

EDUCATION

Without Government



Why it must be in private hands...
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EDUCATION WITHOUT GOVERNMENT

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In this short but compelling book, scientist, educator, and author Jerrold Meyer lays out the history of American public education, the progressive philosophy that guides it, the malign influence of teachers unions on the education system, the system's infiltration by cultural Marxism, and its growing indoctrination of our children. Meyer then convincingly argues that child education need not, in fact **should not**, be the province of government. Privatizing education would reduce costs, open up an enormous range of choices, raise standards, and promote intellectual achievement. Only such a revolutionary change is capable of reversing the long deterioration of American society and ushering in a new era of growth and prosperity.

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Jerrold Meyer



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by Jerrold Meyer

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Executive Summary

Formal education of children began thousands of years ago where, in most societies, it was restricted to the sons of wealthy or noble families. Later, Enlightenment philosophers argued for universal education to prepare the citizenry for participating in a democratic society. By the 19th century, the first modern-style public education system was created in Prussia, followed by the establishment of public schools in the United States modeled after the Prussian system. From the outset, the philosophical orientation of American public schools was heavily influenced by Benjamin Rush, Horace Mann, and especially the progressive philosopher, psychologist, and educator John Dewey. These men shared the philosophy that public schools should imbue children with a collectivist spirit of service and social cohesion instead of a drive towards individualism and independent thought. Federal government intervention in public education policy began after the Civil War and expanded enormously with the creation of the federal Department of Education during the Carter administration. Another key factor in the control of public schools was the rise in power of teachers unions, particularly the National Educational Association and the American Federation of Teachers. These unions are dominated by left-wing politics and they use their political power to serve the interests of their members above those of the students they teach. The leftist orientation of teachers unions and their members can be traced directly to the ongoing infiltration of the American public education system by Marxist socialist ideology. Beginning in the 1930s and continuing through the 1960s and beyond, Marxist theorists realized that capitalism in the Western democracies could not be overthrown by a violent workers revolution as had occurred in early 20th century Russia. Instead, these theorists urged a “long march through institutions” in which the public education system would indoctrinate generations of students in Marxist

ideology until this ideology dominated the culture. In the United States, classical Marxism evolved into a kind of “cultural” Marxism, as evidenced by the creation of Critical Race and Critical Social Justice theories and policies like DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion). Schools of education require teacher trainees to be exposed to the tenets of cultural Marxism, and most of these trainees later pass along the same ideas to their own students. Marxist ideology combined with progressive educational theories has inevitably led to a dumbing down of the K-12 public school curriculum and generations of American schoolchildren who are unable to think logically and critically. The solution to this dilemma is a total privatization of education, from kindergarten to colleges and universities. Privatizing education is not only the practical solution to the problems created by public schools, it is the moral choice since the sole proper function of government is to protect individual rights. Parents could then be free to choose schools whose primary focus is education, not indoctrination.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Most citizens of Western democracies believe, without question, that one of the proper functions of government is to organize and administer a public education system. Such a system is typically conceptualized as being open to all children, requiring mandatory attendance (up to a certain age), and paid for with taxpayers' money. Where did this idea originate, why has it perpetuated without serious debate, and what is the alternative? This essay discusses the historical foundations of education, presents the origins of public education in the United States, discusses the malign influence of teachers unions, teacher training, and Marxist philosophy on the public education system, reveals the complete failure of that system and the harms it has produced, challenges the premise that providing education is a proper function of government, and lays out a vision for education in a fully free, capitalist society.

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2. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

The Ancient World

According to historical records, formal education arose over 4,000 years ago in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. In those civilizations, however, schooling was restricted to the sons of royal or wealthy families. The value of educating a broader group of students can be traced to the rise of the city-states in ancient Greece. For example, the sons of Spartan citizens were removed from their families at 7 years of age to live in an agoge until the age of 21. The agoge was a state-mandated training and educational program based on an austere lifestyle, absolute obedience to authority, and military training, all of which was designed to produce a cohesive class of warrior citizens pledged to the Spartan way of life. Thus, Sparta stands as an early instance of how education can be subverted to indoctrinate children in service to the state. In Athens, Plato argued that the purpose of education was twofold: to help the individual reach a state of fulfillment in life (called *eudaimonia*), and to help society flourish by training future leaders. Like those of Sparta, Athenian schools were state-sponsored and controlled.

Roman Era

Like the Greeks, the ancient Romans understood the value of childhood education. Early on, children of wealthy families were educated in the home by paid tutors. By the time of the Roman Empire, this scheme had been augmented by a formal system of tuition-based schools. The lowest level school, called the Ludus, was attended by both boys and girls up to the age of 10 or 11. Students in the Ludus schools were taught the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic (the 3 Rs). The sons of wealthy Roman families could go on to the Grammaticus, where they primarily learned basic rhetoric (public speaking), grammar, poetry, and

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the Greek language. At the age of 15, boys could enter the most advanced school, called the Rhetor, where they were trained in advanced rhetoric so as to become skilled orators. Students in the Rhetor were also taught literature, philosophy, music, science, and Roman history, law, and politics. This tiered education system can be seen as a forerunner of our current structure consisting of elementary school, middle/high school, and university.

Europe – Middle Ages

In Europe during the early Middle Ages, formal education mainly occurred in monastic and cathedral schools and was restricted to the sons of noblemen and clergy. Subject matter focused on theology, Latin and Greek, and some mathematics. Later on, the first universities were established in Britain, France, Italy, and Spain. Besides theology, these institutions of higher learning provided instruction in medicine, law, and the liberal arts. At first, only the sons of wealthy and noble families attended universities, but admission was later granted to exceptional young men of other social classes. The Middle Ages was also a time when guilds of master craftsmen and tradesmen were forming. The knowledge and skills acquired by these highly experienced workers were passed on to apprentices in newly created guild (i.e., vocational) schools.

