study and box-office production extraordinary [*sic*]." The manual offered a series of rebuttals to counter criticisms of the film. MGM suggested that its film was a "tribute to the teaching profession." Rick Dadier was "symbolic of the intelligent teacher and should do much to create a sympathetic regard for that profession, even when it is faced with the greatest difficulties." In another section titled, "*Blackboard Jungle* and the Educational System," MGM praised the "very high standards of education in the City of New York," where young people, it pointed out, were required by law to attend school until the age of 18. It was noted that the school depicted in *The Blackboard Jungle* "is not typical of U.S. education." In fact, the movie studio complimented itself for adding a

³⁷ Comments from "First Preview: First Report," Encino Theatre, Encino, Calif., 2 February 1955, and "Preview Survey: Research Study Conducted by Film Research Surveys," Loew's Lexington Theater, New York City, 7 February 1955, *Blackboard Jungle*—previews file, MGM-AMPAS.

³⁸ Dore Schary to Howard Dietz, 22 November 1954, *Blackboard Jungle*—production file, MGM-AMPAS.

scene that was not in the book in order to make this point. The scene in question showed Dadier visiting his former education professor at a suburban school where "pupils are eager to learn and teachers eager to teach." By contrasting two different educational institutions, this sequence implied that Dadier's school "is only one unfortunate and minor part of our education system."³⁹

"A Drama of Teenage Terror"

Unfortunately, public relations campaigns by MGM that sought to paint *The Blackboard Jungle* as an important message picture were often compromised by the studio's own marketing strategies. On marquees across the nation, the motion picture was billed as MGM's "Drama of Teen-Age Terror!" Movie trailers for the film described it as "fiction torn from big city, modern savagery," and promised a "brass-knuckle punch in its startling revelation of those teen-age savages who turn big city schools into a clawing jungle."⁴⁰ Radio plugs featured music from the film, playing Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock" while an announcer explained that the "violent" music fit the "explosive screenplay."⁴¹ The MGM campaign included an enormous promotional float that drove around New York City; sitting atop the float was a menacing-looking young man cleaning his fingernails with a switchblade.⁴² One Loew's Theater newspaper advertisement, which depicted a female teacher confronted by a menacing student, read,

³⁹ "Blackboard Jungle: A Sociological Study and Box-Office Extraordinary: Its Relation to Censorship," 17 October 1955, *Blackboard Jungle*—censorship file, MGM-AMPAS.

⁴⁰ "Blackboard Jungle" (Teaser Trailer), Dialogue Cutting Continuity, 10 March 1955, file B1695, MGM-AMPAS.

⁴¹ Scott Meredith to Hunter, 16 March 1955, Box 26, EH-BU.

⁴² Scott Meredith to Hunter, 15 March 1955, Box 26, EH-BU.

"She was a teacher who was indiscreet enough to wear a tight skirt! What happened then could only happen in this big-city school where tough teen-agers ran wild!" Another ad showed a male teacher being choked by a student, with the caption, "They Turned a School Into a Jungle!" Other ads blared, "They brought their jungle code into the school!" and "The kid with the switchblade knife!"⁴³

This approach was a far cry from Simon and Schuster's efforts to market the novel as a sociological expose on par with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Instead, MGM clearly invoked the specter of juvenile delinquency in its advertising campaign.⁴⁴ Dadier's students, rather than Dadier himself, were at the center of this campaign. Movie reviews similarly focused on the more sensational aspects of the film. For example, a headline in the *L.A. Times* announced, "Teen-age Rebels Shock in 'Blackboard Jungle.'" The critic then called the motion picture a "primer in violence" that was "murderously good." Headlines for other film reviews proclaimed, "Movie Tackles Teen-Age School Terror," "Bad Boys in the Schoolroom," and "Schoolroom Terrorism."⁴⁵ Notably, not one single headline shouted, "A Tribute to the Teaching Profession!" However, even as they boasted of the film's sensational violence, many reviewers still tried to acknowledge its sociological worth. One critic maintained that *The Blackboard Jungle* had "a moral and a purpose," while another described it as "realistically scripted." Yet another reviewer suggested that the motion picture had a "documentary effect and is most electrifying when one considers

⁴³ *The Daily News*, March 13, March 18, and March 16, 1955, Box 121, EH-BU.

⁴⁴ In fact, extensive media coverage of juvenile delinquency during the winter of 1955 reportedly prompted MGM to advance the film's release date. See "Juve Delinquency Stir Cues Metro to Update 'Blackboard' Release," *Variety* (daily), 26 January 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

⁴⁵ "Teen-age Rebels Shock in 'Blackboard Jungle,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 12 May 1955; "A Movie Tackles Teen-age School Terror," *Look*, 3 May 1955; "Bad Boys in the Schoolroom," *Life*, 28 March 1955; "Schoolroom Terrorism," *Pix*, 21 May 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

that the situations depicted do exist."⁴⁶ One writer echoed this sentiment, stating, "In a physical and photographic sense, *Blackboard Jungle* is almost *documentary* in its raw and vivid realism."⁴⁷ The *Los Angeles Times* conveniently summed up the film as both sociology and sensationalism, claiming that the production "is stunning in its impact—probably too stunning, in its violent excesses, to move the onlooker to any emotion softer than horror and revulsion, or to allow him to rationalize it completely afterward. Nevertheless, these things have happened, are happening, somewhere, every day."⁴⁸

The response of film critics to *The Blackboard Jungle* gives us a sense of how difficult it may have been for postwar audiences to neatly categorize the story of North Manual Trades High School. It was a "primer in violence," and yet it had a "moral and a purpose." It realistically depicted situations that "do exist," but this depiction was simultaneously "too stunning" to engender any kind of "rational" response from filmgoers. *The Blackboard Jungle* was at once documentary-like and "murderously good." The mass media propagated these seemingly contradictory readings of the film, even while reporting enthusiastically on the difficulty audiences were having interpreting the film. One headline in *Variety*, for example, asked, "'Blackboard Jungle'—True or False? Educators Apparently Uncertain Whether to See Reality or Caricature." In like manner, the *New York Times* ran a piece titled, "The Exception or the Rule?"⁴⁹ As it turns out, this popular story did not fit easily into one category or the other. In fact, *The*

⁴⁶ Dick Williams, "'Blackboard Jungle' is Frank Shocker," *Mirror-News*, 12 May 1955; "Hard-Hitting Drama," *New York Journal American*, 21 March 1955; "'Blackboard Jungle' May Shock But Won't Bore," *New York Daily Mirror*, 21 March 1955. All clippings BJ-AMPAS.

⁴⁷ Review of *The Blackboard Jungle*, *Cue*, 19 March 1955, BJ-AMPAS. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁸ Philip K. Scheuer, "Impact of 'Blackboard Jungle' Stunning—Maybe Too Much So," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 March 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

Blackboard Jungle in many ways collapsed the distinction between fact and fiction, between reality and caricature, between sociology and sensationalism. In the words of one teacher, who reviewed the film for a New York City teachers newsletter, "it is clear that there is a small hard core of truth in it all, but it is not *this* truth, seen *this* way, told with *this* effect!"⁵⁰ Another educator remarked that *The Blackboard Jungle* was "'merely a mirror' of violence and disintegration, and false at that."⁵¹ A false mirror? Truth, but not *this* truth? In the wake of the film version, audience response to *The Blackboard Jungle* was increasingly characterized by such dissonance. Educators, in particular, did not seem to know what to make of the motion picture.

Evan Hunter may have received several kind letters from teachers who read his novel and applauded its treatment of vocational schooling, but this private correspondence did not resemble the public response of many professional educators to *The Blackboard Jungle*. Some educational leaders were already disturbed by the novel's depiction of school conditions, and the film adaptation only seemed to raise their ire even more. Hunter himself had been challenged to a public debate by a New York City school principal shortly after the book appeared, and the administrators at Bronx Vocational High School (BVHS) were especially outraged by what they viewed as a thinly veiled portrayal of their institution. The Board of Education even sent the principal of BVHS to Hollywood to offer MGM recommendations for revising the film version of the story while it was in production. MGM demurred, and the principal proclaimed *The*

⁴⁹ "Blackboard Jungle—True or False?" *Variety* (weekly), 23 March 1955; "The Exception or the Rule," *New York Times*, 27 March 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

⁵⁰ Ruth Goldstein, review of *The Blackboard Jungle*, *High Points in the Work of the High Schools of New York City*, 37:5, May 1955, 59.

Blackboard Jungle a "libel" against the students and the teachers of New York City's vocational high schools. A *New York Post* survey of local teachers found that a "great many" of them regarded the film as "gross exaggeration and bad art." One former New York City teacher suggested to Hunter that "the 'jungle' you refer to is in your own mind." After the film was released, the superintendent of New York City schools went on the air over the board of education radio station to "correct the impressions" left by the motion picture. In a letter to the *New York Times*, a New York City school principal expressed grave concern about the film's "probable effects upon the public attitude towards the students and teachers."⁵²

Such controversy was not just confined to New York City educators. Delegates to the National Education Association annual convention in 1955 denounced the film. At the conference, one assistant superintendent called *The Blackboard Jungle* "harmful" because it encouraged delinquency, portrayed vocational schools as havens for "dummies and undesirables," and scared people away from teaching "at a time when there is a dire shortage of teachers." The NEA proceedings were summed up by one newspaper with the headline, "Pedagogs [*sic*] Pummel Blackboard." The National Congress of Parents and Teachers declined to endorse the film when asked to by the Film Estimate Board of National Organizations, as did the American Association of University Women. *National Parent-Teacher* magazine suggested the film should have been titled "Education's Lower Depths," and dismissed it as a "Hollywood gangster story in a school

⁵¹ Franklin J. Keller, "Jungle Jottings," *High Points in the Work of the High Schools of New York City*, 37:1 (January 1955), 8.

⁵² Our Town's Teachers: Blackboard Jungle?" *New York Post*, 5 May 1955, BJ-AMPAS; Sam Levenson, "Teachers and The Blackboard Jungle," *High Points in the Work of the High Schools of New York City*,

setting." One state board of education said that MGM had "failed in its responsibility to the American public."⁵³

Commentators outside the field of education similarly fretted about the effects the motion picture might be having on the American public. A group calling itself the Institute for Public Opinion mailed postcards to film reviewers claiming that *The Blackboard Jungle* was "anti-public schools." It urged critics to tell the public that the conditions depicted in the film did not exist anywhere in the United States. One municipal censor successfully delayed the release of *The Blackboard Jungle* in Atlanta for a month until the ban was finally overturned by a Federal Court judge. The censor called the film "immoral, obscene, [and] licentious," and predicted it would "adversely affect the peace, health, morals and good order of the city." A Parent-Teachers Association in Virginia similarly urged censorship on the grounds that the motion picture created "in the minds of children new ideas of unbridled misconduct," and that it was "apt to sow seeds of evil or disorder and violence." At times, the film was held responsible for literally "affecting the peace." For example, six teenage girls in Memphis blamed their desire to form a gang on the motion picture. "We wanted to be tough like those kids in that picture," the gang's fourteen-year-old leader reportedly told authorities, shortly after her group was arrested for burning down a fairgrounds cattle barn. Police in Schenectady, New York blamed the film for a rash of "juvenile outbreaks," including the

37:6 (June 1955), 33; "What's Happening in Education?" *National Parent-Teacher*, May 1955, p. 15; "Jungle Tempest," *The New York Times*, 3 April 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

⁵³ "Pedagogs [*sic*] Pummel 'Blackboard'; Hits Teacher Prestige," *Variety* (weekly), 13 July 1955, BJ-AMPAS; "Divided Views on 'Blackboard,'" *Variety* (weekly), 20 April 1955, BJ-AMPAS; "What's Happening in Education?" *National Parent-Teacher*, May 1955, p. 15; "Schary Accuses Educators of 'Shocking Disregard of Facts' in 'Jungle' Attack," *Variety* (daily), 1 September 1955, BJ-AMPAS;

decision by a local band of young men to schedule a "battle" between Schenectady and Albany gangs.⁵⁴

Not surprisingly, all of the controversy surrounding *The Blackboard Jungle* translated into spectacular revenues. By the end of March 1955, after just a few weeks on bookstands, Pocket sold out its first paperback printing of half a million copies, and a second printing was already in press.⁵⁵ Between the Simon and Schuster and Pocket editions, the novel ended up selling two and a half million copies.⁵⁶ For Loew's State in New York City, the motion picture was the theater's biggest hit in six years, and other film houses reported similar success. The film grossed some \$9 million in just under a year—a phenomenal take at the time—and it played on screens worldwide, from England to Thailand, Chile to Lebanon, and Ontario to Hong Kong.

The "Blackboard Aura"

The public furor over *The Blackboard Jungle*, which one newspaper labeled the "jungle tempest," lasted nearly a year starting with the novel's publication in the fall of 1954. How did this extended controversy shape educational debates? Professional educators seemed loath to rally behind the story as a sociological expose, or to use it to push for changes in U.S. public schools; neither the book nor the film ended up serving as a "crowbar for reform." Quite the contrary, in fact—while Evan Hunter and Richard

⁵⁴ "Schary Hits Anonymous Scrawls on 'Blackboard,'" *Variety* (daily), 21 March 1955; "Metro Fights Atlanta Lady Censor Who Banned 'Blackboard Jungle' Outright," *Variety* (weekly), 8 June 1955, and "'Blackboard Jungle' Ban Lifted," *Citizen News*, 6 July 1955; "Virginia Town Protests 'Blackboard Jungle' But Censors Defend License," *Variety* (weekly), 1 June 1955; "Girls Burn Barn in Memphis; Blame 'Blackboard Jungle,'" *Motion Picture Daily*, 17 May 1955; "Police Seek to Finger 'Blackboard Jungle' As Root of Hooliganism," *Variety* (weekly), 18 May 1955. All clippings BJ-AMPAS.

⁵⁵ Scott Meredith to Hunter, 28 March 28 1955, Box 26, EH-BU.

Brooks might have felt they were simply mirroring a school problem that already existed in postwar society, their story somehow managed to become the problem itself. *The Blackboard Jungle* may have tried to serve a sociological purpose, but many viewed it as a root cause of society's ills, scaring away would-be teachers from the profession, inspiring even more acts of juvenile delinquency, and enabling communist propaganda campaigns. In this way, critics simultaneously dismissed the story as "unrealistic" while yet empowering it with "real" agency in society. This rhetorical move turned out to be of great consequence for educational discourse, as the "sensational" *Blackboard Jungle* suddenly became the standard against which "real" schools were measured. With the "jungle tempest" now at the center of popular educational debates, Americans began to assess whether or not their schools were really in crisis based on how much they looked like the imaginary North Manual Trades.

For example, school authorities in New Brunswick, New Jersey conspired with local theaters to add a disclaimer at the end of *The Blackboard Jungle*. After every local screening, the New Brunswick Board of Education ran the following message: "To Our Patrons: The school and situations you have just seen are NOT to be found in this area! We should all be proud of the facilities provided for OUR youth by the Public Schools of New Brunswick and the Middlesex County Vocational and Technical High Schools." The trailer then invited moviegoers to visit any of the "fine" schools in the county to observe these quality conditions for themselves.⁵⁷ In other words, New Brunswick's real schools were healthy and well by virtue of the fact that they did not resemble the fictional

⁵⁶ "Evan Hunter," *Writer's Digest* 38:4 (March 1958): 19.

"blackboard jungle." Other towns across the United States followed New Brunswick's lead and showed similar trailers at the end of each screening.⁵⁸

Yet another example shows the extent to which *The Blackboard Jungle* could shape—and indeed limit—the terms of educational debate. In July 1955, four months after the film premiered in New York City, two separate reports were released announcing that Bronx Vocational High School looked nothing like the institution portrayed in the popular motion picture. Although the movie version of *The Blackboard Jungle* was set in a fictional high school in an unnamed city, it was widely known that the 1954 novel was loosely based on Evan Hunter's short-lived teaching career at Bronx Vocational High. Consequently, the New York school was eager to clear its name. A study commissioned by the city's associate superintendent and conducted by visiting suburban school superintendents and college officials concluded unanimously that the "over-all impression" of BVHS was "a wholesome one." The report, which was allegedly the product of an unannounced visit, noted that students walked through the hallways in a "business-like fashion" without pushing or shoving. There were no signs of vandalism, and few disciplinary problems. Further, there was a notable absence of "tensions" between ethnic groups. On the whole, observed the report, "There was not a shred of observable fact on which to base a description of this school as one where chaos exists or where order is maintained through complete regimentation and continuous teacher vigilance."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ "Taking Care of Local Civic Pride: 'Tail-Piece' Following 'Blackboard Jungle' Assures Jersey Town That Conditions Are Not Native," *Variety* (weekly), 20 April 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ "Two Reports Clear School in Bronx," *The New York Times*, 17 July 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

The second report, filed by three students selected from a citywide student government body, similarly refuted the incidents portrayed in *The Blackboard Jungle*. In fact, it called the story "a collection of trash." Referring to an infamous scene in *The Blackboard Jungle* in which delinquents smash their teacher's jazz records when he tries to play music for them, the students' report proudly noted how differently BVHS pupils had handled a similar situation: an instructor had recently brought in a collection of Tchaikovsky recordings, and rather than insult and destroy the records, the students "asked for another chance in the future to have the pleasure of hearing this music again."⁶⁰

According to press coverage of these reports, Bronx Vocational High School was given a "clean bill of health." Yet the educators' study remarked plainly that the school plant was "obviously inadequate." Moreover, it stated that some aspects of the academic program should be strengthened. These pointed criticisms of the facilities and curriculum seemed to matter little, however, in determining whether or not BVHS could be characterized as a "wholesome" school, because both reports essentially generated their evaluation criteria from *The Blackboard Jungle*. As long as students were orderly and vandalism was non-existent, then BVHS could not possibly be in "crisis." One newspaper even proclaimed that the reports had cleared BVHS of its "'Blackboard' Aura."⁶¹

But what exactly did it mean to be cleared of this "blackboard aura"? What did it mean, for example, that New Brunswick's schools did *not* look like a blackboard jungle?

