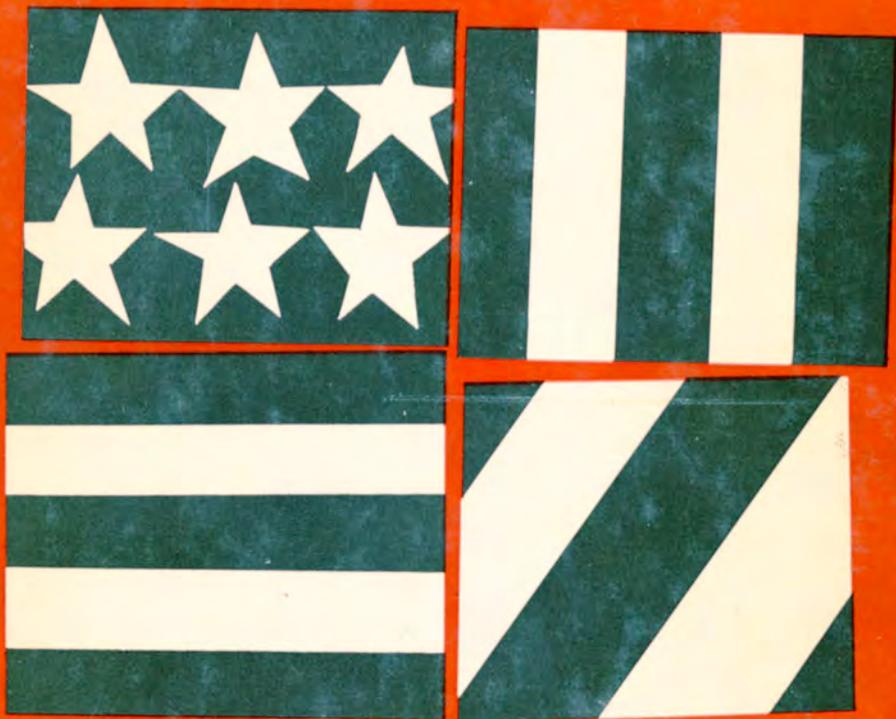


THE CROSSROAD PAPERS

★ A Look Into the American Future ★

Edited and with an Introduction by Hans J. Morgenthau



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any increase in Federal control over education. On the face of it, this is silly. The avowed purpose of federal aid is to force the American people to spend a larger share of their incomes on education. This may be a laudable purpose, but it is either naive or disingenuous to pretend that this would not reduce local autonomy. The right not to spend one's money on other people's children (or even one's own) is not perhaps inalienable, but it is certainly highly valued by many Americans.

Nor is that the only right which Congress would limit if it assumed a major role in financing education. The very liberals who proclaim the possibility of "Federal aid without Federal control" also urge that Federal aid be used as a lever to enforce racial integration in the South. Furthermore, just as state aid has led state legislatures to establish "minimal standards" for local schools, so too Federal aid will mean certain Federal standards of equity and efficiency. Not even the recent Higher Education Facilities Act, permissive as it is, gives the states complete freedom in spending federal funds.

Perhaps most important of all, increasing Federal aid will mean that Congress joins with state legislatures and local authorities in setting the over-all educational priorities of the country. This effort is already self-conscious and deliberate. A century ago the Morrill Act established colleges of "Agriculture and Mechanic Arts" because Congress thought existing colleges too preoccupied with the classics. Half a century ago it began aiding vocational secondary education for similar reasons. In 1958, under the National Defense Education Act, Congress backed science and languages, subjects which it felt, after hearing expert testimony, that the secondary schools had been neglecting.

Looking back at the history of Federal education legislation, two points are clear. First, with the early exception of the Northwest Ordinance, the main aim of Federal legislation has been to bring the educational system into closer harmony with the manpower requirements of a technologically changing society. Second, these requirements are fundamentally national

rather than local, and when innovation has been left to local authorities, whether in schools or colleges, they have done an inadequate job. It therefore seems reasonable to predict that if the rate of technological change increases, the role of the Federal government in shaping educational priorities will also increase. Congress will, however, act only when the existing feudal system has shown itself hopelessly inadequate; it will not in the foreseeable future admit that the *primary* responsibility for many kinds of education is Federal rather than state or local. Nevertheless, that fact seems likely to be increasingly understood by other Americans, although not widely proclaimed.

Just as power is likely to shift from state to Federal authorities so it is also likely to shift from local to state hands. As a matter of law, of course, primary responsibility for education has always fallen on the states rather than local communities. The state education codes have established the ground rules for education, and have for many years limited the freedom of local boards of education within very narrow boundaries. The local board may not reduce salaries or other expenditures below a certain level without losing state aid. It may only hire teachers and administrators certified by the state. It must build buildings with a certain number of square feet for various functions, provide a certain number of teachers and jungle gyms and toilets for each child, and so on. Even the curriculum is regulated by the state in many cases, with state legislators approving a limited number of textbooks, adopting curricula with required courses in everything from patriotism to the dangers of alcohol, and banning instruction in things as diverse as Darwinism and contraception.