Renaissance & Enlightenment

The Renaissance saw formal education moving away from a focus on theology and instead emphasizing study of the humanities. This was a key feature of the new, private, grammar schools that were created for the sons of middle-class English families. The modern concept of universal education originated during the Enlightenment. Philosophers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed in the importance of education for developing citizens who are prepared to participate in a democratic society. Although the ideas of Locke or Rousseau did not include universal **public** education, their ideas were appropriated by

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other Enlightenment scholars like Helvetius, Condorcet, and Diderot to justify the establishment of government-supported education for all children in order to promote “social progress.”

Early 19th Century Prussia

Ideas about the importance of educating the populace culminated in the creation of the first modern-style public education system in early 19th century Prussia. Germany had just suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of Napoleon, and the leaders of the Prussian state instituted a sweeping series of societal reforms designed to revitalize the culture. Among these reforms was the creation of a system of **compulsory** public education in which the state paid for student tuition, teacher training, and school construction. Both boys and girls attended the Prussian primary schools from 5 to 13 or 14 years of age. The true nature of this education system was expounded by the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte in a series of 14 addresses he delivered to the German nation in 1807-1808. According to Turnbull’s analysis of Fichte’s addresses, moral teaching is a foundational aspect of education, and “the root of all morality is self-control, the subordination of the selfish instincts to the idea of the community”, and such subordination is achieved by “raising and advancing of the well-being of the community by self-sacrifice.....This moral training is, therefore, the true and final purpose of the new education.”¹ Moreover, school attendance according to Fichte must be mandatory. Again, in Turnbull’s words, “If parents resist this public education compulsion must be used. The State, as the supreme administrator of human affairs and the guardian of those who are its wards, is responsible only to God and to its own conscience.”² Other analysts have pointed out that the Prussian system emphasized discipline and, in essence, was designed to indoctrinate children to be obedient to authority (i.e., the State).

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Collectivism in the Philosophy of Education

This brief compilation of the historical foundations of education clearly reveals a strong collectivist streak in educational philosophy. Even though schooling was sometimes at least partially aimed at individual flourishing (especially when privately funded), government-sponsored schools were inevitably designed to promote the (presumptive) well-being of the state over that of the individual.

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3. ORIGINS OF UNITED STATES PUBLIC EDUCATION

School Laws – 17th century Massachusetts

In the pre-revolutionary American colonies, literacy levels were high despite the absence of public schools. Most children were educated to read and write at home by their parents. In many cases, additional education could be obtained at schools voluntarily established by towns or cities (but requiring payment of tuition) or sponsored by local church groups. Nevertheless, government involvement in education emerged in 17th century Puritan-dominated Massachusetts. First, the Massachusetts School Law of 1642 mandated parental instruction of their offspring in basic literacy so that the children could read and understand the Bible and its precepts. This was soon followed by a second law, the Massachusetts School Law of 1647, which, having deemed ignorance of the scriptures to be the work of Satan, required every town with at least 50 households to hire a teacher and every town with at least 100 households to establish a grammar school.

Benjamin Franklin – Universal Education, but Not Government Controlled

The Founding Fathers were moved by the Enlightenment ideals of self-improvement and civic engagement through education. Consequently, many of them advocated for some form of universal education, public or private. Influenced not only by Enlightenment philosophy but also by his own limited educational opportunities growing up, Benjamin Franklin became an early promoter of universal education. Franklin's 1749 pamphlet entitled *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* argued for the establishment of an academy that would be open to all, regardless of their social standing. Importantly, the academy would be supported by private funds and donations, not government

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subsidies as implied by historians who refer to Franklin's pamphlet as endorsing "public" education. Indeed, in his 1902 volume on Franklin and education, David E. Cloyd states "Nowhere in his writings did he have in mind a government system of public schools.....The idea of a central government, determining and directing through a system of taxation the schools of the entire country, was contrary to Franklin's nature, education, training, or philosophy of government."³

Benjamin Rush – Public Education System to Imbue Respect for Authority

Another prominent Philadelphian, Dr. Benjamin Rush, agreed with Franklin about the importance of early education, but his motives and goals were far different. First, it's important to understand Rush's thinking as a physician and one of the founders of the nascent field of psychiatry. As a consequence of the success of the American revolution, Rush became concerned that the general population might have become **too passionate** about individual freedom. In one of his essays, he wrote "The excess of the passion of liberty, inflamed by the successful issue of the war, produced, in many people, opinions and conduct which could not be removed by reason **nor restrained by government** (emphasis added).....The extensive influence which these opinions had upon the understandings, passions and morals of many of the citizens of the United States, constituted a species of **insanity**, which I shall take the liberty of distinguishing by the name of Anarchia."⁴ Thus, in Rush's mind, believing strongly in individual freedom and acting in its defense despite government opposition is actually a form of mental illness. Turning to Rush's position on education, he penned an essay entitled *Thoughts Upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic* that reveals his aim of using public (i.e., government-funded) education to mold a populace subservient to the State. Three brief quotes suffice to illustrate this aim: "Our schools of learning, by producing one general and uniform system of education, will render the mass of the people more

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homogenous and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government.....Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that **he is public property** (emphasis added).....In the education of youth, let the authority of our masters be as absolute as possible.”⁵ Whereas Franklin admired and promoted free inquiry and independent thought, Rush proposed a public education system that would quash unconventional thinking and imbue children with the moral value of bending to authority.

Horace Mann – Common School Movement

The drive to establish public education in the early years of the new republic crystallized in the efforts of Horace Mann, a lawyer and later a state legislator in Massachusetts. In 1837, Massachusetts established the first state board of education with Mann as its secretary. To learn about national school systems outside of the U.S., Mann visited several European states in 1843 where he was particularly impressed with the system in Prussia. Upon his return, Mann helped create the Common School Movement, which advocated for universal, nonsectarian (although Bible instruction was included in the curriculum), publicly-funded schools (called “common schools”) taught by professional teachers and open to children of all social classes. To ensure the availability of suitable teachers for the common schools, Mann also formed “normal schools” to train teachers according to his educational principles. This began the establishment of teachers’ colleges and schools of education permeated with theories of pedagogy that, to this day, continue to shape teachers within the public education system.