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Clear Bronx School of 'Blackboard' Aura," *Variety* (Daily), 21 July 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

In the final analysis, it meant that a school could *manage* the diverse, heterogeneous classroom. It meant that a school could essentially tame the "savage" jungle, either with discipline and order, or with Tchaikovsky. Yet we must remember that this "jungle" was not just overrun with delinquents—it was populated by a cast of racially diverse, blue collar, young men. It was inhabited by vocational students, by students with low IQ's, by students who could not read and write. It was, as one character in *The Blackboard Jungle* described it, the "garbage can of the educational system." It was all of these things, as depicted in the film and novel, but in popular discourse, "blackboard jungle" simply became a byword for school violence. Consequently, the school that was not a blackboard jungle was safe and orderly. Whether or not this school provided adequate facilities and curriculum was immaterial—it just had to manage "chaos" effectively.

The education crisis was thus recast in the popular imagination as a question of adequate surveillance. Indeed, one film critic expressed hope that *The Blackboard Jungle* would help reform "public school supervision."⁶² The journalist Benjamin Fine, who in 1947 maintained that schools should be the "first line of defense" in the Cold War, reformulated his position in 1955, stating that "the school is truly the first line of defense in our fight against juvenile delinquency."⁶³ A new danger had now surfaced. Public education was not just threatened by communist subversion or by an anti-intellectual progressive curriculum. No, *mass education* itself seemed to pose the latest, greatest danger. The G.I. Bill and court-ordered desegregation, along with record school enrollments and changing cultural attitudes toward the value of an educational credential,

⁶² "Blackboard Jungle' a Hard-Hitting Film," *New York Daily News*, 21 March 1955, BJ-AMPAS.

⁶³ Benjamin Fine, *1,000,000 Delinquents* (Cleveland: World, 1955), 206 and 155.

had all spurred the democratization of public education after World War II. Postwar schools, as historian William Graebner has noted, became "points of contact for youth populations that had heretofore been largely separate."⁶⁴ Yet this process of democratizing the schools simultaneously seemed to make them more dangerous. The postwar project of educating all youth, regardless of race, class, or ability level, was turning the school into a jungle. And the greatest challenge was not how to teach this diverse student body, but how to ensure that it did not pull knives on its faculty.⁶⁵

Conclusion

When the State Department concurred with Ambassador Luce that *The Blackboard Jungle* was not "truly representative of America," one has to wonder what version of America was thought to be the "norm." After all, the film depicted an integrated high school, and it was released less than a year after *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled segregating schooling unconstitutional. Dadier's students are African American, Hispanic, Asian, and white. They have their own styles of dress, their own music, their own way of talking—indeed, their own "jungle code." To be sure, similar processes of integration were transforming civic spaces and popular culture in postwar America. For example, by 1955, major demographic shifts had changed the racial makeup of cities like Pasadena. Similarly, black musical signatures were being appropriated into mainstream rock 'n' roll, which in turn was appealing to a new youth

⁶⁴ Graebner, 14.

⁶⁵ In a 1983 interview, Richard Brooks reflected back on the controversy surrounding his film: "Those who came after had the conception that the movie was about juvenile delinquents with knives in a classroom."

market niche. Without question, American culture was becoming more *heterogeneous* in the years after World War II—much like North Manual Trades High School.

Nonetheless, critics dismissed *The Blackboard Jungle* as an unreal representation of American schooling and society. But was the popular version of the school crisis any more real? The dominant cultural narrative about postwar education, consolidated during the Pasadena crisis, suggested that schools were in fairly good shape except for a few philosophical debates that needed to be resolved. Yet this narrative about the "real" crisis was essentially what Jean Baudrillard would call a simulation, for it concealed many of the everyday problems confronting public schools in the fifties.⁶⁶ The Pasadena story certainly did not speak to the reality of classroom shortages, budget crisis, and racism in education—in many ways, the Pasadena story was just as imaginary as *The Blackboard*

But that's not what it's about. It's about a teacher who wants to teach where the students have no stake." Sal Mann, "Blackboard Jungle Revisited," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 13 January 1983, BJ-AMPAS.

⁶⁶ In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that our experience of everyday life has become increasingly circumscribed by substitutions of "the signs of the real for the real." In the present "era of simulacra," the distinction between simulation and the real has collapsed, to the point where the "real" and the "imaginary" are no longer mutually exclusive categories. Instead, he argues, we tend to experience a kind of "hyperreality" in our everyday lives in which the simulations are often more real than reality itself. How is this hyperreality sustained? Baudrillard uses Disneyland as an example. Disneyland presumably offers visitors an imaginary world, a "play of illusions and phantasms," that is supposedly different from the "real" world outside the theme park. Yet, according to Baudrillard, "Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the 'real' country, all of 'real' America that is Disneyland." In other words, Disneyland is "presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real." But how real is "the rest," after all? Baudrillard argues that the city of Los Angeles, home to Disneyland, is nothing more than a "network of incessant, unreal circulation." Los Angeles, and indeed America itself, belongs to the "hyperreal order." That is to say, the information that informs our sense of "reality" outside the Mouse is as much a simulation as Disneyland's "Frontierland." Thus, Disneyland does not really demarcate the boundary between the real and the imaginary; it collapses it. Indeed, to isolate Disneyland as the site of the imaginary is to conceal the extent to which life outside of Disneyland has also been constructed out of simulations. Baudrillard would argue that our powerful cultural belief that Disneyland is "imaginary" effectively deters us from challenging the hyperreality of our lives outside of Disneyland. (Along similar lines, Baudrillard suggests that our perception that Watergate is a "scandal"—that it is somehow an aberration that lies outside the ordinary workings of politics—conceals from us the fact that all politics as practiced in America is inherently corrupt, unfair, and indeed undemocratic.) In short, whenever we label something as unreal, we in effect conceal the fact that we live in an era of simulation, and perpetuate the hyperreal order. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994).

Jungle was alleged to be. Labeling *The Blackboard Jungle* a scandal thus effectively concealed the greater scandal of defining the education crisis so narrowly. In this way, the story of Richard "Daddy-O" Dadier and his unruly students effectively sustained the hyperreality of the entire crisis—for this *simulation* of life in a vocational school ended up determining what would and would not be included in what was already a *simulated* debate about America's education crisis.

Chapter Four

Getting Back to the Basics: Evil Experts, Soft Schoolboys, and the Blackboard Backlash

During the year in which the "jungle tempest" captured the public imagination, plans were quietly being made to launch an organization that would promote a wholly different view of America's schools than the one depicted in *The Blackboard Jungle*. From October 1954 to late 1955, while images of violent vocational schools and blue collar delinquents haunted American popular culture, a small group of academics and concerned laymen worked together to cultivate an ideological vision for what would soon be known as the Council for Basic Education (CBE).¹ After securing a private grant from the William Volker Fund, the Council finally announced its incorporation on July 3, 1956.² The one hundred and ten charter members sought to influence the direction of educational reform efforts in the midst of America's school crisis. Specifically, the Council wanted to ensure that public schools gave "all students without exception" instruction in the "basic intellectual disciplines," including mathematics, English, science, history, and foreign languages. It asked that "students of high ability" be afforded "the fullest possible opportunity" to achieve—without "waste of time." The CBE recommended that vocational training be given "due subordination to the school's fundamental purpose of intellectual discipline." In addition, school administrators should phase out curricula "overemphasizing social adjustment" and programs that assumed

¹ James Joseph Hayden chronicles the founding of the CBE in "The Council for Basic Education: From Fringe to Mainstream," Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1993, pp. 69-112.

responsibilities "properly belonging to the home, to religious bodies, and to other agencies."³ According to a CBE spokesman, such reforms were critical "if we are successfully to maintain our economy and security and assure our cultural progress."⁴

The Council for Basic Education effectively institutionalized a swelling back-to-basics movement in postwar America. Its call for academic rigor echoed the most popular critique of progressive education—that it was anti-intellectual and too focused on "life skills." Moreover, the CBE's worldview placed a heavy emphasis on the role of the family and the church in educating the child. The public school's sole charge was intellectual training, not social engineering. Finally, the CBE aggressively sought to redefine the education crisis as less a crisis of numbers than a crisis of philosophy. According to the Council, "in our concern for the *mechanics*—the fringe benefits—of education we are overlooking the *principles* of education."⁵ The biggest threat to America's schools was not a shortage of teachers or classrooms (the "mechanics"), but a dubious educational orthodoxy propagated by misguided educational experts.

The establishment of the Council for Basic Education marks a significant chapter in the history of postwar education. The CBE's founding members included Arthur Bestor and Mortimer Smith, both of whom had written biting educational criticism in the

² The Volker Fund was active from 1932 to 1965, and it primarily supported libertarian causes. Its financial support of the CBE was not disclosed to the public; the CBE announced that an anonymous donor had helped them incorporate. See Hayden.

³ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴ "Council Stresses Basic Education," *The New York Times*, 11 July 1956, 29:2.

⁵ Mortimer Smith, *A Citizens Manual for Public Schools: A Guide for School Board Members and Other Layman* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1959), vii.

early fifties that had been widely discussed in the mainstream media.⁶ The work of the CBE was endorsed by such prominent figures as Jacques Barzun and Admiral H.G. Rickover, and at one point Alfred Knopf served on its Board of Directors.⁷ The Council published a regular bulletin that enjoyed an average mailing of 11,000 by 1958.⁸ In 1959, the CBE put out *A Citizens Manual for the Public Schools*, a short guide that offered laymen advice for effecting change in their local districts. Meanwhile, professional educational organizations expended considerable energy trying to debunk the CBE as doctrinaire and mean spirited.⁹ As early as March of 1957, for example, the journal *School and Society* felt compelled to offer its readership a critique of the CBE titled, "Basic Education: Facts and Fallacies."¹⁰

Notably, the Council for Basic Education incorporated one year after the Progressive Education Association (PEA) folded. The PEA, founded in 1919, finally came to a halt following years of increasing attacks on progressive education and declining membership.¹¹ In one sense, then, the rise of the CBE symbolized a shift in educational thinking at mid-decade. If progressive educators sought to provide a differentiated curriculum to meet the needs of a variety of students, then the back to

⁶ See, for example, Mortimer Smith, *And Madly Teach: A Layman Looks at Public Education* (Chicago: Regnery, 1949) and Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1953).

⁷ Hayden, 99, 162.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁹ "Is Your School a Clambake?" *Time*, 24 December 1956, 47.

¹⁰ "Basic Education: Facts and Fallacies," *School and Society*, 16 March 1957. NEED PAGES

¹¹ By 1955, some 2,000 of the PEA's 2,600 "members" were library subscriptions. See Patricia Albjerg Graham, *Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe: A History of the PEA, 1919-1955* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1967), 142. To Lawrence Cremin, the end of the PEA symbolized the death of progressive education as America's conventional educational philosophy in the postwar era. See Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Knopf, 1961).

basics movement called for a homogeneous program of study for all youth. By the mid-1950s, it seemed that basics advocates had gained the upper hand in this curricular debate.

The philosophical differences between progressive educators and advocates of basic education have been well documented by curriculum historians.¹² However, my concern in this chapter is more with the *cultural* context for these particular debates. What was the cultural significance of the broader "back to basics" movement that galvanized the creation of the CBE? Did calls for a return to the "basics" reflect only a concern for what was being taught in schools? Or did such critiques speak to a more complex set of social anxieties in postwar America? Given the way popular educational discourse so readily positioned "basics" as the antithesis of reform or "progress"—of "progressive" schooling—what might this public conversation reveal about the pace of cultural change in the 1950s? Put another way, what "basics" had been lost in the midst of America's transformation into a modern military and economic superpower? And what *danger* did this loss pose to American society? To wit, why would "cultural progress" only be "assured," as the CBE suggested, if the nation got back to basics?

To answer these questions, this chapter situates the back to basics movement in the context of broader cultural debates about the tenor of everyday life in fifties America. While I focus primarily on formative voices in the back to basics movement, such as

¹² For example, see Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 2nd ed. [New York: Routledge, 1995) and Edward Krug, *The Shaping of the American High School* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964). For a postwar perspective on this curricular controversy, see "Progressive Education: A Debate," *New York Times Magazine*, 8 September 1957, 25+. In this article, Arthur Bestor and William Heard Kilpatrick offer contrasting interpretations of progressive education.

Mortimer Smith, Arthur Bestor, and Rudolf Flesch (author of *Why Johnny Can't Read*), I also consider various incarnations of back to basics rhetoric in the popular culture. Specifically, I explore the ways in which educational discourse about the "basics" resonated with cultural anxieties over conformity, masculinity, and the rise of the "expert" in the postwar era. These anxieties profoundly shaped educational debates in the fifties and, I would argue, helped make the appeals of the back to basics movement more legible to the American public, especially in the wake of Sputnik and the intensifying Cold War. In drawing on these cultural anxieties, the back to basics movement also helped generate more classroom specters for the American popular imagination: by the end of the 1950s, mass public education was not only potentially subversive (ala Pasadena) and violent (ala *The Blackboard Jungle*), but also emasculating, conformist, anti-intellectual, and a threat to national security.

Ultimately, I argue that the back to basics movement constituted a kind of "blackboard backlash" in the late fifties. In the novel and film versions of *The Blackboard Jungle*, the U.S. public school was depicted as racially and economically diverse, peopled with students of varying intellectual ability and comportment. In short, the school reflected the increasing diversity of postwar American culture and society. Yet Richard Dadiere's heterogeneous classroom was first and foremost a dangerous place, a threat to the social order. The back to basics movement thus envisioned a very different kind of public school, and, by extension, a very different America. In this alternative vision, all students studied a homogeneous curriculum of basic subjects, with a strong emphasis given to nurturing the most gifted pupils. Consequently, in the wake of the "jungle tempest," the public conversation about schooling shifted from the challenge—

indeed, the menace—of educational diversity, to the promise of curricular uniformity. Moreover, the focus was no longer on the needs of the supposed "uneducables," who happened to be blue collar minorities, but on the needs of the best and brightest, who happened to be white middle-class males. The insinuation of this late fifties "blackboard backlash," I would suggest, was that heterogeneity—whether educational or cultural—was antithetical to "basic" American and pedagogical values. The greater lesson of "getting back to the basics" was that diversity was a perilous prospect in the postwar era.

Blackboard Jungle or Liberty Hill? Adjusting to Life in the Fifties

In October 1954, the *Ladies Home Journal* published a short story entitled, "Miss Dove and the Maternal Instinct." Written by Frances Gray Patton, it told the tale of a seasoned geography teacher whose influence extended far beyond her classroom in the fictional Cedar Grove Elementary School. Miss Dove's strict, no-nonsense teaching style inspired fear in her pupils, while her status as local spinster drew pity from their mothers. Nevertheless, Miss Dove remained a beloved presence in the quiet town of Liberty Hill, viewed by residents as a kind of "public conscience" who not only knew her students' academic capabilities but could also "put her finger on the snively, ignoble spots in their natures." The plot concerned a former student of Miss Dove, nineteen-year-old Jincey Webb, who returns home after being jilted by her wealthy New York fiancée. While suffering her broken heart, Jincey at first congratulates herself for daring to leave her small burgh in an "intoxicated leap toward freedom," but then begins to embrace the comforting simplicity of life in her birthplace. She visits her old school to seek the advice of Miss Dove. Her teacher counsels her to immediately thank God for saving her

from marrying a cad, and then suggests she study nursing. While the two converse, another former student drops in on Miss Dove—the local doctor, Thomas Baker. Perhaps predictably, Thomas and Jincey forge an immediate romantic connection. They leave together, and Miss Dove quietly calculates whether or not she will have retired by the time Thomas and Jincey's firstborn enters elementary school: "If they didn't tarry... then she could take the first child straight through to graduation. The child would need her."¹³

Curiously enough, "Miss Dove and the Maternal Instinct" appeared in the same *Ladies Home Journal* issue that featured a condensation of Evan Hunter's *The Blackboard Jungle*. That month, *Journal* readers were thus offered two radically different portraits of schooling in the postwar era. At North Manual Trades in New York City, the students were in charge, terrorizing the faculty and testing the will of novice teacher Richard Dadier, who could barely maintain control of his classroom. At rural Cedar Grove, however, students feared their experienced teacher. They learned the virtues of "punctuality, correct posture, and neatness," and Miss Dove required that they all be "industrious and good." North Manual trades was racially diverse, and the halls echoed with the lingo of a distinct youth culture. Meanwhile, at lily-white Cedar Grove, students sang, "Dear old Cedar Grove, to thee we pledge love and loyalty" at their graduation ceremony. North Manual Trades symbolized the future, the postwar dream of democratizing U.S. education and boldly offering all American youth—regardless of race, class, or ability level—a public school education. Cedar Grove, on the other hand, signified a simpler past, with Miss Dove herself described as a symbol of "a bygone era

¹³ Frances Gray Patton, "Miss Dove and the Maternal Instinct," *Ladies Home Journal*, October 1954, 174, 179.

when life had been unchancy and plain as the map on a wall." (Indeed, when Jincey expresses remorse about her romantic misadventure in New York, she confides to Miss Dove, "I liked the old map. I liked the old world."¹⁴) Finally, *The Blackboard Jungle* offered a terrifying vision of delinquent teenagers in high school—with no parents in sight—while "Miss Dove" depicted innocent and tractable grade school children still under the watchful eye of mother and father.