This kind of power is so widely taken for granted that it is seldom even discussed. Few people want to turn back the clock (though the question of teacher certification has aroused some such sentiments). State control arose because local schools were being used for political patronage, firetraps were being constructed with the taxpayer's money, children were being denied an adequate education by parents too niggardly to pay for good

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teachers. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that an extension of Federal power would, over the years, produce a similar pattern of Federal standards.

All of the foregoing issues are fundamentally of the same kind: which groups of laymen make certain choices about the schools. A second and related issue which has received far less attention, is which professionals will have the dominant voice. Here the trend is towards giving university scholars and scientists a greater voice, and everyone else less.

The meaning of what is popularly called "progressivism" in America was, in "political" terms, that for two generations the schools became largely independent of colleges and universities. Only a small minority of the students were going on to college, and in many cases only a small minority of the teachers had any familiarity with a scholarly or scientific discipline. Conversely, university scholars and scientists knew little about the elementary and secondary schools, and cared less. Progressivism was in this sense a revolt against the intellectual demands of the academics. (I should emphasize that this kind of progressivism has only the most distant connection with the kind preached by John Dewey or the practices of the handful of progressive schools, mostly private, which sought to prepare their pupils for further education rather than for "life.")

That era is over. More and more secondary students are going to college. The proportion will, indeed, soon be as high as it was in the nineteenth century. Once again, secondary schooling will be defined primarily as preparation for college. The curriculum is already reverting to a more collegiate model. More teachers have been through a liberal arts college, more have studied an academic specialty. The ties between schools and colleges are tightening in a dozen ways, of which the most conspicuous is perhaps the development of "Advanced Placement" courses in many high schools, offering "college level" work in various subjects. These courses attract a kind of teacher, and set a standard of both academic excellence and intellectual relevance, which slowly permeates the rest of the school. A related phenomenon

is the current curriculum-reform movement, which has involved university scientists and scholars in developing detailed curriculum plans for the secondary schools, training teachers to use them, and even occasionally doing some elementary or secondary teaching themselves.

Similar forces are at work in the colleges. More undergraduates are going on to graduate school. More colleges are establishing their own graduate schools. The result is that the standards of the graduate school are more widely accepted as applying to undergraduate programs. The professor who is primarily interested in undergraduates is either an eccentric or an incompetent, and the program which offers something distinctive to undergraduates is on the wane.

The net result is an increasing consensus about what should be taught, running from the primary through the graduate school. This does not mean, however, that the structure of education is becoming administratively more monolithic. On the contrary.

At the college level, professors are becoming more like doctors or lawyers—independent professionals with their own constituencies and their own incomes. When a professor was primarily a teacher, supported by a student tuition and alumni endowment, he needed an institution to support him. Few individual teachers could reach enough students to make a national reputation, and even if they did, they could seldom make a living by teaching independently (though the public lecturer in effect did this). The research professor, on the other hand, often acquires a national reputation, and then finds that grants and consultantships can support him. He needs a university only as an office and for facilities. If one university does not suit him, he can move to another. His grants and his graduate assistants will follow. This kind of mobility has become characteristic even of disciplines with limited research funds. In this context the university administrator stops being the director of the academic play and becomes merely the producer, making technical arrangements for the display of stars. If there is direc-

tion it comes from the collective wisdom of the legislators and philanthropists who put up the money, and from the committees of scholars and scientists which make the grants.

At the elementary and secondary level there are also signs, especially in big cities, that the teachers are beginning to seek an independent voice, rather than speaking only through administrators responsible to laymen.

If these trends persist, two predictions seem justified. First, no major reforms will be possible in American education which do not begin at the graduate level and filter down through the system. (Indeed, the major "reforms" of the current period consist precisely of filtering ideas and ideals down from the graduate schools to lower levels.) Second, the increasing autonomy of the graduate-school professor will make major institutional reforms even more difficult in the next generation than the last. The era of the great educational leader seems to be over. Innovation, as Clark Kerr indicates in *The Uses of the University*, is something that an administrator no longer plans or even initiates, but rather something that he presides over, keeping the peace as best he can. The autonomous fiefdoms of a great university go their own way, and individual professors run their own realms independently. This is less true in public school systems today, but it may become more so as teachers assert their power.

Yet to say that no individual leader can impress his dreams or nightmares upon the educational system is not to say that educators as a group may not do so, perhaps at the expense of laymen.

The key issue in education today, both public and private, is probably the extent to which teachers at all levels will be allowed to become a self-regulating profession, controlling their own affairs without lay interference. This is the question of "academic freedom," in the broadest sense of that phrase, or as I would prefer to say, professional freedom. It implies freedom not merely to read and write whatever books one thinks best or to teach whatever version of one's subject one thinks

(Continued from front flap)

Senator Joseph S. Clark, Professor John P. Roche, and Eric Larrabee. These contributors deal with the problems facing us under four headings: *Equality and Freedom – the Unfinished Agenda*; *Beyond the Welfare State*; *The International Future*; and *Political Action at the Crossroads*. Nineteen carefully prepared essays range over such diverse subjects as “The Future of the Race Issue,” “The Economics of Disarmament,” “America and the Communist Challenge,” “The Case of the Ailing Unions,” and “The Breakthrough to Modernity.”

Dissecting the issues confronting us, the authors of this eminently lucid and rational book discard outmoded approaches and present their often brilliant and original solutions in terms of the future.

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