John Dewey – Progressive Education

While the men described above laid the groundwork for public education in the United States, the current philosophy of progressive education originated largely from the work of John Dewey. Dewey was a philosopher, psychologist, and educator known best for his writings

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while serving as a professor at Columbia University Teachers College from 1904 to 1930. Philosophically, Dewey was a pragmatist. This means that there are no objective truths; rather, truth is determined by whatever works in practice. The ideal classroom, according to Dewey, is a place where students learn by experience. The traditional conveyance of factual information by the teacher/professor was considered obsolete. Indeed, in the spirit of Horace Mann, Dewey writes in his influential book *The School and Society* that “The growth of the child in the direction of social capacity and service.....becomes the unifying aim [of education].”⁶ Most educators are either unaware of or ignore the fact that Dewey was invited in 1928 by the Bolsheviks to visit the Soviet Union to observe directly their new Communist school system. Upon his return, Dewey wrote a glowing account of that system, stating “Their [Soviet schools] function is to create habits so that persons will act cooperatively and collectively as readily as now in capitalistic countries they act ‘individualistically’”, and “The Russian educational system is enough to convert one to the idea that only in a society based upon the cooperative principle can the ideals of educational reformers be adequately carried into operation.”⁷ In his praise of the collectivist Soviet system, Dewey conveniently ignored the mass murders and severe famine that had already killed millions of Russians by the late 1920s. To summarize, the public education system conceptualized by Mann and Dewey was “designed to teach the population democratic cohesion and unity with the dominant culture, all while instilling a collectivist, rather than individualistic, form of morality.”⁸

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4. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT GETS INVOLVED

1867 Office of Education, 1980 Education Cabinet Level Position

With the post-Civil War expansion of central power, it was inevitable that the federal government would enter the domain of public education. This was accomplished by the establishment of the U.S. Office of Education in 1867. Initially housed within the U.S. Department of the Interior, this small organization was tasked with collecting and distributing statistics regarding educational facilities across the country. Involvement of the federal government in public education was substantially enlarged during the presidency of Jimmy Carter by the creation of a cabinet-level Secretary of Education in 1980. The Secretary's role was to administer a newly formed federal Department of Education. The department's website lists its principal activities as follows: (1) establishes policies relating to federal financial aid for education, administers distribution of those funds and monitors their use; (2) collects data and oversees research on America's schools and disseminates this information to Congress, educators and the general public; (3) identifies the major issues and problems in education and focuses national attention on them; and (4) enforces federal statutes prohibiting discrimination in programs and activities receiving federal funds and ensures equal access to education for every individual.⁹ In fiscal 2024, the Department of Education employed over 2,400 people and had a budget of approximately \$268 billion.¹⁰ At the same time, federal student loans to cover the cost of education had reached an outstanding debt of \$1.5 trillion held by almost 43 million borrowers.¹¹ During the years 2000 to 2020, the number of student loan borrowers more than doubled, but the total amount owed **more than quadrupled**.¹² This disparity vividly illustrates how federal education

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policies encouraged the spiraling costs of tuition and fees, turning millions of young people into “debt slaves.”

Skyrocketing Spending by the Department of Education

Coincident with the explosive rise in our country’s national debt that began in the 1980s and 1990s, the Department of Education was handing out lavish amounts of money through its grants and contracts programs. The Federal Register lists over 3,900 grants and other funding opportunities that have been offered by the department since 1994.¹³ Some of these opportunities have been related to the applicant’s racial, ethnic, or immigrant status, as illustrated by various programs listed within the Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. These include the Office of Migrant Education, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics, the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education, and the White House Initiative on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders.¹⁴ The omission of an educational excellence initiative for Caucasian students is a clear example of government-enforced racism, unless the Congress somehow believes that all Caucasians (regardless of socioeconomic status and educational opportunities) must already be exceptional despite a lack of federal assistance. One also wonders why there is an initiative for Asian American students, since this group is well known for their outstanding educational achievements.¹⁵

Title 20 of the United States Code – Federal Control of Education

The U.S. Congress has also been quite busy drumming up legislation designed either to promote or to regulate education across the country and beyond (i.e., international education programs). Dozens of education-related congressional acts have been enacted since the

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formation of the Department of Education. Most of these can be found within Title 20 of the United States Code, a massive compendium of federal education-related legislation that comprises 80 chapters and over 1,700 pages.¹⁶ The mere size and scope of this document illustrates how deeply the federal government has infiltrated every facet of education in the United States.

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5. TEACHERS UNIONS CAPTURE K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

Influence of Teachers Unions

In his review of teachers unions and public education, Terry Moe states that “teachers unions probably have more influence on the public schools than any other group in American society.”¹⁷ This influence, according to Moe, is derived through a combination of collective bargaining and political activism that drives public education laws and regulations. In this section, we discuss how teachers unions have acquired substantial control over public education and how these unions serve their own interests above the interests of students.