There was even a stark contrast between the two authors: Evan Hunter was a World War II veteran turned pulp fiction writer from New York City; Frances Gray Patton was a Duke faculty wife, born and raised in North Carolina, who wrote often about the South.¹⁵ Both writers, however, would enjoy similar success in the coming year. Miss Dove became the protagonist of Patton's first novel, published in 1954—the same year as *The Blackboard Jungle*. *Good Morning, Miss Dove* was quickly picked up as a book-of-the-month club selection and then turned into a popular film, which was released the same year as the celluloid version of *The Blackboard Jungle*—1955.¹⁶

The popular success of these two dramatically different stories about schooling reminds us once again that educational debates of the 1950s were not just played out in the pages of professional journals. The mass culture industry clearly capitalized on these

¹⁴ Ibid., 174.

¹⁵ Patton seems to have been widely referred to as the wife of a Duke faculty member. For example, the jacket sleeve to *Good Morning, Miss Dove* includes the following biographical note: "Frances Gray Patton was born in North Carolina where her father was a well-known newspaper editor and she has always lived there (sic). Her husband teaches English at Duke University, so for many years, they, with their three children have lived in Durham..." See Patton, *Good Morning, Miss Dove* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1954), n.p. Along similar lines, an obituary for Patton remarked, "Ms. Patton's finely crafted stories offered glimpses into Durham society in the mid-20th century, a world she knew well as a Duke faculty wife." See *The New York Times*, 2 April 2000, 1:36.

¹⁶ Patton, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, op cit, and *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, dir. Henry Koster, 1955. The film starred Jennifer Jones in the title role.

debates, just as the public eagerly consumed multiple depictions of U.S. schools. But the concurrent popularity of *Good Morning, Miss Dove* and *The Blackboard Jungle* also spoke to the ongoing cultural confusion over how to define the postwar "crisis" in education. For example, the October 1954 issue of *The Ladies Home Journal* was dedicated to the topic of education, with the cover asking readers, "What Do We Want Of Our Schools?" The editors claimed not to endorse any particular position vis-a-vis this question, but by juxtaposing Patton's work with Hunter's, the magazine effectively answered its own query. After all, who would "want" a school like North Manual Trades when Cedar Grove was so much more serene and stable? Indeed, if Hunter in a way defined a crisis, then Patton seemed to offer an alternative—but not necessarily a solution—to that particular crisis. The alternative to the "blackboard jungle" was small town life, family values, religion—the "old map" of the world. To avert the crisis, retreat from the city, just as Jincey had, to the safety and order of "unchancy" Liberty Hill, where genuine education (and even romance!) took place under the wise tutelage of Miss Dove.

The juxtaposition of these stories in the popular culture also suggested that the *real* crisis of the 1950s might be more of a cultural one than an educational one. After all, the schools in Liberty Hill were *not* in crisis, so the problem must lie with North Manual Trades itself. Clearly something had gone wrong in the modern urban public school, with its diverse student population, distinct youth culture, and vocational curriculum. Liberty Hill, on the other hand, was doing something right. But what? In Patton's novel, the town is described as a place where "the streets were named for trees and heroes." In Liberty Hill, "people born and raised there—high and low, rich and

poor—were neighbors in an irrevocable way because their imaginations had been nursed on the same sights and sounds and legends and early ordeals." What's more, everyone in Liberty Hill had, "for the space of a whole generation, been exposed at a tender and malleable age to... Miss Dove."¹⁷ Tradition, constancy, cultural heritage—the antidote to an educational crisis. Simply put, *change* appeared to be the culprit; change was not what we wanted of our schools.

In a similar vein, the back to basics movement gained momentum at mid-decade by propagating a nostalgic vision for a more traditional society, for a simpler time when students acquired rigorous academic skills in school, when boys learned to be self-reliant men, when communities—not educational experts—taught young people the life skills they would need to succeed as adults. The predominant theme of the basic education movement was that something had been lost in the postwar era, that rapid cultural change had come at great cost to basic cultural values. But what exactly had been lost? In back to basics rhetoric, the ideals most threatened by these changes were traditional notions of masculinity and individuality, for U.S. public schools were emasculating American boys and teaching all students how to conform to the group. Moreover, a coterie of educational experts had wrested control of important everyday decisions away from the common man—the once self-reliant layman was being crippled by a postwar cult of expertise.

The main target of back to basics advocates was the so-called "life adjustment" movement. This movement advocated the teaching of more life skills in schools, and it

¹⁷ Patton, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, 1.

was generally viewed as the postwar incarnation of progressive education.¹⁸ The movement grew out of a 1945 conference sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education that concluded that a majority of secondary students were not receiving basic life skills training. Leaders of the movement submitted that secondary schools were preparing 20% of all students for entrance to college and another 20% of students for skilled occupations, but the remaining 60% were not receiving the basic life adjustment training needed for citizenship and adulthood. Though often vaguely defined by proponents, life adjustment generally referred to formal school training in areas such as domestic and civic life, mental and physical health, and use of leisure time.

As it grew in popularity with professional educators, life adjustment was increasingly criticized by champions of basic education for being anti-intellectual, conformist, and emasculating. The movement was typically derided as a vapid attempt by progressive educators to teach American schoolchildren "how to get along with their peers [and] how to bake a cherry pie."¹⁹ Moreover, to back to basics advocates, the very title of this initiative erroneously assumed that there was a need to *adjust* to changes in postwar American life. In back to basics rhetoric, cultural change was to be resisted, not accommodated—Liberty Hill, remember, not blackboard jungle. Hence, for basic education proponents, the philosophy of getting "adjusted" became synonymous with feebly embracing a society that had changed for the worse. "Adjustment" to postwar life meant losing one's individuality in a new age of conformity. "Adjustment" meant

¹⁸ On the life adjustment movement, see Kliebard and Cremin, *op cit.*

¹⁹ Kliebard, 226. One contemporary critic described life adjustment as "a school of thought which seemed to believe that teacher's job was not so much to teach history or algebra, as to prepare students to live happily ever after." "Flapdoodle," *Time*, 19 September 1949, 64.

emasculatation in a postwar culture that offered no viable models of masculinity. And it meant replacing one's inner-directedness with a servile dependence on specialists during an orgiastic era of expertise. Because it articulated such deep-seeded anxieties about more than just schooling in the 1950s, the back to basics movement offers an important window onto cultural change and cultural resistance in the postwar era. Indeed, the movement can be read as a kind of social referendum on the various "adjustments" Americans were making to life in the fifties. And one of the most conspicuous cultural changes that back to basics advocates resisted was the new cult of expertise that seemed to pervade postwar society.

Education in the Age of Experts

Scholars have characterized the postwar era as the "age of the expert," suggesting that Americans encountered, and widely embraced, a growing cast of experts in their lives after World War II.²⁰ From the scientists who brought the U.S. into the atomic age, to the social scientists who helped shaped public policy, to the self-help gurus who serviced an expansively "therapeutic culture," to the expert managers who swelled the ranks of the middle class, a profusion of experts secured respected if not lucrative roles in postwar American society. The historian Elaine Tyler May has even suggested that a

²⁰ See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Frank Newman, "The Era of Expertise: The Growth, The Spread and Ultimately the Decline of the National Commitment to the Concept of the Highly Trained Expert, 1945 to 1970" (Ph.D. diss, Stanford, 1981).

"faith in expertise" prevailed in the 1950s: "When the experts spoke, postwar Americans listened."²¹

Of course, America's alleged love affair with the expert did not suddenly begin in the fifties. The "expert" has been a prevalent figure throughout American history; intellectuals, scientists, managers, counselors—all have been viewed as experts in their respective fields. However, in the 20th century, professionally trained experts increasingly influenced the course of American social, economic, and political life.²² For instance, the progressive era spawned an intense faith in science to solve social problems, facilitating the rapid proliferation of reform-minded experts at the turn of the century. In the 1920s, efficiency experts taught industries how to incorporate the cost-saving principles of Taylorism and scientific management. In the 1930s, FDR's "brain trust" became the expert architects of the New Deal. But it was World War II that significantly expanded "the number and roles of highly trained experts in American life".²³ Experts had played a crucial role in the war, especially in terms of weapons technology, and after 1945, there was an emerging national consensus that the U.S. needed as many experts as it could possibly train and employ. According to Frank Newman, in his study of the "era

²¹ May, 26-27.

²² For various perspectives on the rise of the expert in the 20th century, see Raymond Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Martha Banta, *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Mark Smith, *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate Over Objectivity and Purpose* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press); and Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963).

²³ Newman, 1.

of expertise," the trained expert gained a "dominant position" in 1950s America, even replacing "that persistent American hero, the self-made man, in public esteem."²⁴

There is certainly evidence to support the claim that the fifties was an age of experts. For one, a glance at nonfiction books sales from the postwar years reveals a flourishing market for expert advice and information. For instance, Dr. Spock's *Baby and Child Care*, published in 1946, went on to sell 22 million copies over the next twenty-five years.²⁵ Sociologists David Riesman and William Whyte both reached a popular readership with their respective studies of American character, *The Lonely Crowd* and *The Organization Man*. At 800-plus pages, Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* was a surprise bestseller, as was his subsequent report on the human female. Self-help specialist Norman Vincent Peale also struck a consumer chord with *A Guide to Confident Living* and *The Power of Positive Thinking*.²⁶

Expert counsel similarly poured from the federal government in the postwar period. The Federal Civil Defense Administration, for instance, offered expert advice for handling a potential nuclear attack. Indeed, the atomic age spawned an army of experts who also encouraged children to "duck and cover" and persuaded anxious adults to purchase bomb shelters.²⁷ In like fashion, many social scientists, increasingly funded by the federal government, expanded their sphere of influence, impacting the direction of

²⁴ Ibid., 10.

²⁵ William M. Tuttle, Jr. "America's Children in an Era of War, Hot and Cold: The Holocaust, the Bomb, and Child Rearing in the 1940s," in Peter Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2001), 26.

²⁶ Information on best sellers from Alice Payne Hackett, *70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1967).

²⁷ On the Federal Civil Defense Administration and other atomic age experts, see May, op. cit., Laura McEnany, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton:

military research, Cold War policy, and even the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision.²⁸

Educational experts also abounded in the 1950s. Institutions like Columbia Teachers College trained scores of educational leaders and curriculum specialists. Organizations like the NEA's Educational Policies Commission greatly influenced decision making on the national level, and it spearheaded the life adjustment movement. The establishment of the Educational Testing Service in 1948 signified a growing faith in expert measurement tools like the S.A.T.²⁹ However, the proliferation of educational experts in the postwar period was not a new development. For nearly fifty years, educators had been nurturing a more professional ethos. At the turn of the century, during the progressive movement, teachers colleges made more concerted efforts to recruit and train expert administrators, teaching and learning specialists, and guidance counselors.³⁰ In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a distinct turn toward efficiency and expertise in education, particularly in areas such as school management and curriculum development. Interestingly enough, educators had cultivated this more professional ethos

Princeton University Press, 2000), and Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

²⁸ See Herman, *op. cit.*, and Terence Ball, "The Politics of Social Science in Postwar America," in Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

²⁹ On the history of the Educational Testing Service, See Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

³⁰ In 1910, for example, Columbia Teachers College issued only seventy three graduate degrees in education. In 1924, however, it conferred 939 degrees, 390 of which went to administrators. Callahan, 214.

largely in response to lay critics of the early 1900s who had complained that the field of education was lacking in expertise.³¹

By the 1950s, however, lay critics were charging that education had become *too obsessed* with professionalism and expertise. In fact, a central tenet of the back to basics movement was that educational experts were actually responsible for the postwar crisis in education. In basic education rhetoric, the experts were the ones who were mismanaging the schools and dumbing down the curriculum. Even more egregiously, experts were disparaging the layman, stubbornly refusing to allow parents and concerned citizens to participate in educational decision making. For basic education advocates, the common man—not to mention common sense—were both threatened by the postwar cult of expertise. In other words, the fifties may have been an "age of the expert," but in actuality not all experts inspired the same "faith" Elaine Tyler May suggests they did. Indeed, when educational experts "spoke," postwar Americans did not always lend an ear. Certainly, back to basics advocates did not care to listen.

A Layman's Attempt

In a 1957 speech to a "lay group interested in education," a charter member of the Council for Basic Education recommended four points that citizens should consider whenever they evaluated educational decisions that affected the public schools:

1. Be highly skeptical of expert knowledge when applied to the enormous complexities of human experience.

³¹ On the rise of the educational expert in 20th century America, see Callahan, *op cit*, as well as David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), esp. parts IV and V.

2. Since experts are the only persons who can contribute certain things to civilization, learn how to estimate the worth of the expert.
3. Do this by asking about the limits of applicability of the concepts which give structure to the knowledge the expert professes.
4. Do not expect knowledge to be a substitute for good sense until the limitations of the knowledge are quite well understood.³²

The Council for Basic Education must have considered this rubric sound advice, as the guidelines were reprinted in the February 1958 issue of the group's *Bulletin*. CBE co-founder and *Bulletin* editor Mortimer Smith quoted the four points in his article, "The Seven Deadly Dogmas of Elementary Education," a piece which expressed profound skepticism toward educational experts. In the essay, Smith assailed professional educators who promulgated a "great orthodoxy of thought and practice" that was "flagrantly unscientific." He maintained that the "dogma" of these "self-established 'experts'" was derived from "much dubious psychological and sociological interpretation, exaggeration, and naivete." Further, this expert knowledge was "offensive to common sense" (7). As he had done in much of his writing on education over the past decade, Smith enclosed the word expert in quotation marks, indicating he used the term loosely.

Mortimer Smith, author of several trenchant books on education and active leader of the CBE, was one of the most prominent critics of educational experts in the fifties. He defined educational experts as anyone affiliated with the National Education Association, the U.S. Office of Education, state departments of education, or teachers colleges. He typically linked these agencies together, referring to them as an "empire," a

³² Mortimer Smith, ed., *A Decade of Comment on Education, 1956-1966: Selections from the Bulletin of the Council for Basic Education* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1966), 13.

"powerful junto," and a "controlling combine of educationists."³³ Smith regularly bemoaned the "stranglehold" these educational experts maintained over teacher certification guidelines and academic standards. What's worse, Smith argued, these so-called experts kept themselves above reproach: any layperson who dared to criticize the public schools was immediately dismissed as either an "ignoramus" or an enemy of democracy.

To reach out to these disenfranchised citizens, Smith self-consciously fashioned himself as a layman speaking to laymen, and as a debunker of the expert educationist. His first book on education, *And Madly Teach* (1949), was subtitled, "A Layman Looks at Public Education." In his follow-up work, *The Diminished Mind: A Study of Planned Mediocrity in Our Public Schools* (1954), he referred to his earlier book as a "layman's attempt" to critique the foundations of contemporary schooling, and offered his latest monograph as a "sort of spotting service for parents and layman" to help them recognize flaws in the educational system.³⁴ In like manner, much of Smith's work for the CBE—especially as editor of the *Bulletin*—was designed to arm laypeople with the knowledge they would need to take on the educational experts. To that end, Smith authored a *Citizen's Manual for Public Schools: A Guide for School Board Members and Other Laymen*, published by the CBE in 1959.

Smith himself was not a professional educator, as he repeatedly made clear to his readers. In 1933, at the age of 27, he left a brief career as a businessman to become a self-employed writer. He wrote several amateur histories before turning to the subject of

³³ Mortimer Smith, *The Diminished Mind: A Study of Planned Mediocrity in Our Public Schools* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1954), 34, 62.

education in 1949. His qualifications for approaching this topic, he claimed, were simple: he and his wife had both served on local school boards; his children in the aggregate had spent over twenty years in the public schools; and he belonged to the PTA. In Smith's view, informed citizens such as himself were just as qualified to discuss educational philosophy as the "coterie of experts" who had taken over U.S. public schools.³⁵ It was time, declared Smith, for the layman to rise up.

By employing such rhetoric, the back to basics movement fostered a cult of the layman that was distinctly opposed to the postwar cult of expertise. In this alternative worldview, experts *caused* problems rather than solved them. Self-reliant laymen were the only ones who could effect meaningful change in the schools, and, by extension, in society. This particular sentiment was articulated even more forcefully in a 1955 bestseller by another basic education advocate, Rudolf Flesch. Indeed, *Why Johnny Can't Read And What You Can Do About It* took Mortimer Smith's attack on experts a step further, suggesting that their dominance was not just a threat to American schools, but to basic American cultural values.

Why Can't Johnny Read?

Why Johnny Can't Read was nothing short of a mid-decade cultural event, one that showcased the tensions between lay critics and educational experts and also demonstrated the growing popularity of the back to basics movement. Both its author

³⁴ Ibid., 10.

³⁵ Smith, *And Madly Teach*, 4.

and its thesis became the subject of massive media commentary. Magazines including *Time*, *The Ladies Home Journal*, *Catholic World*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, and *The New Republic* all weighed in on the book.³⁶ Flesch claimed that American schools were teaching reading "all wrong," and he proposed phonics as the best method for instruction. Children were being taught to recognize and memorize whole words, when instead, he argued, they should be taught how to sound and spell these words out. According to Flesch, the "word guessing" approach currently in vogue was creating a generation of incompetent readers. Moreover, this problem was being perpetuated by educational researchers who were fiercely anti-phonics. Flesch encouraged parents—his target audience—to take a side in the "deadly warfare between entrenched 'experts' and the advocates of common sense in reading."³⁷

Not surprisingly, Flesch's work angered many educators, and a full-scale attack on *Why Johnny Can't Read* was launched in the professional organs. The *NEA Journal* explained "Why Mr. Flesch is Wrong," and it questioned Flesch's use of evidence in an article titled "Why Can't Rudy Read?" *National Parent-Teacher* scoffed at Flesch and cited expert studies that showed children were actually attaining reading levels as high, or higher, than levels reached twenty years ago. *The Reading Teacher* even devoted an

³⁶ "Why Johnny Can't Read," *Time* 14 March 1955: 72, "How Johnny Reads," *Time*, 20 June 1955: 55, and "Why Johnny Can/Can't Read," *Time*, 15 August 1955: 28; Dorothy Thompson, "Why Make it Harder for Johnny to Read?" *Ladies Home Journal*, July 1956: 11+; Rev. of *Why Johnny Can't Read*, *Catholic World*, December 1955: 182; Frank Jennings, "That Johnny May Read," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 4 February 1956: 7+ and "Teaching Johnny to Read," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 30 July 1955: 20-21+; Lois M. Rettie, "The Devil, According to Flesch," *New Republic*, 13 June 1955: 21-22.

³⁷ Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It* (New York: Harper, 1955), 10.

entire issue to the "Battle of Phonics" that included the article, "An Analysis of Propaganda Techniques Used in *Why Johnny Can't Read*."³⁸

Flesch's book obviously struck a nerve in the mid-fifties. Without question, his view on phonics caused much of the controversy. But I would suggest that *Why Johnny Can't Read* also generated so much attention—from experts and laymen alike—because it tapped into a more complex set of cultural anxieties in the postwar era.

Flesch began his book with a swift jab at experts and a direct appeal to the layman: "Just as war is 'too serious a matter to be left to the generals,' so, I think, the teaching of reading is too important to be left to the educators. This book, therefore, is not addressed to teachers and teachers' college professors but to fathers and mothers. I tried... to write a book they can use to help their children read."³⁹ Like Mortimer Smith, Flesch wanted to provide a practical resource to laymen that could empower them to resist the experts. However, this was not an easy task, as Flesch acknowledged. After all, "our teachers are carefully coached in what to answer parents who complain about the abandonment of phonics."⁴⁰ Parents needed to understand the benefits of phonics thoroughly in order to challenge their children's teachers—teachers who have been "coached," of course, by educational experts in teachers colleges.

Like other basic education advocates, Flesch wanted to see families take a more active role in the education of America's young people. He assured his readers that

³⁸ Arthur I. Gates, "Why Mr. Flesch is Wrong," *NEA Journal*, September 1955: 332-334; Harold Bienvenu and Kenneth Martyn, "Why Can't Rudy Read?" *NEA Journal*, November 1955: 499-500; Paul Witty, "Answers to Questions about Reading," *National Parent-Teacher*, September 1955: 10-13; F. Duane Lamkin, "An Analysis of Propaganda Techniques Used in *Why Johnny Can't Read*," *The Reading Teacher*, 9:2 (December 1955): 107-117.

³⁹ Flesch, ix.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

"private, individual tutoring at home" was the "most speedy and efficient method of teaching there is." Indeed, this kind of home schooling was more in line with America's cultural heritage. According to Flesch, teaching children phonics at home "is wholly in the American tradition. It's what the pioneers did, when there were no schools for hundreds of miles around." After all, "Lincoln in his log cabin must have learned that way; so did his successor Andrew Johnson, the illiterate tailor's apprentice who taught himself to read when he was ten." Clearly, Flesch's argument about phonics was couched in the American tradition of self-reliance. If the experts at school were failing you, it just made sense to do it yourself. He even conjured an image of a world in which experts were simply not needed: "You paint your living room, you lay tiles in your kitchen, you do dozens of things that used to be left to professional experts. Why not take on instruction in reading?"⁴¹ The image here, significantly, was not of an "age of experts," but of an age of independent "pioneers," of self-trusting laymen.

In *Why Johnny Can't Read*, the threat to America's children was not just an educational one. To Flesch, failure to teach reading through phonics could have more dire consequences, for "there is a connection between phonics and democracy—a fundamental connection." Without further explanation, Flesch simply avowed that "equal opportunity for all is one of the inalienable rights, and the words method interferes with that right." Such soaring if unsubstantiated rhetoric characterized many of Flesch's asides in *Why Johnny Can't Read*. For instance, the word method had "alienated most of our children from the books that English-speaking children and adolescents have read and enjoyed for many generations." Boys suffered from higher rates of illiteracy than girls

⁴¹ Ibid., 112, 110-111, 130.

because "girls are usually a little less revolted by the stupidity of the word method than boys." The "American dream" was "beginning to vanish in a country where the public schools are falling down on the job." Too many parents today "know that something terrible has happened to their most precious dreams and aspirations, that something, somewhere, is very, very wrong."⁴²

Like many basic education advocates, Flesch linked his criticism of education to a much broader cultural critique. *Why Johnny Can't Read* was ostensibly a treatise on phonics, but it also found fault with a wayward postwar society. It invoked a simpler past—the days of pioneers and log cabins. It lamented the loss of cultural heritage—children were no longer reading the "English-speaking" classics of generations past. It warned that America's young men were at risk because of the "stupidity" of the word method—this was, after all, a problem for "Johnny." It mourned an American dream that was fading—in postwar society, something "terrible" had happened. In the end, experts bore the blame: the educationists had failed America's children, and their theories had done "untold harm to our younger generation."⁴³

In other words, *Why Johnny Can't Read* was more than just a primer for parents on phonics. It was also a judgment on cultural change in the postwar era. Rudolf Flesch essentially offered readers a guide to the most dangerous "life adjustments" that were taking place in the 1950s. To reverse course, bring education back into the home, fight to preserve cultural traditions, and pay more attention to America's young boys. In the final analysis, getting back to the basics meant liberation from the overabundance of experts

⁴² Ibid., 130, 88, 114, 133.

⁴³ Ibid., 133.

who were increasingly telling people how to live their lives. But in basic education rhetoric, experts were not the only threat to the younger generation. If America was ever going to look like Liberty Hill again, it would have to oppose two other cultural developments of the 1950s: the postwar turn to conformity, and the emasculation of the American male.

The Masculine Mystique and the Age of Conformity

Throughout the 1950s, many social critics fretted over the imperiled state of masculinity in America. Concerned in particular that the white, middle class male was going "soft," commentators blamed the emasculating effects of suburban living and white collar employment for making men domesticated and conformist. The popular image of the "organization man" came to represent this enfeebled brand of postwar maleness: Formerly independent-minded American men, back from the war, were now morphing into other-directed corporate clones lacking in toughness. White collar employment merely offered "a secure job, not a vital role," writes Susan Faludi in *Stiffed*, her study of postwar masculinity, and after World War II, there seemed to be no clearly defined "mission to manhood."⁴⁴ To contemporary critics, conformity characterized the social ethos of this new era, not self-reliance, and this ethos seemed to be especially troublesome for men. As Barbara Ehrenreich has noted, "in the fifties, 'conformity'

⁴⁴ Faludi writes that middle management was just a wasteland "filled with functionaries... who suspected they weren't really needed at all." See Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1999), 29.

became the code word for male discontent—the masculine equivalent of what Betty Friedan would soon describe as 'the problem without a name.'⁴⁵

Another common scapegoat for the masculinity crisis was the overaffectionate mother, who was supposedly dominating the home and raising a generation of sissies. According to the historian William Tuttle, child care professionals had begun advocating a more permissive, rather than coercive, approach to child rearing starting in the mid-1930s, and the wild success of Dr. Spock's 1946 guide, *Baby and Child Care*, seemed to signify that the pendulum had "swung to permissiveness" by the start of the postwar era.⁴⁶ Yet this more liberal approach to parenting drew the ire of critics, who lambasted mothers for overindulging their sons. For example, the writer Philip Wylie, in his oft-cited tome *A Generation of Vipers* (1942), complained about the social disease known as "momism": "Mom is everywhere and everything and damned near everybody."⁴⁷ In a 1958 *Playboy* article, Wylie similarly decried the "womanization" of America.⁴⁸ In the fifties, writes Ehrenreich, "a whole posse-full of angry male writers took out after the American woman; if it wasn't the corporation that had emasculated American men, it must have been her."⁴⁹ In light of the Cold War, overbearing mothers were even deemed a threat to national security. To faultfinders, it appeared that America's feminized sons were ill-suited to wage the new global fight against communism. Cold warriors wondered why nearly forty percent of men called under the military draft during the

⁴⁵ Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment* (New York: Anchor Press, 1983), 30.

⁴⁶ Tuttle, 26.

⁴⁷ Philip Wylie, *A Generation of Vipers* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942), 187.

⁴⁸ Wylie, "The Womanization of America," *Playboy*, September 1958, qtd. in Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 255.

⁴⁹ Ehrenreich, 37.

fifties were declared ineligible, and why the boys who did make it to Korea seemed to cave too easily to communist brainwashing.⁵⁰ Might mom be the problem?

Critics also fretted about the impact homosexuality might be having on traditional notions of masculinity. After all, the 1948 Kinsey Report found that a third of white American males had engaged in at least one same-sex orgasmic experience.⁵¹ Indeed, a preoccupation with sexual orthodoxy attended the male culture of anxiety in the postwar era. The rise of the national security state during the Cold War only tended to aggravate concerns that homosexuality was both socially deviant and politically subversive. The resultant purges of some four hundred real or suspected homosexuals from the U.S. State Department between 1947 and 1953 constituted what historians have called the "Lavender Scare" of the 1950s. According to Robert Dean, this "Cold War pervert panic" gave rise to a newly gendered political discourse that was calculated to "certify respectable masculinity and sexual orthodoxy as the basis for political legitimacy and participation in the agencies of government."⁵² The challenges of the Cold War demanded tough, common sensical leaders, not effeminate elitists. But where were the cultural role models for these rugged types?

In *Manhood in America*, the sociologist Michael Kimmel demonstrates that wildly contradictory cultural messages about masculinity circulated in the 1950s.⁵³ Indeed, popular culture only seemed to perpetuate anxieties about the masculinity crisis.

⁵⁰ Donald J. Mrozek, "The Cult and Ritual of Toughness in Cold War America," in Ray B. Browne, ed., *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 185.

⁵¹ See Alfred Kinsey et al, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948).

⁵² Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 164.

At one end of the spectrum was the *Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, the film and best-selling novel about a discontented organization man living in the suburbs. Then there was Willy Loman, doomed protagonist of Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, who had neither a secure job nor a vital role to play in society. Or the feeble father in the 1955 film *Rebel Without a Cause*, portrayed by Jim Backus, who wore an apron around the house and seemed incapable of providing his troubled son with the necessary fatherly guidance. In short, these depictions suggested that domesticated men were ineffectual, effeminate, and even emotionally and mentally disturbed. In fact, as Peter Biskind points out in his study of postwar films, many of the male film stars of the era—who had formerly assumed the roles of proud, stoic, individualistic men in the 1930s and 1940s—now played "neurotics or psychotics" in the fifties.⁵⁴

On the opposite end of the spectrum from the "organization man" was the image of the bad boy, the rebel without a cause. This image was widely commodified in the postwar era, producing what the historian Van Gosse has labeled a "cult of marginal men."⁵⁵ From Marlon Brando's biker character in *The Wild One*, to the juvenile delinquents of *The Blackboard Jungle*, to Jack Kerouac and the Beats, to Elvis and his pelvis, the rebel's ethos of nonconformity contrasted sharply with the contained predictability of the middle-class organization man. Still other contradictory models of masculinity circulated in the postwar era. For instance, westerns enjoyed great popularity in the fifties, flooding the market on television (five of the ten top-rated TV programs in

⁵³ See esp. Kimmel, ch. 7, "Temporary About Myself: White-Collar Conformists and Suburban Playboys, 1945-1960," 223-258.

⁵⁴ Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 252.

1957 were westerns), in movie theaters, and on bookstands.⁵⁶ With their cast of rugged male individualists taming the wild frontier, westerns offered an escapist antidote to the pathos of the domesticated male. And with the launch of *Playboy* magazine in 1953, yet another image of masculinity surfaced: the unmarried man who liked "jazz, foreign films, Ivy League clothes, gin and tonic, and pretty girls."⁵⁷ In other words, the male as sophisticated consumer and domesticated urban bachelor, living the good life in "an apartment with mood music rather than a ranch house with barbecue pit."⁵⁸ And yet the rebel, the cowboy, and the playboy were all as problematic as the organization man in terms of masculine role models; certainly none of these types emerged as the hegemonic image of maleness in the fifties.⁵⁹ After all, the rebel was ultimately portrayed as immature and irresponsible; the cowboy as a mere curio of history; the playboy as just an unmarried version of the organization man, still tethered to consumer and corporate culture.

In the fifties, then, there seemed to be no simple cultural formula for how to be a "real" man. How did this perceived crisis in masculinity influence educational debates? If the "trappings of gender failure were all around us" in the 1950s, as Kimmel argues, then how might these gendered anxieties about conformity and domesticity have affected

⁵⁵ Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the Making of the New Left* (New York: Verso, 1993) 57.

⁵⁶ Kimmel, 252.

⁵⁷ Hugh Hefner, editorial, *Playboy*, June 1957, qtd. in David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 574-75.

⁵⁸ Ehrenreich, 44.

⁵⁹ Bryce Traister makes a similar point in "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies," *American Quarterly* 52:1 (June 2000), 274-304. According to Traister, the 1950s was a "time when, far from supplying a stable image of hegemonic male dominance, the regime of the 'domesticated male' contributed to a male culture of anxiety and resistance that masqueraded as the fulfilled suburban corporate man," 296.

the cultural conversation about basic education?⁶⁰ As it turns out, back to basics advocates forged a caustic critique of the life adjustment movement that resonated strongly with the male culture of anxiety. In fact, intersecting education with conformity and emasculation became a standard rhetorical tactic for a variety of school critics who were determined to expose the deficiencies of America's "soft" curriculum.

Reforming the "Soft" Curriculum

David Riesman seemed to launch the opening salvo on education and conformity with his 1950 sociological study, *The Lonely Crowd*. Riesman and his team of researchers famously charted the rise of "other-directed" agents of character formation in American society. The school was identified as one of these agents, for U.S. education had supposedly undergone a shift away from intellectual training toward social performance. According to Riesman, schools were increasingly training children to be "other-directed" rather than "inner-directed." The only way a child's inner "gyroscope" could be set spinning on its own self-reliant path was through a program of intellectual training: the student should be taught that "what matters is what he can accomplish, not how nice his smile or how cooperative his attitude."⁶¹ Such training would help young people begin the "internal production" of their own character. Yet, in postwar schools, the now other-directed child was being taught "to take his place in a society where the concern of the group is less with what it produces than with its internal group relations." Teachers now valued students' "smile" and "cooperative attitude" more than what they

⁶⁰ Kimmel, 237.

could accomplish academically. In fact, noted Riesman, many contemporary educational methods tended to "thwart individuality rather than advance and protect it."⁶²

Although Riesman's analysis was not necessarily a gendered one—he never overtly equated other-directedness with emasculation—his argument about conformity in the schools helped to shape an evolving critique of life adjustment education. And as this critique took form, basic education advocates increasingly invoked gender anxieties in their pronouncements about schools. Consequently, life adjustment's emphasis on social skills, domestic training, and use of leisure time came to be seen as not just other-directed, but as feminine.

Take, for example, Vladimir Nabokov's caricature of America's life adjustment movement in his 1955 novel *Lolita*. In one scene, Humbert Humbert visits Lolita's progressive all-girls school, hoping to find a rigorous curriculum but discovering instead that the institution teaches girls "not to spell very well, but to smell very well." The headmistress, taking Humbert on a tour, assures him that the school is concerned with the "adjustment of the child to group life. That is why we stress the four D's: Dramatics, Dance, Debating and Dating." She claims that teachers have done away with the "irrelevant topics" that had traditionally been taught, such as Shakespeare and astronomy, and replaced them with the skills the girls would need "in managing their lives" and the

⁶¹ David Riesman, with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961/1989) (orig 1950), 59.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 65, 60.

lives of their husbands. "For the modern pre-adolescent child," says the headmistress, "medieval dates are of less vital value than weekend ones."⁶³

Nabokov's satirical take on life adjustment tapped into broader cultural concerns that the movement, whether implemented in same-sex or co-ed schools, was too focused on teaching overtly feminine life skills—skills that would primarily be of use in managing the home. That advocates of life adjustment were reveling in the fact that more boys were now taking cooking and homemaking classes made it that much easier for critics to shape a gendered critique of the movement as soft, feminine, and emasculating.⁶⁴ Foremost among these critics was Arthur Bestor.

Bestor, a University of Illinois history professor, was one of the best known school critics of the 1950s. A founding member of the Council for Basic Education, he appeared frequently on radio and television programs, and his widely-read publications included the books *Educational Wastelands* (1953) and *The Restoration of Learning* (1955), as well as a series of articles for *Good Housekeeping* in 1958. One of Bestor's standard lines of critique proposed that progressive education was really *regressive* education because it created perpetual children rather than maturing young adults. Genuine education, according to Bestor, was intellectual training. He claimed that life adjustment programs were anti-intellectual, and that they "bred servile dependence" while undermining self-reliance. Life skills training was unnecessary in public schools;

⁶³ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Vintage, 1997) (orig. 1955), 177-78. Though it first came out in 1955, *Lolita* was not published in the United States until August 1958.