NEA & AFT Dominate Teachers Unions

Teachers unions are so pervasive in American K-12 public schools that almost all instructors and administrators are union members. The two largest and most influential teachers unions are the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The NEA, which is the largest teachers union, was established in 1857. The AFT, which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO, was formed in 1916 by the coalescence of several previously unaffiliated teachers unions in large cities. The impact of the NEA and AFT on education policy was relatively modest until the 1960s, when both unions began to grow in membership and power. This change was coincident with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, a component of Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” program that provided federal support for school districts with low-income families as well as funding for teacher training and development.¹⁸ Later, lobbying efforts by the NEA played a pivotal role in the establishment of the federal Department of Education in 1980.¹⁹

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Political Power of the Unions

The NEA currently has 3 million members, including both teachers and administrators, whereas the AFT has a membership of 1.8 million. Together, these unionized public education workers constitute a formidable donating, lobbying, and voting bloc which, for many years, has strongly identified with left-wing causes and the Democratic Party. During the 2023-2024 election cycle, the NEA contributed over \$3.3 million to the Democratic Party and an additional \$29.2 million to organizations identified as politically liberal. In contrast, the NEA contributed only \$58,000 to the Republican Party and nothing to conservative groups. Similarly, the AFT contributed about \$2.8 million to the Democrats along with \$4.6 million to liberal groups, vs. nothing to either the Republicans or conservative groups.²⁰ It is no surprise that the Democratic Party and its allies have been staunch supporters of public education and of the policies advocated by teachers unions.

Fundamental Goal of Teachers Unions

Fundamentally, teachers unions exist not to help child education but to protect their membership, enhance their political power, and organize opposition to policies that threaten those objectives. In his 2001 analysis of teachers unions²¹, Moe identified seven themes common to teachers union policies: (1) “Unions are dedicated to protecting the jobs of all their members.” The result is that it’s almost impossible for administrators to fire incompetent teachers. (2) “Unions don’t want basic personnel decisions—about pay, promotions, transfers—made on the basis of teacher performance.” In other words, unions oppose merit-based decisions. (3) “Unions seek to create, expand, and guarantee teacher rights by severely restricting the discretion available to principals and other administrators.” (4) “Unions tend to oppose anything that induces competition or differentiation among teachers...

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The notion that some teachers are better than others, or worth more than others, is stridently resisted.” (5) “Unions tend to oppose anything that induces competition among schools.” This means that unions oppose not only private schools but even school choice within the public school system. (6) “Unions tend to oppose any contracting-out of educational functions that involves a shift of jobs and resources from the public to the private sector.” A key feature of this position is that teachers unions oppose school vouchers that could transfer education dollars from the public to the private sector. (7) “Unions want contract provisions that, so far as legally possible, induce all teachers to become members and force any nonmembers to pay agency fees.” Such provisions ensure a continuous flow of resources to the union for lobbying and other political activities.

Union Behavior During COVID-19

The behavior of teachers unions during the COVID-19 pandemic is a vivid example of how the unions prioritize the interests of their members over those of the families they serve. Early in the pandemic, everyone from government officials to the general public were concerned about possible child mortality from COVID-19 as well as the potential spread of the virus from children to other family members. For those reasons, almost all schools across the country were closed by late March 2020. However, accumulated data over the succeeding months revealed that only a minute fraction of children developed serious illness from COVID-19 and even fewer died.²² Nevertheless, the AFT, headed by Randi Weingarten, pressed the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to keep the schools closed for much longer than necessary.^{22,23}

Consequences of Union Behavior

We now know that forcing children to stay at home for such a lengthy period during their formative years had disastrous consequences for their academic progress, social development, and mental health.²⁴ In the

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words of Alex Gutentag, a former Oakland, California school teacher who directly witnessed the impact of prolonged school closure on his students, “The children who never catch up will grow into damaged, illiterate adults who cannot participate in the labor force and who are plagued by social dysfunction and decay. Ultimately, the union will achieve its vision of remaking the world—only it will be a broken, disfigured world that no one wants.”²⁵

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6. THE INFILTRATION OF MARXIST SOCIALIST IDEOLOGY

The Pervasiveness of Socialist and Marxist Ideas

Numerous parent groups and media members have voiced concerns about the pervasiveness of socialist and Marxist ideas in the public schools, perhaps thinking that this is a recent development. It isn't. The idea put forth by Benjamin Rush and John Dewey that public education should indoctrinate students to serve the collective state comes directly from Karl Marx himself. In Marxist theory, "The deliberate shaping of curriculum to favor collective over individualist action, and to prioritize social need over profit, marks the moral horizon that socialist education strives for."²⁶ Marx also believed that his Communist "paradise" would come about through a violent revolt of the workers against the ruling class. However, although this formula worked in early 20th century Russia, the predicted revolution wasn't occurring in the American and European democracies. Accordingly, Marxist theorists revised their strategy to a non-violent one that involved the gradual takeover of society's major institutions from within, starting with the education system.

Antonio Gramsci

One of the first Marxist disciples to adopt this new strategy was Antonio Gramsci, a philosopher and political leader who helped found the Italian Communist Party in 1921. Gramsci believed that the ruling elites (led by society's intellectuals) maintained their power through "cultural hegemony", meaning an indoctrination of the masses with a system of beliefs, values, and social mores that benefit the elites at the expense of the people they rule (i.e., the working class).²⁷ In place of a workers' revolt, Gramsci proposed a "counter-hegemony" in which revolutionary

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groups employ persuasion, propaganda, and what we now call “psyops” (psychological operations aimed at subtly influencing a population’s beliefs and actions) to replace the current hegemonical structure.

The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory

Another key element underlying Marxist infiltration of the education system was the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, a group that originated within the Frankfurt University’s Institute for Social Research. The Frankfurt School was founded in 1923 by members of the German Communist Party with the aim of instigating “a subtle revolutionthrough the penetration and transformation of the cultural traditions and institutions of Western Civilization.”²⁸ Max Horkheimer, who became the director of the Frankfurt School in 1930, developed a philosophical approach he termed Critical Theory. Critical Theory claims to be a new way of understanding society and man’s relationship to it, with an emphasis on social injustices and the responsibility of philosophers not only to understand this relationship but to actively work to remedy it. Among other premises, Critical Theory rejects “the notion of *objectivity* in knowledge by pointing, among other things, to the fact that the object of knowledge is itself embedded into a historical and social process.”²⁹ In contrast³⁰ to the epistemology of Ayn Rand³⁰, critical theorists believe that there is no objective reality that can be perceived by man’s senses and mentally integrated into knowledge.