⁶⁴ For example, see Hazel Anthony, "Boys, Too, are Learning Homemaking," *NEA Journal* 46:9 (December 1957), 581-82.

as Bestor pointed out, "The West was not settled by men and women who had taken courses in 'How to be a pioneer.'"⁶⁵

Bestor also led the charge against the educational experts who promoted life adjustment. Like Mortimer Smith, he lumped the National Education Association, the U.S. Office of Education, teachers colleges, and state departments of education all together, referring to them as an "interlocking directorate of professional educationists." This "directorate" was training an army of teachers who displayed "timidity, self-distrust, and conformity" because they uncritically brought the life adjustment movement into the public schools. Bestor even characterized the American teachers college as an "overprotective mother," and U.S. teachers as her "children." According to Bestor, these children "have been spoon-fed" by their mother for so long that "they dare not begin to live until they have received detailed instructions from her on all their most personal affairs."⁶⁶

Bestor clearly invoked tropes of the postwar masculinity crisis in his critique of the life adjustment movement. His diatribes were peppered with references to the rugged pioneer West, when self-reliance was the rule of the day. He assailed progressive education for breeding conformity and "servile dependence." He also asserted that the "soft" life adjustment curriculum was being delivered by teachers who could not break free from their overprotective mother, the progressive teachers college—apparently, the scourge of momism had even afflicted education in the 1950s.

⁶⁵ Arthur Bestor, *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1953), 64.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 121, 63.

While Bestor tended to harp on the softness of America's public school curriculum, other commentators worried about the feminization of the classroom in the wake of the life adjustment movement. The journal *School and Society*, alarmed that the number of male college graduates trained to teach in elementary and secondary education was decreasing in the early fifties, expressed concern that schools were "losing the 'man' in their manpower."⁶⁷ It probably did not help when *The Saturday Evening Post* announced in 1956, "These days mother is teaching school."⁶⁸ Might the turn to life adjustment be dissuading male teachers from the profession? To be sure, around seventy five percent of teachers in elementary and secondary levels combined were female during the postwar era.⁶⁹ However, this ratio was not at all exceptional; women teachers had been in the majority for nearly one hundred years in public education, and the percentage of female teachers in the fifties was actually lower than in the early 1900s, when women comprised some eighty five percent of all public school teachers.⁷⁰ But anxieties about the "soft" curriculum reinvigorated debates about the feminization of teaching in the fifties, and observers called for the infusion of more manly men to teach a more manly curriculum.

For example, in October 1956, *The Saturday Evening Post* profiled the life of a male elementary school teacher named Robert Haley. Titled, "Don't Call Me a Sissy!," the article reports that Haley is a 6'1" former college football player who had flown B-24s

⁶⁷ Ray C Maul, "Are Schools Losing the 'Man' in their Manpower?" *School and Society*, 13 June 1953, 369-372.

⁶⁸ Alice Lake, "Look Who's Teaching School," *Saturday Evening Post*, 31 March 1956, 38+.

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "Progress of Public Education in the United States, 1957-58" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), 20.

⁷⁰ David Tyack and Elisabeth Hanson, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Public Schools* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992), 163.

in World War II. He enjoys charcoal-broiled steaks, Hemingway, the New York Yankees, and films starring Gina Lollobrigida. Haley is proud of his service to the elementary school, and he encourages more men to enter the profession. He contends that men are better qualified to teach sports, mechanics, and science, all subjects that fascinate young boys in particular. He argues that male teachers are "generally firmer disciplinarians than women," and suggests that a man's "size and gruffness of voice, plus a fatherly no-nonsense attitude, often suffice to keep children in line." To prove this, Haley relates a story about a female teacher in a nearby elementary school who was having trouble disciplining her pupils. One day three of the biggest boys in her class were "prowling" the schoolyard looking for trouble, and they challenged the only male teacher in the school to a fight. Haley notes that this man was a veteran of the Battle of the Bulge, who, realizing that his "integrity as a teacher" was at stake, proceeded to remove his coat and wrestle the three boys to the ground. The principal of the school, so impressed by this move, ended up hiring a man to replace the female teacher who had been struggling with her rowdy classroom. At the end of the article, Haley brushes off those who think teaching is "sissy work," and even suggests that male teachers could save young boys from becoming too soft. He proudly reports that his students were eager to have a man for a teacher, and that a male student once told him, "I felt like a sissy until I got into your class."⁷¹

If more men could not be enticed to teach, then at minimum female teachers could try to be more firm and raise their standards for academic excellence. At least, that

⁷¹ Robert M. Haley, as told to Andrew Hamilton, "Don't Call Me a Sissy!" *Saturday Evening Post*, 6 October 1956, pp. 31, 105, 106.

seemed to be the object lesson of *Good Morning, Miss Dove*. In her 1954 novel, Frances Gray Patton notes that Miss Dove's pedagogy had not changed in all the years she taught—and this was a boon to the youth of Cedar Grove. "Occasionally a group of progressive mothers would contemplate organized revolt," writes Patton. "'She's been teaching too long,' they would cry. 'Her pedagogy hasn't changed since we were in Cedar Grove. She rules the children through fear!'"⁷² But none of the mothers ever has the courage to confront Miss Dove about this issue, and eventually they conclude that the aged pedagogue is in the right after all. In other words, "progressive" mothers tend to be enamored of educational fads, but the best teachers resist these curricular trends and stick to the basics.

So what are Miss Dove's "basics"? Dove believes that the "first duty" of any teacher is to "preserve order." To that end, she positions her desk on an elevated platform so she can oversee her students—even though this seating arrangement was "deplored by modern educators who seek to introduce equality into the teacher-student relation." Miss Dove's students learn through rote memorization and strict discipline. They are "marshalled and trained for life as green soldiers are trained in field maneuvers for the reality of battle."⁷³

And how did the products of this "hard" curriculum turn out? Certainly, the boys learn what it means to be masculine in Miss Dove's classroom. In one telling scene, a Cedar Grove alumnus sends a letter to his younger brother that is read aloud in Miss Dove's classroom. In the letter, Randy recounts his experiences in World War II. When

⁷² Patton, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 139, 21, 41.

his navy ship was sunk in the Pacific theater, Randy survived his days in the water by thinking about the lessons of Miss Dove:

When I was bobbing up and down like Crusoe on my raft, what do you guess I thought about? It wasn't any pin-up girl. It was Miss Dove. I thought about the fishy stare she used to give us when we needed a drink of water. So to make my supply hold out I played I was back in the geography room. And even after the water was gone I kept playing. I'd think, "The bell is bound to ring in a few minutes. You can last a little longer." It took the same kinds of guts in the Pacific it did in school. Tell that to the guys in Cedar Grove.⁷⁴

Randy adds that he was scared when the "little yellow insects from hell" dive-bombed his ship, but not much more afraid than the time Miss Dove caught him bragging about how he could beat her up. "'I didn't run that time,' I told myself 'so I won't run now.'" In short, Randy's masculine courage was forged in Liberty Hill, at Cedar Grove Elementary, in Miss Dove's no-nonsense classroom.

If school critics like Arthur Bestor launched a series of direct attacks on the "softness" of life adjustment education, then popular cultural texts like *Lolita*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Lonely Crowd*, and *Good Morning, Miss Dove* indirectly reinforced the message that modern, progressive education was somehow emasculating and conformist. If America did not get back to the basics, its children would become other-directed sissies who were ill-prepared to wage war on America's enemies. This expansive cultural critique of the life adjustment movement seemed to preordain an eventual change in national education policy. But what would be the ultimate catalyst for this change?

⁷⁴ Ibid., 136-7.

"Schoolboys Point Up a U.S. Weakness"

Criticism of America's "soft" curriculum came to dominate the public conversation about schooling in the 1950s, especially as the back to basics movement gained momentum at mid-decade. However, the steady stream of attacks on life adjustment did not lead to any substantial education reform until later in the decade, when a Cold War crisis shocked the nation into action. That crisis arrived in the shape of a 184-pound Soviet satellite named Sputnik. The Soviet Union launched Sputnik into space on October 4, 1957, and the event created an immediate uproar. Some observers compared Sputnik to Pearl Harbor in terms of its impact on the American psyche, and one senator even called on President Eisenhower to declare a "week of shame and danger."⁷⁵ Americans had always presumed technological superiority to the Russians, but with Sputnik, the Soviets had beaten the United States into space and, more startlingly, demonstrated that they had the potential to send a nuclear warhead to a distant target. A public consensus quickly emerged that U.S. education shouldered much of the blame for America's defeat in the Cold War space race.

The Sputnik crisis appeared to generate even more educational debates that were fueled by postwar gender anxieties. For instance, the day after Sputnik was launched, the CBS newsman Walter Cronkite interviewed a male student on the steps of a San Francisco area middle school. Cronkite observed that the boy was enrolled in a co-ed

⁷⁵ Barbara Barksdale Clowse, *Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and National Defense Education Act of 1958* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 8.

cooking class, but not in any mathematics classes.⁷⁶ The implication here was that America's students were well-trained to manage the homefront, but ill-prepared to serve the homeland in the midst of a Cold War. Over the next year, the course-taking patterns of American youth became of great interest to the media as public sentiments toward life adjustment grew harsher. For example, in the spring of 1958, *Life* magazine ran a four-part series on the "Crisis in Education," and one article unfavorably compared American education with Soviet education. Titled "Schoolboys Point Up a U.S. Weakness," the piece profiled a day in the life of two sixteen-year-olds, Alexei and Stephen. The Russian Alexei was described as "hard-working" and "aggressive," a student who was academically two years ahead of American teen Stephen thanks to "intensive" days spent studying "formidable" subjects, including physics, chemistry, machinery, and astronomy. Stephen, on the other hand, was described as "well-adjusted." He pursued more "relaxed studies"—he started his day with a typing course—and seemed most interested in extracurricular activities, such as his after school "Rockin' Cha" dance class at the Y.M.C.A.⁷⁷

The ongoing mass media coverage of the school crisis, combined with the recent embarrassment of Sputnik, further heightened public debates over the merits of progressive education and provoked calls for immediate reform. The middle-school boy enrolled in a cooking class, and the comparison of hard-working Alexei with well-adjusted Stephen, seemed to offer concrete evidence that the U.S. curriculum was indeed "soft" and full of frills. It was clear to many critics—and increasingly clear to

⁷⁶ Personal recollection, O.L. Davis, Jr., 15 October 2002.

⁷⁷ "Schoolboys Point Up U.S. Weakness," *Life*, 24 March 1958.

politicians—that American schools urgently needed to reinstate a "hard" curriculum of basic subjects, particularly in science, math, and foreign languages. Soon after Sputnik, Vice President Nixon warned Americans, "There are too many soft subjects and not enough tough, challenging topics that develop the mind. We know that a soft physical life leads to flabby muscles and poor health. A mental regime that lacks challenge leads to an underdeveloped brain and a weak intellect." Something had to be done, said Nixon, for brain power was lying "fallow," and schools were failing to prepare students for the "hard competition" and "hard realities" of life.⁷⁸

The National Defense Education Act (NDEA), signed into law by President Eisenhower in September 1958, was designed in large part to refocus schools on the "hard" subjects of math and science, which were deemed critical for national defense. Without question, the formulation of this landmark education policy was influenced by popular critiques of American education in the 1950s. Throughout the House and Senate hearings over the bill, many lawmakers insisted that the current school crisis had been caused by the weaknesses of progressive education. At one point, Arthur Bestor sent a memo to Congressmen outlining his critique of life adjustment education, and the memo struck a response chord with many legislators. Senator Strom Thurmond proposed that the nation simply eliminate progressive education from its schools rather than initiate federal aid to education. During the hearings, one Congressman even asked a witness whether "the most critical problem in the field of education today is the softness in our

⁷⁸ Richard Nixon, "A Challenge to American Education," Yeshiva University, New York, 15 December 1957, rpt. in *School and Society* 86:2127 (1 March 1958), 103, 104.

high schools... the softness of the curricula."⁷⁹ For the legislators who passed the National Defense Education Act by wide margins in both the House and Senate, the answer to this question was apparently a resounding "yes."⁸⁰

Complicating the Basics

In 1966, the Council for Basic Education published an anthology of articles from its newsletter the *Bulletin*. The collection was edited by Mortimer Smith, who had in turn edited the *Bulletin* since 1957. In his introduction to *A Decade of Comment on Education*, Smith reflected back on the demise of the life adjustment movement. Noting that this movement was at its height by the mid-fifties, Smith recalled the urgency with which he and his colleagues set out to debunk it. "The threat of this influence to genuine education seemed to call for vigorous countermoves, or at least vigorous opposition," which he claimed the CBE tried to provide in the *Bulletin*.⁸¹ Smith suggested that a "gradual change in tone and emphasis" had taken place in education over the past ten years, and while he would have liked to credit the CBE for effecting this change, he conceded that "the Sputnik scare had more to do with it." At the same time, however, he confessed to having mixed feelings about the impact of Sputnik on American education. "We were glad to see the old educational establishment, the 'interlocking directorate' of

⁷⁹ Clowse, 80, 126, 89.

⁸⁰ The NDEA increased funding for science, mathematics, and foreign language instruction in a range of educational institutions, from elementary schools to graduate universities. It also provided student loan relief for college graduates who became full-time teachers, though only if they agreed to sign a loyalty oath. Over the next six years, the NDEA distributed 8,500 graduate fellowships and 600,000 undergraduate loans. Vocational schools trained some 42,000 new technicians, and foreign language institutes turned out 17,400 teachers. The federal government gave \$290 million to states for the purpose of enhancing instruction. See Clowse, *op cit*. On NDEA's legacies, see Peter B. Dow, *Schoolhouse Politics: Lessons from the Sputnik Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

educationists, lose some of its power," he wrote. However, Smith was apprehensive of the "new establishment" that had been erected in the wake of the National Defense Education Act. This "new establishment" included a greatly empowered U.S. Office of Education, philanthropic foundations that were pouring money into higher education, and a slew of experts who were now devising and distributing curriculum using federal funds.⁸² While Smith appreciated the curricular turn back to the basics after Sputnik, he had misgivings about the enhanced role of the federal government in setting education policy.

In this sense, the National Defense Education Act proved a Pyrrhic victory for back to basics advocates. For one of their key critiques of U.S. education was that it was managed by intractable experts who governed on high from state departments of education and teachers colleges. This "interlocking directorate of educationists," as Smith and Arthur Bestor both liked to call it, had a stranglehold on educational decision making. The only way to effect real educational reform was for laymen to rise up and take back control of their local schools. Yet Sputnik had ushered in a new era of federal intervention in state and local educational issues, and, what's more, the NDEA had authorized and funded a new coterie of experts who were telling local schools how best to teach math and science. While the back to basics movement helped to discredit the "soft" curriculum by the end of the fifties, it was unable to reverse postwar America's fascination with experts.

⁸¹ Mortimer Smith, *A Decade of Comment on Education*, 3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4.

In fact, when we situate the entire basic education movement in its broader cultural context, several other tensions in "back to basics" rhetoric emerge. For one, the movement's emphasis on intellectual training for all youth sounded uncannily like the same kind of forced educational conformity that Arthur Bestor and others railed against. Labeling curricular differentiation—which was at the heart of the life adjustment philosophy—as conformist, while affirming that a one-size-fits-all curriculum was more "inner directed," seems like a difficult position to defend. Yet basic education advocates somehow managed to assure the public that curricular uniformity would foster self-reliance in young people. How? In this instance, it seems that the postwar masculinity crisis proved an opportune cultural backdrop, for it helped to focus much of the conversation on the "soft" progressive curriculum. And in the midst of the Cold War, Americans could not afford to be "soft." If intellectual training for all was the best way to toughen up our youth, then progressive methods had to go.

And yet, ironically, *intellectuals* were not necessarily described as "tough" in postwar popular discourse. As Richard Hofstadter points out in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, those individuals who had actually studied a "hard" curriculum of the basics, and who had acquired a degree of intellectual prowess, were more commonly known as thin-shelled "eggheads" than self-reliant Cold Warriors in the 1950s.⁸³ In fact, the term "egghead" was coined during the 1952 presidential contest between Dwight D. Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson—an election in which the general defeated the

⁸³ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 9-10.

egghead.⁸⁴ Hence, even though back to basics advocates invoked the male culture of anxiety to criticize progressive education, it turned out that their intellectual alternative to the "well-adjusted" student was just another example of how emasculated American men had become. For the "egghead" was typically viewed as effeminate and ineffectual. Indeed, the popular definition of an egghead resembled what Louis Bromfield wrote in *The Freeman* in 1952: a "person of spurious intellectual pretensions... fundamentally superficial. Over-emotional and feminine in reactions to any problem... An anemic bleeding heart."⁸⁵ A popular 1950s rock song titled "Egghead" even intoned, "When it comes to a quiz, you're a whiz; but when it comes to lovin', you're the biggest fiz there is."⁸⁶ If this was the product of basic education, then *Life* magazine's example of "well adjusted" Stephen—who at least had a girlfriend and played sports—seemed a better alternative to the egghead.

These inconsistencies in basic education rhetoric reveal that getting back to the basics was not such a simple proposition in the postwar era. If anything, the CBE's Pyrric victory after Sputnik demonstrates that even basic to basics champions had to "adjust" to life in the 1950s. And the difficulty basic education advocates had in devising an agenda and rhetorical tact that was truly in opposition to the culture of conformity and male anxiety illustrates just how dominant these cultural discourses had become in the

⁸⁴ A journalist first used "egghead" in print in 1952 after hearing his brother, a Stevenson supporter, remark that "all the eggheads are for Stevenson." On the origins of this term, see Mitford M. Mathews, "Of Matters Lexicographical," *American Speech* 32 (1957): 56, and also "Egghead," *American Speech* 38 (1963): 235-36.

⁸⁵ Louis Bromfield, "The Triumph of the Egghead," *The Freeman*, 1 December 1952, 158.