The Frankfurt School Comes to America

The Frankfurt School was driven out of Germany by the Nazis in 1933, after which it eventually found a home at Columbia University in New York City. Following in Horkheimer’s footsteps, many university professors such as Theodor Adorno, Eric Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse developed their own brands of Critical Theory. However, it wasn’t until the confluence of three factors in the early 1960s that Marxist ideology really began to take hold within the higher education system. First,

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Gramsci's writings were finally translated into English, thereby becoming accessible to American students and educators. Second, by this time Critical Theory had become a mainstream school of thought within the humanities and social sciences. Third, C. Wright Mills, a sociology professor at Columbia, penned his "Letter to the New Left," which was published in 1960 in the *New Left Review*. In his letter, Mills disparaged the old Marxist idea of the working class serving as the agency of change (i.e., from capitalism to Marxist socialism). Rather he identified "the cultural apparatus, the **intellectuals** [emphasis added]—as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change."³¹

The Long March

The aim of this new generation of Marxists was nothing less than a societal revolution accomplished not by violence (although violent actions by extremist groups continue to occur periodically) but by a pervasive infiltration of educational and other (e.g., political) institutions. This goal was stated explicitly in 1967 by Rudi Dutschke, a German social activist student, who coined the phrase "long march through the institutions."³² Dutschke was aware of and admired Mao Zedong's Communist Chinese revolution, hence the derivation of his phrase from Mao's Long March of the Chinese Red Army. How did this "long march" affect the American professoriate? A study published in 2006 found that the most politically radical faculty members at that time had gone to college in the 1960s or early 1970s.³³ Since that time, the domination of Marxist/socialist thought among college and university professors has continued or even increased, especially in the humanities and social sciences. Note, however, that whereas only a minority of faculty members are openly radical, many others subscribe to or are sympathetic to such ideas (i.e., are "woke"), without understanding the historical origins and full implications of what may be called "Cultural Marxism".

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“Critical Theory” becomes “Critical Race Theory (CRT)”

Although Critical Theory in the 1960s and 1970s continued to be widely studied and discussed within academia, it didn't become a significant part of **popular culture** until the advent of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT originated in the 1980s from the work of Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and other Black legal theorists.³⁴ The core tenets of CRT include the following: “that race is not biologically real but is socially constructed and socially significant; that racism is a normal feature of society and is embedded within systems and institutions, like the legal system; that racism is codified in law, embedded in structures, and woven into public policy.”³⁵ CRT rejects the principle of meritocracy, arguing that “the traditional notion of meritocracy is flawed because it ignores the systemic inequalities and biases that affect marginalized groups, thereby perpetuating their disadvantage.”³⁶ Advocates of CRT argue that racial inequities are created and maintained by what they call “White privilege” or White supremacy”, leading to the conclusion that discrimination against Whites (termed “antiracism”) is morally justified.³⁷ CRT specifically or at least some of its key premises began to appear in K-12 public schools in the 2010s, sparking much controversy among policy-makers, educators, parents, and students.³⁸ The mandated teaching of CRT or similar concepts in the public schools, despite parental objections in many cases, has led to numerous problems including unearned feelings of guilt by White children.

The Concept of “Intersectionality”

CRT's initial focus on racial divisions was expanded significantly in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw when she proposed the concept of “intersectionality.”³⁹ This term “is a framework used to understand how various forms of inequality, discrimination, and social identities (such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability) intersect and overlap. It emphasizes that people are not defined by a single social category but by multiple interconnected aspects of their identity that can result in

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unique experiences of privilege or oppression.”⁴⁰ The idea of intersectionality directly underlies educators’ pleas for “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” (DEI) in the school system, since the diversity aspect is meant to foster greater inclusion of presumably marginalized groups based on their race, gender (including transgender), sexual orientation, ableness, and any other category that could be dreamed up in the future. In practice, such groups become preferred in admissions and hiring processes, and they are also protected legally so that any criticism (no matter how carefully reasoned) by a student or teacher can be construed as “hate speech” and lead to suspension, expulsion, or even prosecution by the legal authorities. Unfortunately, DEI initiatives in one form or another are not going to disappear any time soon, as evidenced by the National Education Association’s continued advocacy of “racial and social justice.”⁴¹

Critical Social Justice Theory (CSJT)

In their 2012 teaching manual *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, Özlem Sensoy and Robin diAngelo integrated Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality with critical theory and the premise of “social justice” to create a new theory they term Critical Social Justice Theory (CSJT).^{42,43} This theory posits that our society (and others) have created a state of injustice because different social groups (identified by the same criteria described by Crenshaw) are valued unequally in society and have different access to societal resources, particularly in the case of various “minority” groups that are systemically oppressed by the majority. Moreover, as a “critical” theory, adherents of the theory (especially if belonging to the majority group of “oppressors”) must engage in constant self-reflection and must make a life-long commitment to act in accordance with this concept of social justice.

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CRT, CSJT, and the Fallacy of Group Rights

On the surface, theories such as CRT and CSJT may seem far removed from Marxist ideology but they are not. Like Marxism, CRT and CSJT are collectivist paradigms in which people are judged and treated based on their membership in a group or groups instead of their individual character and actions. Indeed, the underlying ethical philosophy of these theories was elaborated by Lynn Lemisko, who wrote “If democracy is about individual rights (justice for individuals) [for current purposes, we will overlook this incorrect definition of democracy], then social justice is about group rights (justice for groups).”⁴⁴ Like Marxism, CRT and CSJT divide those groups into the oppressed and the oppressors, victims and persecutors. The only difference is that classical Marxism identified the oppressed as the working class and the oppressors as the bourgeoisie, whereas CRT and CSJT (as variants of cultural Marxism) identify the oppressed as members of particular racial, sexual, and/or other defined groups, and the oppressors as heterosexual Whites (particularly White men). DEI policies in educational and other institutions give preferential treatment to members of the groups deemed to be oppressed with the rationale that such preferences are needed to rectify past and present discriminatory practices. Because it is simply **group membership** that counts in these deliberations, there is no need for the beneficiary of the preferential treatment to show that he or she was actually discriminated against within the institution. Most importantly, CRT and CSJT are fundamentally invalid because, as Ayn Rand has demonstrated, only individual humans possess rights. “Group rights” do not exist outside of the rights of each individual group member.⁴⁵