⁸⁶ I have not been able to find a year and performer for this song, but the title and lyrics are cited in Joseph F. Marsh, "A Critique of American Higher Education: The Views of a Former Instructor in the Great Issues Course at Dartmouth College," *Journal of Higher Education* 30:6 (June 1959), 317.

fifties. After World War II, the back to basics movement may have positioned itself in opposition to cultural change, but it was inescapably a part and product of this change.

Still, the movement succeeded in delimiting the parameters of educational debate in the late fifties. Whether sissy or egghead, Johnny or Stephen, the topic of conversation was still the white, middle-class male. Whether expert culture or cult of the laymen, the subject was still how to train the best and brightest of America's youth through intellectual training. Whether Miss Dove in Liberty Hill or mom and dad at home, the assumption was still that the best teaching took place in more traditional settings. And whether "soft" or "hard" curriculum, the most pressing cultural context was still the Cold War. As the central tenets of the back to basics movement gained currency in popular educational discourse, the uncomfortable images of the blackboard jungle seemed to fade into the background. For getting "back to the basics" simply did not require directly addressing questions of race, class, or differing ability levels in the classroom.

Conclusion

In 1952, a speaker addressed a meeting the National Citizens Commission for Public Schools on the topic of education.⁸⁷ Like the CBE, the Citizens Commission had been organized to encourage increased lay involvement in educational decision making, and to promote intellectual training in the schools. The speaker focused his talk on the idea that the United States had changed dramatically in the years after World War II, so much so that it was nearly unrecognizable to "we older people." The adults of the fifties had grown up "in small cities, towns, and rural communities that reconciled a natural

environment with simple, almost ideal social conditions." They had enjoyed the "free, exhilarating life of nature, balanced by the discipline of a stable family life and an orderly, purposeful society that educated us far more than our primitive schooling." Back then, there had been a "constant interaction of freedom and authority" that gave Americans "profound emotional security" and a "deep faith in democracy."⁸⁸

In the postwar years, however, life in the United States was much different than in the imagined past. Americans found themselves living in a "chaotic era," rife with "fears, animosities, and social tensions." After World War II, "that organic community life had been shattered by rapid urban centralization." As a result, people were now living "a disorderly life in a disorderly community." While this transition was proving "hard enough" for adults, for children "it was a major disaster, because it robbed them of that implicit education in moral, mental, and emotional values that are the product of an orderly life in an orderly community." Today, children were being deprived of "cultural community influences," and the schools were increasingly taking on the responsibilities of home and church.⁸⁹

This popular characterization of two different Americas—prewar and postwar, Liberty Hill and blackboard jungle—sustained the back to basics movement in the 1950s. The central conceit of this "blackboard backlash" was that much more than education had fallen into crisis after World War II. American culture and society had become "disorderly" and "chaotic," and the dire school situation was merely a reflection of this. The "emotional security" of the prewar years had been "shattered" and replaced by fear

⁸⁷ The speech is reprinted in Eugene Meyer, "The Hub of the Wheel," *NEA Journal*, May 1952, 277-79.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 277.

and "social tensions." Certainly this appeared to be the case in Pasadena, where "urban centralization" and shifting demographics destabilized a once "organic community" and thrust its schools into crisis. And the urban chaos of *The Blackboard Jungle* seemed to prove that disorder did indeed attend the loss of "simple social conditions" and a "purposeful society." But rather than address the inherent cultural complexity of the postwar school crisis, the back to basics movement advocated retreat and resistance—ultimately, it seemed to advocate willful ignorance. For America was already looking more like a blackboard jungle than Liberty Hill. As school enrollments increased, as desegregation commenced, and as classrooms grew more heterogeneous in the wake of urban migration, the project of mass public education became vastly more complicated in the 1950s—there was nothing basic about it. Nonetheless, after the most profound expansion of educational opportunity in history, Americans seemed to be left with the sense that truly democratizing the schools—and, in turn, democratizing society—was, in the final analysis, just too daunting and dangerous a prospect. By the end of the 1950s, with schools still in crisis, the conclusion seemed to be that it was best to focus on why white, middle class Johnny couldn't read, than on why Richard Dadier was having such a difficult time teaching in the blackboard jungle.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion

Americans tend to dream big dreams when it comes to education. In the Revolutionary era, Thomas Jefferson conceived of a system of free and universal schooling that would create a literate electorate while also identifying and nurturing those with innate talent. In his view, public education ideally would function as a true meritocracy, a system that would provide general education to all and advanced schooling to a select few, the "natural aristocracy." The 18th century physician and social reformer Benjamin Rush imagined that a "general and uniform system of education," supported by the government, could produce "republican machines" who would in effect guarantee the long-term survival of democracy in the United States. During the common school movement of the antebellum era, education reformers like Horace Mann submitted that universal schooling could function as a kind of social leveler, integrating children from a variety of socioeconomic and religious backgrounds and offering them uniform instruction in morality and republican ideals. Indeed, the common school movement promoted a vision of America's educational institutions as the very "pillars of the republic."¹ And at the turn of the 20th century, progressive educators like John Dewey renewed this call for universal public education, professing that schools could serve as genuine instruments of democracy by offering a differentiated curriculum that would meet the needs of all children, regardless of ability level or vocational path.

¹ See Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

Such sweeping expressions of faith in mass public schooling were based purely on speculation and hopeful prescription, for universal education was more the stuff of republican rhetoric than social reality in the years before 1945. In the postwar era, however, Americans had reason to believe that their big dreams for education finally might be coming true. For one, more young people were enrolled in school than ever before. In the 1950s, public school enrollment jumped 44 percent.² In 1950, 78.7 percent of the population aged five to nineteen was enrolled in school (as compared to 51 percent in 1930, 33 percent in 1920, and 11 percent in 1900).³ Further, from 1950 to 1960, the proportion of 14- to 17-year-olds attending high school rose from 83 percent to 90 percent.⁴ In 1940, more than half of the U.S. population had completed only an eighth grade education. But in the 1950s, median educational attainment rose to 12.3 years of formal schooling.

Besides rising enrollment and retention figures, other developments suggested that America was remarkably close to realizing its cherished goal of universal public schooling in the postwar era. In the late forties and early fifties, the G.I. Bill extended educational opportunities to some seven million veterans and spurred the democratization of higher education. The unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) declared segregated schooling unconstitutional and stated that the right to an education "must be made available to all on equal terms."⁵ The National Defense

² National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, Washington, D.C., January 1993, 26.

³ *Ibid.*, and Herbert Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7.

⁴ *120 Years of American Education*, 7.

⁵ *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) (*Brown I*).

Education Act of 1958 represented the federal government's expanded financial commitment to education, as well as its symbolic assertion that public schools should serve as "pillars of the republic" during a time of Cold War. On the state and local level, there were still other indications that Americans were investing more time and resources in public education: in the 1950s, expenditures per pupil jumped 45 percent.⁶ And membership in Parent-Teacher Associations across the United States increased over 65 percent.⁷

Professional educators similarly embraced the postwar push toward universal schooling. Indeed, the slogan of choice for educators in the 1950s was "education for all youth." This mantra echoed the title of a 1944 report by the Educational Policies Commission (EPC), a standing body of the National Education Association. According to the historian Lawrence Cremin, this report voiced the "best-laid plans of the teaching profession for American education in the postwar decades."⁸ In *Education for ALL American Youth*, the EPC stated unequivocally that "schools should be dedicated to the proposition that every youth in these United States—regardless of sex, economic status, geographic location, or race—should experience a broad and balanced education."⁹ According to this educational doctrine, schools must strive to serve all American youth, from the age of three to twenty, regardless of their ability level, socioeconomic background, or future career path. The slew of professional organizations and

⁶ *120 Years of American Education*, 33.

⁷ Jack Malcolm Bethune, "A History of the Advertising Council, 1942-1967," M.A. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1968, 69.

⁸ Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Knopf, 1961), 332.

⁹ Educational Policies Commission, National Education Association, *Education for ALL American Youth*, Washington, D.C., 1944, 1.

"individual experts in and out of the educational world" who endorsed the report collectively called for an eminently democratic and functional system of public schooling.¹⁰

In sum, in the postwar era, federal mandates, professional policy pronouncements, and efforts by local citizens all seemed aligned under the common goal of creating a serviceable system of mass public schooling. And yet, almost implausibly, as America crept ever closer to the educational utopia imagined by Jefferson and his progeny, public schools became more dangerous in the popular imagination. Indeed, these historical developments—which reasonably should have generated great optimism, and even a sense of patriotic achievement—stood in stark contrast to the cultural conversation about an unfolding education crisis. For in postwar popular discourse, educating "all youth" was less a prideful accomplishment than a fearful prospect. As public school enrollments grew, popular culture just seemed to catalogue an ever-expanding list of school ground dangers. Notably, this list did not include the potential dangers posed by overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, or funding problems. Instead, America's fear of schooling issued from more ominous threats—subversive teachers, evil experts, juvenile delinquents, conformist classrooms, an emasculating curriculum. How did America's "pillars of the republic" become so dangerous?

Arguably, this anxiety may have had little to do with the state of American education in the fifties. In popular culture, after all, the U.S. public school more often served as the locus for anxieties about the world *outside* the classroom. The popular school crisis narrative articulated broader concerns about the Cold War, urban migration,

¹⁰ Kliebard, 332.

racial integration, social conformity, and the masculinity crisis. Americans projected their discomfort with a host of dramatic cultural changes onto the schools, and in this sense, the crisis in education effectively mirrored a deeper crisis in national identity. The sundry criticisms directed at education in popular culture seemed to reflect and amplify insecurities about the national psyche: schools were producing a generation of other-directed, emasculated citizens. Schools were not preparing young people for the challenges of the atomic age. Schools were losing the Cold War "brains" race. Schools had lost sight of the "basics." Schools were dangerous, diverse, and out of control. Indeed, intense debates about what "really" caused the Pasadena school crisis, or whether *The Blackboard Jungle* was a "real" representation of an American school, suggested an urgent need to define the "real" nature of postwar American society. Was the nation culturally unified, like Liberty Hill in *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, or socially fragmented, like North Manual Trades in *The Blackboard Jungle*? Was it more like the Pasadena of old—an "Athens" made up of "citizens of like kind" who bravely battled political subversion—or the "new" Pasadena—racially and economically diverse, and rife with social tension? The very fact that the education crisis produced such wildly contradictory messages about American culture speaks to the cultural complexity of the postwar era. In other words, the culture of the "other" fifties—a culture of ferment and anxiety rather than consensus and complacency—was hidden in plain sight in America's mainstream educational debates.

The popular school crisis narrative forged in the 1950s proved to be quite resilient, for American education has apparently been in perpetual crisis ever since the

end of World War II. The rhetoric of fear and schooling that typified postwar popular discourse has continued to inform educational debates, long after the long fifties came to an end. This rhetoric has been employed by critics across the political spectrum, whether to push for public school reform or to justify educational alternatives. Moreover, it has steadfastly influenced cultural production since the 1950s; American audiences still eagerly consume stories about the nation's dangerous schools. Indeed, the rhetoric of fear and schooling has shown itself to be remarkably malleable—when dominant cultural anxieties change, popular educational discourse simply recasts its list of school ground dangers.

In the 1960s, the focus of the popular crisis narrative shifted from the plight of the white, middle-class male to the problems facing minorities and the poor in rural and urban schools. The federal government effectively defined the new nature of the crisis by redoubling its efforts to improve public education. President Lyndon B. Johnson, who once taught in rural Texas, considered education to be his own passport out of poverty, and education reform became a cornerstone of his administration's "Great Society" initiatives. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, for example, forbid payment of federal funds to school districts that had not made efforts to desegregate. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) similarly was designed to use schools as a vehicle for achieving social equality. ESEA distributed money to schools that served a high population of poor children; it provided aid for compensatory education programs to assist the mentally and physically disabled; it helped launch Head Start and bilingual education programs; and it allocated funds for textbook and classroom technology

purchases (in the sixties, many schools acquired overhead projectors—considered to be cutting-edge technology at the time—as a result of ESEA).¹¹

Popular educational discourse likewise turned its attention, at least temporarily, away from white, middle-class Johnny to minority and poor students in the sixties. *Newsweek*, for instance, ran a cover story on "The Plight of Urban Schools" in 1963. *Death at an Early Age*, Jonathan Kozol's 1968 memoir about teaching, chronicled racial discrimination and the "destruction of the hearts and minds of Negro children" at a Boston public school. The 1967 motion picture *Up the Down Staircase* was set in New York City and told the story of a rookie teacher who had to contend with overcrowded classrooms, disruptive students, a shortage of supplies, and crumbling facilities. In the film, the teacher's cast of racially and economically diverse students are disruptive and academically challenged, and her administration is obsessed only with rules and discipline—they actually designate an "up" and a "down" staircase at the school.¹² However, unlike the postwar "jungle tempest" that brewed after the release of *The Blackboard Jungle*, public discourse about these popular texts tended to acknowledge the reality of urban blight rather than dismissing these cultural depictions of city schools as sensational. In fact, the U.S. State Department even submitted *Up the Down Staircase* to the 1967 Moscow Film Festival to offer the Soviets "proof" that American schools were not racially segregated.¹³ This certainly marked a reversal from the *affair Luce* at the Venice Film Festival in 1955, when the State Department criticized *The Blackboard*

¹¹ On the history of the ESEA, see Harvey Kantor, "Education, Social Reform, and the State: ESEA and Federal Education Policy in the 1960s," *American Journal of Education* (November 1991), 47-83.

¹² "The Plight of Urban Schools," *Newsweek*, 16 September 1963, 55; Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age* (New York: Bantam, 1968); *Up the Down Staircase*, dir. Robert Mulligan, 1967.

Jungle for being an "unrealistic" portrait of American education. Yet despite the enhanced cultural acceptance of this "new" version of the school crisis in the 1960s, popular discourse notably was still tinged by fear—words like "death," "destruction," and "plight," combined with visual depictions of inner-city school violence in *Up the Down Staircase* and LBJ's use of schools to wage "war" on poverty, unquestionably perpetuated the theme that American education was still a dangerous endeavor.

The perception that schools remained in a state of crisis in the 1960s fueled a concerted search for educational alternatives. The free schools movement, for example, leveled a humanistic critique at public education, arguing that schools were antidemocratic and technocratic. To free school advocates, like Paul Goodman and John Holt, education had become dangerous because it stifled creativity. Students needed to be educated in an environment that was more organic, holistic, and "authentic." A series of experimental and alternative schools thus emerged in the late sixties and early seventies that followed this philosophy.¹⁴ In 1970, the education critic Ivan Illich offered an even more radical alternative to public education by calling for the "deschooling" of society. Illich argued that public schools initiated citizens to "the myth that bureaucracies guided by scientific knowledge are efficient and benevolent... that increased production will provide a better life."¹⁵ As an alternative to this "oppressive" institutional ideology, Illich conceived of education as a non-centralized process that would organically link

¹³ *Internet Movie Database*, s.v. *Up the Down Staircase* <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0062425/trivia>>.

¹⁴ On the Free Schools movement, see Ron Miller, *Free Schools, Free People: Education and Democracy After the 1960s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 106.

self-directed learners with a range of community resources, from libraries to mentor professionals to peers available for "skill exchanges."¹⁶

In a sense, the free schools movement can be viewed as a kind of back-to-basics backlash, a pendulum swing back toward progressive education in the sixties. According to free school champions, public schools needed to get back to the basics—meaning they had to emphasize "basic" human qualities such as curiosity, creativity, and self-direction. Nonetheless, the free schools movement employed the same dangerous school discourse as basic education supporters did in the fifties. Jonathan Kozol, for example, praised *Deschooling Society* as a "dangerous book" for the timely challenge it posed to conventional wisdom about schooling.¹⁷ In the 1960s, schools were still conformist and undemocratic, but for different reasons—technocratic schools of the sixties were just as fearful as postwar era progressive schools. Indeed, just like Rudolf Flesch in *Why Johnny Can't Read*, free schoolers adamantly argued that education was too important to be left to the educators.

In the 1970s, the school crisis persisted, but it was attended by a curious rash of historical forgetting about its postwar roots. During so-called "literacy crisis" of the mid-seventies, which was fueled by reports that SAT scores were declining yearly, commentators started to locate the origins of America's present educational dilemma in the 1960s. In a 1975 cover story on "Why Johnny Can't Write," for instance, *Newsweek* suggested that high school English classrooms had started to emphasize "creativity" in

¹⁶ Illich even called on the government to provide tax credits for parents to pursue educational options outside of the public schools—a proposal that would be co-opted by conservative school critics in the 1980s. See Ira Shor, *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration, 1969-1984* (Boston: Routledge, 1986).

the sixties at the expense of teaching expository writing. A *Christian Science Monitor* article similarly outlined the "Legacy of the '60s: Declining Quality." Yet another school critic charged that students' writing skills had been deteriorating ever since the mid-sixties.¹⁸ Such rhetoric implied, of course, that schools of the fifties had been doing something right before the villainous sixties made America's youth illiterate. Yet the popular school crisis narrative of the 1950s made it abundantly clear that education in the decade before the sixties was considered far from perfect.

Even popular culture of the 1970s suffered from this lapse of historical memory about the postwar education crisis. In the popular television show *Happy Days*, for example, schools were as stable as the rest of the Cunningham's everyday life in 1950s Milwaukee. The biggest trauma the *Happy Days* high school ever experienced was losing the championship basketball game because of Richie's missed free-throw. And in the 1978 film *Grease*, the chief threat to order at Rydell High appeared to be students breaking into song and dance during school hours. In popular culture of the 1950s, the school had served as a locus for cultural anxieties—it was a dangerous place. However, popular culture of the 1970s invoked the "fifties" high school as a nostalgic symbol of a bygone era—it represented not menace, but more innocent days of sock hops, poodle skirts, and varsity sweaters. Such historical revisions in popular culture created the impression that every generation's school crisis was new and unique—and that American education had once enjoyed a "Golden Era."