Marxist Ideology in the Field of Pedagogy

Beyond the teaching of CRT and CSJT in our schools, Marxist ideology can even be found in the field of pedagogy, which is the philosophy and practice of teaching. The introduction of Marxist thought into pedagogical theory can be traced back to Paolo Freire and disciples like

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Henry Giroux. Freire was a Brazilian philosopher and educator who launched a new field of Critical Pedagogy with the publication of his books *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970 and *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* in 1985. Freire was a radical postcolonialist and Marxist who argued that the prevailing model of education was a “banking concept” in which teachers “deposited” facts into their students, the goal of which was to “reproduce” the existing system of capitalist exploitation and oppression.⁴⁶ The aim of Freire’s Critical Pedagogy is described in the following quote from Donaldo Macedo’s *Introduction to the 50th Anniversary Edition of Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “Thus, the central goal of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is to awaken in the oppressed the knowledge, creativity, and constant critical reflective capacities necessary to unveil, demystify, and understand the power relations responsible for their oppressed marginalization and, through this recognition, begin a project of liberation through praxis which, invariably, requires consistent, never-ending critical reflection and action.”⁴⁷ As a “critical” theorist, Freire denies the existence of an independent reality and objective truths. In one passage from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he states “Education as the practice of freedom [i.e., the pedagogy Freire is proposing].....denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people.....In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous.”⁴⁸ Here Freire is arguing for a form of “social constructionism”, which proposes that there is no reality independent of human social interactions.⁴⁹ Consequently, there is no objective knowledge, since one’s knowledge has unavoidably been shaped by their ideology and position of power. Importantly, the theory is not talking about an individual’s **interpretations** or **value judgments** about a particular situation, which are certainly influenced by that individual’s life experiences, education, and philosophical positions. Rather, critical pedagogy would have us believe that **knowledge itself** is a social construct. One might imagine that this idea would be difficult to put into practice in the teaching of mathematics or the sciences. Yet, there are educators who are attempting to do just that. For example,

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Eric Gutstein and Bob Peterson are editors of a mathematics teaching guide entitled *Rethinking Mathematics. Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers* that offers various “social justice” examples for teachers to use in their math classes.⁵⁰ Chapter titles such as *Chicanos Have Math in Their Blood*, *When Equal Isn't Fair*, and *The Square Root of a Fair Share* clearly illustrate the theme of the book. Other teachers, such as Wildson dos Santos from the University of Brasilia, have similarly argued for the application of critical pedagogy to science teaching.⁵¹ Some teachers may be drawn to critical pedagogy because it encourages students to raise questions and actively engage in the learning process. But one must never forget either the epistemological basis of this theory, that there are no objective truths, or its politico-economic embrace of Marxist socialism, a system that has always resulted in economic collapse and totalitarian rule wherever it has been implemented.

Marxist Infiltration of Education & Rampant Attacks on Free Speech

One of the most dangerous consequences of the Marxist infiltration of education has been the open attack on free speech that began on college campuses and has spread to virtually every other societal institution including K-12 education. In colleges and universities, this attack takes the form of celebrating left-wing/Marxist faculty members and speakers while simultaneously shouting down, attacking, and canceling any who openly oppose that ideology. Ironically, the proponents of this “cancel culture” claim that their actions are in defense of “free speech,” purposely ignoring that the only speech deemed to be free is that which is in accordance with their particular philosophical and political beliefs. Georgetown University law professor Jonathan Turley, a committed advocate of free speech, writes “The current anti-free speech movement in the United States has its origins in higher education, where faculty have long argued that free speech is harmful. Starting in secondary schools, we have raised a generation of speech phobics who believe that opposing views are triggering and

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dangerous.”⁵² The assault on free speech has become so entrenched that many college students have taken to self-censorship, meaning that they are reluctant to express an unpopular (i.e., anti-left wing) opinion in the fear that they will be attacked verbally or, in some cases, even physically.⁵³ Evidence for such self-censorship comes from a 2023-2025 study in which 1,452 undergraduates at Northwestern University or the University of Michigan were asked in a confidential interview: “Have you ever pretended to hold more progressive views than you truly endorse to succeed socially or academically?” The investigators were astounded when 88% of the students responded affirmatively to the question. Further questioning on the topic of gender discourse revealed that “77 percent [of responders] said they disagreed with the idea that gender identity should override biological sex in such domains as sports, healthcare, or public data — but would never voice that disagreement aloud. Thirty-eight percent described themselves as ‘morally confused,’ uncertain whether honesty was still ethical if it meant exclusion.”⁵⁴ If these are the kinds of students matriculating from top-rated mainstream American universities, perhaps we need to look for students from alternative institutions such as the University of Austin or Prager University to be the future opponents of collectivism and the champions of individual rights.

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7. TEACHER TRAINING IN THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

General Requirements for Teacher Certification

Great teachers can be instrumental in helping children become well-versed in the core knowledge fundamental to modern Western democracies, and even more importantly, to become logical, critical, thinkers. Unfortunately, contemporary teacher training has largely failed in this mission. When we examine how public school teachers are trained in the U.S., we first see that every state requires that teachers be certified or licensed by that state's primary education department. Certification generally requires (1) a Bachelor's degree either in education or in the person's field of specialization (e.g., English, chemistry, etc.), (2) a minimum set of education courses if the degree is in the field of specialization, (3) a minimum set of courses in the person's field of specialization if their degree is in education, (5) a minimum overall GPA, (6) obtaining a passing grade in the state's teacher certification test that examines knowledge of both pedagogy and the field of specialization, and (7) student teaching experience.

Five Critiques of Teacher Certification/Licensure

Educational institutions generally defend teacher certification by arguing that it produces the most qualified teachers with the best student outcomes; however, the data on this issue are inconsistent. Indeed, consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic created a natural experiment in Massachusetts in the spring of 2020. Because the pandemic caused the state to interrupt teacher training programs and to suspend state licensure testing, administrators were forced to authorize emergency teaching licenses to applicants who had a Bachelor's degree but lacked the other requirements such as

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coursework in pedagogy. Despite concerns that this policy would lead to a sharp decline in teacher effectiveness, a study performed by Boston University researchers debunked this prediction. According to Andrew Bacher-Hicks, one of the study's authors, "There's really no indication that the students who were assigned to emergency license holders were getting teachers who were substantially different on any of the traditional measures of effectiveness."⁵⁵ Not only does the certification/licensure process fail to ensure teacher quality, it may actually do more harm than good. An analysis by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in Michigan concluded "it is increasingly clear that certification deters rather than ensures that the most qualified people are teaching in our classrooms."⁵⁶ Among the many critiques of teacher certification/licensure are: (1) Despite numerous studies on teacher training and student outcomes, educators have not yet fully identified how to screen for the best teachers. As stated by Sam Peavey, emeritus professor from the University of Illinois School of Education: "After 50 years of research, we have found no significant correlation between the requirements for teacher certification and the quality of student achievement."⁵⁷ Instead, there is evidence that a teacher's verbal ability (not scores on a certification exam) is the best predictor of student achievement.⁵⁸ (2) Paying for the coursework and other requirements for certification (including the fees charged for certification testing) results in a significant financial burden, which discourages many promising individuals from pursuing a teaching career and leads to teacher shortages. Erika Donalds has argued that "Certification requirements mostly serve to detract candidates with agency [individuals with an established non-teaching career who are considering switching to teaching] from pursuing the teaching profession. Those who persist are forced to take on tens of thousands of dollars in debt to sit through hours of abstract theorizing and ideological indoctrination—only to walk into class on day 1 of their first year ill-equipped to handle the student who won't take his seat."⁵⁹ (3) Because certification restricts the number of teachers entering the profession, it

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is strongly supported by teachers unions regardless of whether it benefits the students; (4) An education major is less academically rigorous than most majors in specific content areas (especially mathematics and the sciences). As a result, undergraduates who seek the easiest route to certification are drawn to schools of education. (5) Majoring in education instead of one's area of specialization results in lower subject competence and is likely to hinder the teacher's ability to keep up with the latest advances in their field.⁶⁰

Political Indoctrination of Students

Another significant problem with current teacher training is the political indoctrination that students receive in their education classes. A recent German study by Dalila Lindov found that students entering into teacher training are already more left-wing politically than the average university freshman,⁶¹ and there is no reason to think that the situation is any different here. Once students are enrolled in teacher preparation courses, the indoctrination that may have begun during their K-12 years is intensified. College of education faculty present CRT and CSJT as manifestly true theories without the possibility of serious debate in the classroom. The pervasiveness of this indoctrination was strikingly demonstrated by a 2020 study of teacher training in Wisconsin that surveyed all of the state's four-year public colleges.⁶² In virtually all of the schools, education majors were required to complete one or more courses in subject areas such as "culturally relevant pedagogy", "equity and inclusion", or "diversity in childhood." Even more revealing was the selection of required readings across these various courses, which included Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo; *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice* by Sensoy and DiAngelo; *Antiracist Baby* by Ibram X. Kendi; *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*; *White Teachers Need to See Color: Here's Why*; *Ten Things White People Need to Quite Saying*; *Decolonizing the Classroom*; *Education Policy for Social Change*;

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Readings for Diversity and Social Justice; Becoming a Multicultural Educator: Developing Awareness, Gaining Skills, and Taking Action; Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools; Despite the Best of Intentions: How Racial Inequality Thrives in Good Schools; Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities; Safe is Not Enough: Better Schools for LGBTQ Students; A Guide to LGBTQ+ Inclusion on Campus, Post-PULSE; and many others. If students realistically are not permitted to question the premises of these readings, almost all will digest these premises as factual and will carry those biases into their own future classrooms.

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8. PUBLIC EDUCATION FAILS SCHOOL CHILDREN, PARENTS, SOCIETY

The 1983 Report. A Nation at Risk ...

In 1981, T.H. Bell, U.S. Secretary of Education under President Ronald Reagan, created a National Commission on Excellence in Education tasked with evaluating the state of American public schools. Two years later, the commission published a report of its findings entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*.⁶³ The commissioners did not pull any punches in describing the state of our educational institutions, writing “Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.....the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people.....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.”

Educational Reforms are Ineffective

A Nation at Risk caused quite a stir when it was released, not least because the 1980s was a period of intense competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. To remedy the poor academic performance of American students detailed in the report, the commission recommended a variety of educational reforms, including specific content requirements, longer school days, requiring teachers to demonstrate competence in an academic discipline, and increased federal funding of education. Yet, despite these suggested reforms as well as numerous calls for improving the public school system since publication of *A Nation at Risk*, American students continue to

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underperform in relation both to representative norms and, in many cases, to students from other countries. Since 1969, the National Center for Education Statistics has released a yearly report entitled the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)* (commonly called “The Nation’s Report Card”). According to the 2024 report, fewer than a third of 4th and 8th grade students across the nation met the NAEP Proficient level of reading comprehension (which means the ability to understand written text and interpret its meaning).⁶⁴ Just over 25% of 8th graders met the NAEP Proficient level at mathematics, and almost 40% scored below the NAEP Basic level. Information about the proficiency of U.S. students compared to those of other countries is available from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which documents reading, mathematics, and science literacy among 15-year-old students every 3 years. In the 2022 assessment of math literacy, U.S. students scored below average among members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), including significantly poorer performance compared to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, former members of the USSR.⁶⁵

Public Education Contributes to Widespread Illiteracy

Literacy metrics provided by the website ThinkImpact tell a similar disturbing story about the state of American education. According to this source, 21% of U.S. adults are illiterate and 54% exhibit a literacy level below the 6th grade.⁶⁶ These alarming statistics can be traced to a combination of the mediocre public education afforded to U.S.-born individuals plus the deficient English language skills of many immigrants, as 34% of adults with poor literacy were not born in this country.