¹⁷ Kozol is quoted on the back cover of the Harrow paperback edition of *Deschooling Society*, which appeared in 1972.

¹⁸ Shor cites these three instances of sixties bashing in educational criticism of the 1970s in *Culture Wars*, 66-67. See "Why Johnny Can't Write," *Newsweek*, 8 December 1975, 60; Richard D. Little, "Legacy of the

This historical forgetfulness continued into the 1980s, when popular discourse about America's education crisis erupted anew. Indeed, the educational debates of the eighties rivaled if not surpassed the debates of the fifties in terms of volume and intensity. T. Cullen Davis's infamous school survey, comparing schools in the 1980s and 1940s, was just one manifestation of this moral panic and short-term memory. The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* spurred much of this cultural conversation, as it famously likened the deterioration of America's schools to a kind of "educational disarmament." In no uncertain terms, it stated, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." The report further suggested that the education crisis was essentially a recent phenomenon: "What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments." Yet a "generation ago," in the late forties and fifties, Americans fretted continuously about the possibility that the Soviet Union might "surpass" America in terms of education. And in 1957, Sputnik finally seemed to prove what was previously "unimaginable"—that U.S. education was inferior to the "attainments" of others.

While *A Nation at Risk* refused to acknowledge the long history of the education crisis, it nonetheless employed school crisis rhetoric that had been forged forty years prior. Echoing the anxieties of postwar education critics, who linked America's educational failures to a national identity crisis, the report claimed that "our society and

'60s: Declining Quality," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 17 January 1977; Donna Woolfolk Cross, *Word Abuse: How the Words We Use Us* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1979).

its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling." The "frustration" Americans felt about the "shoddiness" of their school system in the 1980s was intimately connected to a "dimming of personal expectations" and to "the fear of losing a shared vision for America." As in the fifties, the antidote to this educational and cultural malaise was to get back to the basics. School critics called for higher academic standards, more frequent testing, measures for school accountability, and a curricular emphasis on the "fundamentals." In September 1983, the cover of *U.S. News* announced, "Back to School—and Back to Basics." The Reagan administration, seeking to redress America's perceived cultural decline as much as its educational dilemma, pushed for a constitutional amendment that would permit voluntary school prayer. In the best-selling books *The Closing of the American Mind* and *Cultural Literacy*, Harold Bloom and E.D Hirsch each blamed the school crisis on a socially fragmented society; both authors suggested that education could be improved by making the United States a more culturally unified nation.

A nation "at risk," minds "closed," educational "disarmament," a "culturally illiterate" public—school ground dangers clearly persisted in the 1980s. *Newsweek* explained "Why Public Schools are Flunking." *U.S. News* alarmed readers by asking "U.S. vs. Japan: Is Your Child Getting a First Class Education?"¹⁹ Even the 1986 film comedy *Fast Times at Ridgmont High* wryly suggested that sex, drugs, and surfing

¹⁹ "Why Public Schools are Flunking," *Newsweek*, 20 April 1981, 62; "U.S. vs. Japan: is Your Child Getting a First-Class Education?" *U.S. News*, 19 January 1987. See also "Kids, Teachers and Parents: Give Us Better Schools," *U.S. News*, 10 September 1979, 31, and "Saving Our Schools," *Newsweek*, 9 May 1983, 50.

comprised the core curriculum in today's schools—perhaps that infamous school survey of the "top" problems in the 1980s was not too far off the mark.

Much as it did in the sixties, this latest wave of dangerous school discourse engendered a vigorous search for alternatives. The first test case for legalized home schooling was successfully argued in Seattle in 1983, and throughout the eighties, many other states granted parents the right to home school their children. During his two terms in office, President Reagan urged the federal government to provide tax-supported vouchers for private school tuition. The charter school movement—which encouraged private boards to run publicly financed schools—also gained momentum in the 1980s. *U.S. News* acknowledged this growing public appetite for educational alternatives in a 1991 cover story, "The Flight From Public Schools," which chronicled the turn toward parochial, for-profit, and home-based education.²⁰ Apparently, thirty years of dangerous school discourse had started to take its toll on public education, and Americans were now in retreat.

Massive media coverage of school violence in the 1990s surely did not help beat back this "flight from public schools." School shootings in rural Jonesboro, Arkansas and suburban Littleton, Colorado suggested that violence was no longer confined to America's urban school systems. Indeed, the blackboard jungle seemed to be extending beyond the city limits into white, middle-class neighborhoods. Or then again, was it? As it turns out, school violence actually *decreased* in the 1990s. From 1992 to 1999, the

²⁰ "The Flight From Public Schools: Five Leading Alternatives," *U.S. News*, 9 December 1991, 66.

number of violent deaths at school dropped 43 percent.²¹ In the 1998-99 school year, there were 33 homicides; that number dropped to fourteen in 2001-02. A 2003 study similarly showed that school crime had decreased between 1995 and 2001. Statistically speaking, students have less than a one in a million chance of experiencing a violent death at school. In other words, schools have in fact become *less* dangerous over the past ten years.

Nonetheless, a 2004 survey found that Americans believe their schools are getting more dangerous. A majority of respondents even stated they would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to install metal detectors and classroom cameras in their local schools.²² After fifty years of dangerous school discourse, these findings are perhaps not surprising. Recent studies have shown that the volume of media coverage of school violence vastly outweighs the actual number of violent incidents that take place. Forty percent of reports in the nation's major newspapers that focus exclusively on children concern crime and violence. On major television news channels, that figure rises to 48 percent.²³ Schools might be safer, but Americans continue to consume a steady stream of media stories about dangerous schools—today, we read about the kindergartner in Philadelphia who was suspended for punching his pregnant teacher in the stomach. Or about the girl in Nebraska who was expelled for bringing a small knife to school. There was the honor student in Atlanta who wrote a fictional story in her journal about a student killing a teacher. Or the twelve-year-old boy in New Jersey who threatened to expose his

²¹ "Multiple Killings in School Violence Rises," *New York Times*, 5 December 2001. Notably, this *New York Times* headline focused on just one aspect of the report—the number of *multiple* killings—even though the report's central finding was that violence *on the whole* was in decline.

²² "After Shooting, Fears for Student Safety," *The Times Union* (Albany), 22 February 2004, A:1.

allergic teacher to a peanut butter cookie.²⁴ Teachers are also making schools dangerous today: in New York City, a teacher attacked his first-grade class with a broom handle, sending twenty students to the hospital with welts and bruises. In Charleston, a substitute was fired for piloting a school bus without a license—he had formerly lost his driving privileges because of a DUI. In Connecticut, an instructor with hepatitis C was let go because one of his students accidentally pricked herself on his used insulin needle. In Kentucky, a middle school teacher was discharged for allegedly videotaping students changing clothes in an A/V room. In Florida, a twenty three-year-old teacher had sex with an underage student in the back of her sports utility vehicle.²⁵

But physical violence is apparently not the only scourge on school grounds today. The abovementioned incidents of bodily harm have shared the media spotlight in recent years with other seemingly less urgent educational menaces. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, the list of reasons why Americans should fear their schools has been revised and expanded to include the threat of malnutrition, sexual perversion, and ideological subversion. For in contemporary popular discourse, vending machines, gay students, and unpatriotic teachers and pupils are also making schools dangerous.

²³ Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 69-70.

²⁴ "Critics Attack Suspension of 33 Philadelphia Kindergartners," *New York Times*, 14 December 2002; "Burke High Student Expelled for Knife," *Omaha World Herald*, 20 April 2004, B:2; "Student Expelled Over Story," *Associated Press*, 24 October 2003; "Allergic Teacher Student Threat," *Associated Press*, 23 April 2004.

²⁵ "Wielding Broom, Teacher Attacks Class, Police Say," *New York Times*, 14 September 2002, B:1; "Teacher's Past Comes to Light After Arrests," *The Post and Courier* (Charleston, SC), 12 June 2004, A:1; "Teacher Fired After Student Pricks Finger on Insulin Needle," *Associated Press*, 8 June 2004; "Boyle County Teacher Fired," *Associated Press*, 19 March 2004; "Fla. Teacher Charged in Sex with Student," *Associated Press*, 29 June 2004.

The *New York Times* characterized the recent push by parents and educators to remove junk food from the nation's schools as the "culture war for the new century." States like California and Texas have begun to phase out "foods of minimal nutritional value" from school vending machines and cafeterias, citing a threefold increase in the number of overweight children in America over the past thirty years. Food items like soda, candy, and chewing gum are being replaced with bottled water, graham crackers, and light popcorn. Schools are even starting to ban the time-honored tradition of bake sales on campus. Public discourse about these policy changes has been charged with the rhetoric of fear and schooling. In touting Texas's new school nutrition policy, the state Agriculture Commissioner pointed out that Texas was home to some 800,000 obese children. "We are in the midst of a crisis," she announced. One superintendent argued that "any teacher can tell you that a school is run on the strength of its stomach." A school website in Austin assured parents and teachers that "no students will suffer from this change," and added that "some of your classrooms may be calmer places." Meanwhile, food industry representatives, obviously unhappy with the new trend, have pointed out that "a soft drink or an ice cream cone is not dangerous."²⁶

Today, schools are not only policing their students' eating habits, but their sexual habits as well. In Arkansas, for instance, teachers punished a gay student for discussing his sexual orientation by forcing him to listen to biblical admonitions against homosexuality. In Sacramento, a citizens group railed against a student-led "Day of

²⁶ "To Improve Nutrition, Schools Bar Snack Food," *New York Times*, 20 May 2002, A:1; "AISD to Offer Only 'Healthful' Drinks, Snacks," *Daily Texan*, 15 August 2003, 1; Austin Independent School District, "Student Health," *Austin.isd.tenet.edu*, 7 April 2002 <<http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/k12/health/index.phtml>>.

Silence" that was intended to honor the silence forced on gay and lesbian students by discrimination and harassment. The group protested that the event, which took place on the same day in schools across the nation, allowed "gay activist teens to push the gay agenda" on school grounds. In Connecticut, a teenage boy was sent home for wearing a floral skirt to school; the principal justified her decision by noting that the dress code prohibited clothing that advertised "sexual activity or preference." She also claimed some of the girls at the school "would be offended" by a boy in a skirt. In Texas, a student group called the Lubbock Gay-Straight Alliance was barred from holding meetings on school grounds because it made certain members of the community uncomfortable.²⁷

Menacing vending machines and gender transgressions are not the only dangers at school today. There are fearful threats to the *mind* as well as to the body. On the first-year anniversary of 9/11, for example, a number of critics excoriated the National Education Association for posting on its website a variety of lesson plans that focused on the theme of tolerance. These lesson plans—including one that encouraged students to discuss cultural stereotypes about the typical terrorist—were allegedly "unpatriotic" because they "unfairly [raised] doubts about the United States" and promoted "the dangerous idea of moral equivalence." In the months leading up to the Iraq War, the Maine Department of Education warned teachers to keep their anti-war sentiments to themselves. The Maine Army National Guard had complained that some teachers were reportedly telling students that the pending war was unethical. In Michigan, a student

²⁷ "Gay Student Settles Suit," *New York Times*, 18 July 2003; "Voices Raised Against Day of Silence," *Sacramento Bee*, 7 April 2003, B:1; "So A Guy Walks Into a School in a Skirt...", *New York Times*, 11

was sent home for wearing a T-shirt that featured a picture of President Bush and the words "International Terrorist." The sixteen-year-old said he wore the shirt to express his anti-war views, but the administration worried the message would incite harassment of the school's Arab-American student population.²⁸

As in the fifties, this contemporary catalogue of school ground dangers reflects broader cultural anxieties. The vending machine wars are no doubt born of growing concerns about the "fattening" of America. Our fear that schools are making kids fat surfaces at a time when media reports and best-selling books regularly remind us that sixty percent of U.S. citizens are obese; Congress has even taken up legislation—the "Obesity Prevention and Treatment Act"—to address this "crisis" situation. In a similar vein, the heightened surveillance of gender transgressions in the classroom speaks to intensifying public debates over gay rights, especially now that several states have legalized either civic unions or marriage for homosexual couples. Finally, fears of ideological subversion at school can surely be read in the context of America's post-9/11 "War on Terrorism." In the current political climate, when patriotism seems to be monitored closely, schools are being asked to support national security objectives.

All three of these examples of contemporary dangerous school discourse can also be discursively linked to the postwar crisis narrative. After all, boys wearing skirts to school, or gay students announcing their sexual orientation in class, are acts that potentially threaten to emasculate today's boys, much as conformist curricula and

November 2002; "School District Wins on Banning Student Groups," *New York Times*, 4 March 2004.

²⁸ "Lesson Plans for Sept. 11 Offer a Study in Discord," *New York Times*, 31 August 2002, A:1; "Maine Teachers Warned: Watch Anti-War Talk in Classroom," *CNN.com*, 28 February 2003; "Anti-Bush T-Shirt Banned at Michigan School," *CNN.com*, 19 February 2003.

cooking classes did in the 1950s. Similarly, the careful policing of ideological subversion post-9/11 recalls the attempts to purge schools of unpatriotic teachers and textbooks during the Cold War. Even the debate over "foods of minimal nutritional value" recalls the postwar controversy surrounding the "life adjustment" movement. Only this time, rather than denounce schools for teaching frivolous life skills, critics are calling on schools to instruct America's youth in how to stay trim and healthy.

What happens when Americans come to believe that their schools are dangerous? What happens when the mass media feeds the general public a steady stream of stories about fearful schools? What happens when audiences flock to motion pictures like *Dangerous Minds*, a film that essentially reworks the plot of *The Blackboard Jungle* and reproduces its racially-coded depiction of school violence? Or to a film like *The Faculty*, which depicts teachers as body-snatching aliens?

For one, school safety becomes an overriding concern. Dangerous schools need to be made less dangerous, and so administrators install metal detectors at the front door and digital surveillance cameras in every classroom.²⁹ Schools construct high tech command centers, employ security guards, and hire consultants to perform school safety audits. The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) even includes a "dangerous school" provision that requires individual states to develop criteria for identifying "persistently dangerous schools."³⁰ According to NCLB, if a school is labeled "dangerous," students

²⁹ "Cameras Watching Students, Especially in Biloxi," *New York Times*, 24 September 2003.

³⁰For a summary of the key provisions of NCLB, see Roderick R. Paige, "Testimony Before the House Committee on the Budget," *House.Gov*, 13 March 2001 <www.house.gov/budget/hearings/rodpaigestmnt.pdf>. The homepage for NCLB can be found at

must be given the option to transfer to a different institution. The U.S. Department of Education recently cooperated with the Secret Service in producing a "threat assessment" guide for "managing threatening situations" in schools.³¹ The Education Secretary also authorized the formation of a new office in his department, the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. The primary purpose of this office is "to assist schools in developing plans to deal with the variety of threats they face." The threats include "everything from natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes, to shootings, accidents and terrorist attacks."³²

Second, if Americans believe their public schools as dangerous, then they will be more likely to search for educational alternatives. Between 1993 and 2001, 37 states passed laws authorizing charter schools.³³ Edison, a private, for-profit education provider, runs more than 130 public schools in twenty-two states, serving a student population of 75,000. Enrollments in Edison schools nearly quadrupled from 1999 to 2002, and this private company is now one of the 25 biggest school districts in the country.³⁴ Similarly, it is estimated that between 1.5 and two million children are now home schooled, and that figure is increasing by ten percent each year. The U.S. Supreme Court recently upheld the use of public money for religious school tuition, paving the

<http://www.NoChildLeftBehind.gov/>. See also the fact sheet for parents posted by the House Education and the Workforce Committee

<http://www.house.gov/ed_workforce/issues/107th/education/parentalchoice/factsheet61302.htm>.

³¹ U.S. Department of Education, "Education Department and Secret Service Release Threat Assessment Guide for Schools," 5 June 2002 <<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2002/06/06052002.html>>.

³² Secretary Paige even placed a former Texas appeals court justice in charge of this office, effectively symbolizing his department's surveillance and security approach to education. U.S. Department of Education, "Paige Announces Formation of Two New Offices," 17 September 2002 <<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2002/09/09172002.html>>.

³³ "Parents Hungry for ABC's Lead New School Movement," *New York Times*, 29 April 2001, A:1.

way for voucher proponents to go on the offensive in states that had previously rejected voucher proposals.³⁵ In short, fifty years of dangerous school discourse has arguably made public education the least appealing option for many Americans.

In the final analysis, contemporary popular discourse about dangerous schools is especially noteworthy for what it leaves *out* of the cultural conversation about education.³⁶ For example, overcrowded classrooms are not characterized as dangerous. Nor is the massive shortage of guidance counselors, with some schools facing a 400:1 student-counselor ratio. In popular educational discourse, it is not considered dangerous that students' rights to search and seizure are regularly violated at school. Nor is it threatening that a disproportionate number of African American males are punished at school.³⁷ Or that only 57 percent of Hispanics aged twenty-five and older have graduated from high school.³⁸ Indeed, it does not seem to be considered dangerous that half a century after *Brown v. Board of Education*, many schools are now resegregating.³⁹ These situations are arguably among the most pressing school problems facing Americans in the year 2004. But nearly sixty years into our education crisis, we still do not know how to

³⁴ "Buying In to the Company School," *New York Times*, 17 February 2002, A:18; "For-Profit School Venture Has Yet to Turn a Profit," *New York Times*, 8 April 2002, A:16; "A Learning Curve for Whittle Venture," *New York Times*, 25 May 2002, B:1.

³⁵ *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 00 U.S. 1751 (2002).

³⁶ For an alternative perspective on the "real" threats in present-day public schools, see Irwin A. Hyman and Pamela Snook, *Dangerous Schools: What We Can Do About the Physical and Emotional Abuse of Our Children* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

³⁷ See Anne Ferguson, *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

³⁸ "More Americans Have Degrees," *New York Times*, 29 June 2004, A:21.

³⁹ "U.S. Schools Turn More Segregated, a Study Finds," *New York Times*, 20 July 2001; "Schools Resegregate, Study Finds," *New York Times*, 21 January 2002.

talk about these problems in the public sphere—and perhaps that is why they remain unsolved.

Bibliography

Manuscript Collections

Brookline, Massachusetts

Boston University, Mugar Library
Evan Hunter papers

Hollywood, California

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Margaret Herrick Library
Richard Brooks papers
MGM Turner script collection
Blackboard Jungle clippings file

Newspapers and Periodicals

American Speech
Atlantic Monthly
Collier
Ladies Home Journal
Life
Los Angeles Herald-Examiner
Los Angeles Times
Motion Picture Daily
Nation
National Parent-Teacher
NEA Journal
New Republic
Newsweek
New York Times
New York Times Magazine
Reader's Digest
Reading Teacher
Saturday Evening Post
Saturday Review of Literature
School and Society
Time
Variety Daily
Variety Weekly

Reports and Government Documents

- California State Department of Education. *Bulletin*. 20:3. April 1951.
- _____. *Bulletin*. 20:11. December 1951.
- Educational Policies Commission. National Education Association of the United States. *Education for All American Youth*. Washington, D.C., 1944.
- Gallup, George H. *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971*. Vol. 1. New York: Random House, 1972.
- Historical American Engineering Record. *Arroyo Seco Parkway*. HAER No. CA-265. 1995.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. U.S. Department of Education. *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*. Washington, D.C., January 1993.
- National Commission for the Defense of Democracy Through Education. National Education Association of the United States. *The Pasadena Story: An Analysis of Some Forces and Factors that Injured a Superior School System*. Washington, D.C., June 1951.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Washington, D.C., 1993.
- Pasadena, Calif. Cooperative Survey of the Pasadena City Schools. *Report of the Survey of the Pasadena City Schools: A Cooperative Study, 1951-1952*.
- Pasadena, Calif. Superintendent of Schools. *The Kindergarten-Six-Four-Four Plan of Public School Organization: Fifty-Third Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1939-1940*. December 1940.
- U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Un-American Activities. *100 Things You Should Know About Communism and Education*. 81st Cong, 1st sess., 1949.
- U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. *Comic Books and Juvenile Delinquency*. 84th Congress, 1st Session, 1955.
- U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. *Current Population Reports: Popular Characteristics*. Series P-20, No. 45, 22. October 1953. Washington, D.C., 1953.

U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. *Progress of Public Education in the United States, 1957-58*. Washington, D.C., 1958.

U.S. Department of Labor. U.S. Office of Education. *National Go-to-School Drive 1944-45: A Handbook for Communities*. Washington, D.C., 1944.

U.S. Office of Education. *Annual Report, Federal Security Agency, 1947*. Washington, D.C., 1948.

U.S. President. *State of the Union Address*. 4 January 1949. Washington, D.C., 1949.

Published Books, Articles, and Pamphlets

Allen, Mary. *Education or Indoctrination*. Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1956.

Allen, Maury. *Jackie Robinson: A Life Remembered*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1987.

Angus, David and Jeffrey Mirel. *The Failed Promise of the American High School: 1890-1995*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1999.

Anthony, Hazel. "Boys, Too, are Learning Homemaking." *NEA Journal* 46:9 (December 1957): 581-82.

Aronowitz, Stanley. "A Different Perspective on Educational Inequality." *Education and Cultural Studies: Toward a Performative Practice*. Henry A. Giroux and Patrick Shannon, eds. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Barzun, Jacques. "Teaching: Job or Profession?" *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1948, 142-143.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Baxter, Lindly C. "Wake Up, America!" *NEA Journal* 35:2 (February 1946): 86-87.

Bell, Bernard. *Crisis in Education: A Challenge to American Complacency*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1949.

Berliner, David C. and Bruce J. Biddle. *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1995.

- Bestor, Arthur. *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1953.
- Biskind, Peter. *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*. New York: Pantheon, 1983.
- Boorstin, Daniel J. *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Atheneum, 1961/1982.
- Bortner, Doyle. "A Study of Published Lay Opinion on Educational Programs and Problems." *Education* (June 1951): 641-650.
- Boyer, Paul. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985/1994.
- Brands, H.W., *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Bromfield, Louis. "The Triumph of the Egghead." *The Freeman*, 1 December 1952, 158
- Brown, Joanne. "'A is for Atom, B is for Bomb': Civil Defense in American Public Education, 1948-1963." *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 68-90
- Butts, R. Freeman and Lawrence Cremin. *A History of Education in American Culture*. New York: Henry Holt, 1953.
- Callahan, Raymond. *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
- Carey, Michael J. "The Schools and Civil Defense: The Fifties Revisited." *Teachers College Record* 84:1 (Fall 1982): 115-127
- Carleton, Don E. *Red Scare! Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas*. Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985.
- Carmichael, O.C. "Crisis in Education: Opportunity or Disaster?" *The New York Times Magazine*, 26 January 1947, 7+.
- Carter, Paul A. *Another Part of the Fifties*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Caute, David. *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.

- Chafe, Thomas. *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Clowse, Barbara Barksdale. *Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and National Defense Education Act of 1958*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Vintage, 2003.
- Collins, Hunt. "Wrong Number." *Famous Detective Stories*, 12:5, August 1952, 10-31.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.
- Cottrell, Jr., Leonard S. and Sylvia Eberhart. *American Opinion on World Affairs in the Atomic Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948.
- "Council Stresses Basic Education." *The New York Times*, 11 July 1956, 29:2.
- Cremin, Lawrence. *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- _____. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957*. New York: Knopf, 1961.
- _____. "What Happened to Progressive Education?" *Teachers College Record* 61:1 (October 1959): 23-28.
- Crichton, Kyle. "Our Schools are a Scandal." *Collier's*, 12 April 1946, 32-35.
- Dean, Robert D. *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.
- Dickstein, Morris. *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction, 1945-1970*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Doherty, Thomas. *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988.
- Dudziak, Mary L. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Duncan, C.T. "The 'Education Beat' on 52 Major Newspapers." *Journalism Quarterly* (Summer 1966): 336-38.

- "Egghead." *American Speech* 38 (1963): 235-36.
- Engelhardt, Tom. *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment*. New York: Anchor Press, 1983.
- Faludi, Susan. *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. New York: William Morrow, 1999.
- Ferguson, Anne. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2000.
- Fine, Benjamin. *The Crisis in American Education: A Reprint of Twelve Articles from the New York Times*. New York, 1947.
- _____. *Our Children Are Cheated: The Crisis in American Education*. New York: Henry Holt, 1947.
- Fisher, William H. "Is Progressivism Passe?" *Education* 81:9 (May 1961): 563-65.
- Flesch, Rudolf. *Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It*. New York: Harper, 1955.
- Foreman, Joel, ed. *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Foster, Stuart J. *Red Alert! Educators Confront the Red Scare in American Public Schools, 1947-1954*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
- Gates, Arthur I. "Why Mr. Flesch is Wrong." *NEA Journal* (September 1955): 332-334.
- Gilbert, James. *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Glassner, Barry. *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.
- Goldman, Eric F. *The Crucial Decade and After: America, 1945-1960*. New York: Vintage, 1960.
- Gosse, Van. *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the Making of the New Left*. New York: Verso, 1993.

- Graebner, William. *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s*. Boston: Twayne, 1991.
- _____. *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.
- Graham, Patricia Albjerg. *Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe: A History of the PEA, 1919-1955*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1967.
- Grantham, Dewey W. *The United States Since 1945: The Ordeal of Power*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Hackett, Alice Payne. *70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1967.
- Halberstam, David. *The Fifties*. New York: Villard, 1993.
- Haley, Robert M., as told to Andrew Hamilton. "Don't Call Me a Sissy!" *Saturday Evening Post*, 6 October 1956, 31+.
- Hamill, Pete. "The Poet of Pulp: How Ed McBain Made the Precinct House a Respectable Place." *The New Yorker*, 10 January 2000, 62-71.
- Herman, Ellen. *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. New York: Knopf, 1963.
- Hulburd, David. *This Happened in Pasadena*. New York: Macmillan, 1951.
- Hunter, Evan. *The Blackboard Jungle*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954.
- "Hunter, Evan." *Conversations*. Roy Newquist, ed. New York: Rand McNally, 1967. 156-167.
- "Hunter, Evan." *Writer's Digest*, 38:4, March 1958, 19.
- Hutchins, Robert M. *The Atom Bomb and Education*. London: National Peace Council, 1947.
- Hyman, Irwin A. and Pamela Snook. *Dangerous Schools: What We Can Do About the Physical and Emotional Abuse of Our Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.

- "Is Your School a Clambake?" *Time*, 24 December 1956, 47.
- Kandel, I.L. *The Impact of the War Upon American Education*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948.
- Keller, Franklin J. "Jungle Jottings." *High Points in the Work of the High Schools of New York City* 37:1 (January 1955): 8.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
- Kliebard, Herbert. *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Kluger, Richard. *Simple Justice*. New York: Knopf, 1976.
- Knowles, John. *A Separate Peace*. New York: Bantam, 1988. Orig. 1959.
- Krug, Edward. *The Shaping of the American High School*. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.
- Kuznick, Peter and James Gilbert, eds. *Rethinking Cold War Culture*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2001.
- Lake, Alice. "Look Who's Teaching School." *Saturday Evening Post*, 31 March 1956, 38+.
- Lamkin, F. Duane. "An Analysis of Propaganda Techniques Used in *Why Johnny Can't Read*." *The Reading Teacher* 9:2 (December 1955): 107-117.
- Leloudis, James. *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Lemann, Nicholas. *The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.
- Levenson, Sam. "Teachers and The Blackboard Jungle." *High Points in the Work of the High Schools of New York City* 37:6 (June 1955): 33.
- Lynd, Albert. *Quackery in the Public Schools*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1953.
- Marsh, Joseph F. "A Critique of American Higher Education: The Views of a Former Instructor in the Great Issues Course at Dartmouth College." *Journal of Higher Education* 30:6 (June 1959).

- Mathews, Mitford M. "Of Matters Lexicographical." *American Speech* 32 (1957): 56.
- May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.
- May, Lary, ed. *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.
- "McBain, Ed." *The Craft of Crime: Conversations with Crime Writers*. John C. Carr, ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983. 1-23.
- McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- McCoy, Beth. "Manager, Buddy, Delinquent: *Blackboard Jungle's* Desegregating Triangle." *Cinema Journal* 38:1 (1998): 25-39.
- McCulloch, David. *Truman*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.
- Medovoi, Leerom. "Reading the Blackboard: Youth, Masculinity, and Racial Cross-Identification." *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel, eds., Durham: Duke University Press, 1997. PAGES
- Melby, Ernest O. and Morton Puner, eds. *Freedom and Public Education*. New York: Praeger, 1953.
- Meyer, Eugene. "The Hub of the Wheel." *NEA Journal* (May 1952): 277-79.
- Miller, Ron. *Free Schools, Free People: Education and Democracy After the 1960s*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Mrozek, Donald J. "The Cult and Ritual of Toughness in Cold War America." *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*. Ray B. Browne, ed. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980. PAGES???
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. New York: Vintage, 1997.
- Nash, Paul. "The Strange Death of Progressive Education." *Educational Theory* 14:2 (April 1964): 65-75, 82.
- O'Connor, Flannery. *The Violent Bear it Away*. New York: Signet, 1983. Orig. 1960.
- O'Neill, Barry. "The History of a Hoax." *New York Times Magazine*, 6 March 1994, 46-49.

- Patton, Frances Gray. *Good Morning, Miss Dove*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1954.
- _____. "Miss Dove and the Maternal Instinct." *Ladies Home Journal*, October 1954, 174+.
- Pells, Richard H. *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.
- Perlstein, Daniel. "Imagined Authority: *Blackboard Jungle* and the Project of Educational Liberalism." *Paedagogica Historica* 36:1 (2000): 406-424.
- "Progressive Education: A Debate." *New York Times Magazine*, 8 September 1957, 25+.
- Rampersad, Arnold. *Jackie Robinson: A Biography*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1997.
- Ravitch, Diane. *The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945-1980*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Raywid, Mary Anne. *The Ax-Grinders: Critics of Our Public Schools* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).
- Reese, William J. "The Origins of Progressive Education." *History of Education Quarterly* 41:1 (Spring 2001): 1-24.
- _____. *Power and Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements During the Progressive Era*. New York: Routledge, 1986.
- Rettie, Lois M. "The Devil, According to Flesch." *New Republic*, 13 June 1955, 21-22.
- Riesman, David with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. New Haven.: Yale University Press, 1961/1989.
- Rose, Lisle R. *The Cold War Comes to Main Street: America in 1950*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999.
- Salinger, J.D. *Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1951.
- Savage, Sean J. *Truman and the Democratic Party*. Lawrence: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.
- Scott, C. Winfield and Clyde M. Hill, eds. *Public Education Under Criticism*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1954.

- Shor, Ira. *Culture Wars: School and Society in the Conservative Restoration, 1969-1984*. Boston: Routledge, 1986.
- Sides, Josh. *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Sinclair, Upton. *The Goslings: A Study of the American Schools*. Pasadena, Calif: Upton Sinclair, 1924.
- Smith, Mark. *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate Over Objectivity and Purpose*. Durham: Duke University Press, YEAR
- Smith, Mortimer. *A Citizens Manual for Public Schools: A Guide for School Board Members and Other Layman*. Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1959.
- _____, ed. *A Decade of Comment on Education , 1956-1966: Selections from the Bulletin of the Council for Basic Education*. Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1966.
- _____. *And Madly Teach: A Layman Looks at Public Education*. Chicago: Regnery, 1949.
- _____. *The Diminished Mind: A Study of Planned Mediocrity in Our Public Schools*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1954.
- Solomon, Barbara Miller. *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Sperber, Murray. *Beer and Circus: How Big-Time College Sports is Crippling Undergraduate Education*. New York: Henry Holt, 2000.
- Sugrue, Thomas. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- _____. "Reassessing the History of Postwar America." *Prospects* 20 (1995): 493-509.
- Traister, Bryce. "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies." *American Quarterly* 52:1 (June 2000): 274-304.
- Tuttle, William. "America's Children in an Era of War, Hot and Cold: The Holocaust, the Bomb, and Child Rearing in the 1940s," in Peter Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., *Rethinking Cold War Culture*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2001. 14-34.

- Tyack, David. *The One Best System: A History of Urban Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Tyack, David and Larry Cuban. *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Tyack, David and Elisabeth Hansot. *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Public Schools*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992.
- _____. *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980*. New York: Basic Books, 1982.
- Tyack, David, Robert Lowe, and Elisabeth Hansot. *Public Schools in Hard Times: The Great Depression and Recent Years*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Van Ells, Mark D. *To Hear Only Thunder Again: America's World War II Veterans Come Home*. New York: Lexington Books, 2001.
- Van Til, William. "Is Progressive Education Obsolete?" *Saturday Review of Literature*, 17 February 1962, 56+.
- Winkler, Allan M. *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Witty, Paul. "Answers to Questions about Reading." *National Parent-Teacher* (September 1955): 10-13.
- Wollenberg, Charles. *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1976*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
- Wylie, Philip. "What is Your Education Worth?" *Reader's Digest*, September 1947, 23-25.
- Zilversmit, Arthur. *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930-1960*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Biographical and Historical Dictionaries

Historical Dictionary of American Education, s.v. "Mortimer Smith."

Los Angeles A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County, s.v. "Pasadena" and "Freeways."

Mystery and Suspense Writers, Volume 1, s.v. "Evan Hunter."

Who's News and Why, 1948, s.v. "Rudolf Flesch."

Who's Who in America, Vol. 26, 1950-51, s.v. "Benjamin Fine."

Dissertations and Theses

Bethune, Jack Malcolm. "A History of the Advertising Council, 1942-1967." M.A. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1968.

de Graaf, Lawrence B. "Negro Migration to Los Angeles, 1930-1950." Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1962.

Hayden, James Joseph. "The Council for Basic Education: From Fringe to Mainstream." Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1993.

Krzywda, Sister Mary Maurilia. "A Study of *Why Johnny Can't Read* and its Criticisms." M.A. thesis, Case Western Reserve, 1961.

Newman, Frank. "The Era of Expertise: The Growth, The Spread and Ultimately the Decline of the National Commitment to the Concept of the Highly Trained Expert, 1945 to 1970." Ph.D. diss, Stanford, 1981.

Rollins, Joel David. "The Continuing Crisis: An Analysis of Educational Crisis Rhetoric from 1951-1985." Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1996.

Seals, Jack Reece. "A Survey of Magazine Criticisms of the Schools, With Implications for Public School Relations." M.A. thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 1954.

Vita

Adam Benjamin Golub was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on May 7, 1970. He was raised by his parents, Roberta and Dr. Stanley Golub, in New Jersey. After earning a Bachelor of Arts in English from Vassar College in New York in 1992, he taught high school for five years in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and completed his Master of Arts in Teaching from Boston College. In August 1998 he entered the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin to pursue a doctoral degree in American Studies. In August 2004, he began work as an Assistant Professor of Education Studies at Guilford College in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Permanent address: 5328 West Market Street, Apt. 5F, Greensboro, NC 27410

This dissertation was typed by the author.