Rigorous Curriculum Initially Recommended for Public Education

A number of authors have documented the history of American public education, focusing on the educational philosophies and curricular choices that have resulted in the current state of the system. Williamson

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Evers, Senior Fellow and Director of the Center on Educational Excellence, notes that in the late 19th and early 20th century, high standards were expected of students.⁶⁷ Graduating high school was considered a significant achievement because few students went on to college. In 1893, a group of distinguished educators called the Committee of Ten was organized to evaluate the state of education in the United States. In his recent book *Why Johnny Still Can't Read or Write or Understand Math and What We Can Do About It*, the eminent philosopher, author, and educator Andrew Bernstein quotes the following passage from the committee's report: "As studies in language and in the natural sciences are best adapted to cultivate the habits of observation; as mathematics are the traditional training of the reasoning faculties...so history and its allied branches are better adapted than any other studies to promote the invaluable mental power which we call judgment." ⁶⁸ In essence, the committee urged the adoption of a rigorous curriculum capable of instilling in students the critical faculties of observation, reasoning, and judgment.

Curricular Rigor Undermined by Progressive Educational Theory

Unfortunately, over the next 20-30 years, the premise of a rigorous, content-driven curriculum was undermined by the ascendance of progressive educational theory. In 1912, the NEA (which had not yet become a teachers union) established the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, the objective of which was **not** to facilitate implementation of the rigorous curriculum described above but rather "to help the American high school become a better instrument of democracy and reflect the highest ideals of American life."⁶⁹ In 1918, the Commission issued a report entitled *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*⁷⁰, which recommended seven primary objectives of secondary education. Amazingly, the cardinal skills of reading, writing, and mathematics (specifically "arithmetic") were lumped together into just a **single** objective called "Command of

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Fundamental Processes.” If you’re wondering what the other six objectives are, some examples are “Worthy Home Membership,” “Citizenship,” and “Worthy Use of Leisure.” Goals such as these stem directly from the principle of progressive education that students need to be molded to fit the needs of society. In the words of Thomas James and David Tyack in their 1983 paper *Learning from Past Efforts to Reform the High School*, the Commission’s perspective was that “the high school should become a total socializing institution – one that supplemented, if not replaced, the older functions of the family, church, apprenticeships, and other shaping agencies of society.”⁷¹

Progressive Educational Theory and the Dumbing Down of the American Classroom

The adoption of progressive educational theory by the American public school system has had several major consequences, notably (1) a reduction in the amount and changes in the kind of content taught in the schools, (2) an opposition to specific performance standards at each grade level because children may develop cognitively at different rates, and (3) opposition to requiring that students meet specific standards (e.g., passing an examination of skills or content) in order to graduate. In Andrew Bernstein’s book, he describes his personal experiences of college students lacking even the most basic knowledge of history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of study. Reading skills and exposure to great literature have declined precipitously, as many schools substitute readings on racism, social justice, etc. for classical novels and plays (for example, see ref. 72 detailing the 8th-grade reading list for the Alice Deal Middle School in Washington, D.C.). Recent surveys have additionally shown that many English classes no longer teach grammar, despite its role as a foundational element of learning a language.⁷³⁻⁷⁵ History, civics, and geography are other important subjects that have been deemphasized in contemporary curricula. Instead of being given their own specific classes, these topics (to the

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extent that they're taught at all) are subsumed under a vague category called "social studies."⁷⁶ Lastly, mathematics instruction has been drastically curtailed in many schools, resulting in markedly poor math proficiency, even in students admitted to major universities.⁷⁷ Deficient skills in both math and English language were highlighted in the recent report of a University of California San Diego workgroup composed of faculty and administrators that stated: "Between 2020 and 2025, the number of freshmen whose math placement exam results indicate them not meeting high school standards grew nearly **thirtyfold** [their emphasis]. In the 2025 incoming class, this group constitutes roughly **one-eighth** of our entire entering cohort.....Moreover, more than 70% of these students are also not meeting *middle school* standards. A similarly large share of students must take additional writing courses to reach the level expected of high school graduates."⁷⁸ These disturbing trends are the result of multiple factors, including "dumbing down" of K-12 classes, passing students along from grade to grade who have not met the minimum grade-level standards, and university admissions policies that rely on high school transcripts (despite known grade inflation) and other criteria like "diversity" in preference to objective test scores.

Equity Grading – The Newest Manifestation of Progressive Educational Theory

Exacerbating the consequences of watered-down curricula is a relatively more recent phenomenon called "equity (or equitable) grading." One of the major proponents of equity grading is Joe Feldman, founder of Crescendo Education Group and author of the book *Grading for Equity: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How It Can Transform Schools and Classrooms*.⁷⁹ The stated aim of equity grading is to redress achievement gaps between presumably advantaged vs. disadvantaged students by assessing final student mastery of the class content irrespective of student behaviors such as attendance, work habits, or compliance with course requirements.^{80,81} This approach is claimed to reduce bias in the

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grading process, result in greater student motivation, and be more accurate than standard grading for assessing student competence. Common examples of equity grading are replacing the 0-100 point grading scale with a condensed scale of 0-4 or 1-5 points; minimum grading, which mean that instructors are prohibited from giving a zero grade to exams or assignments that are incomplete or simply not done (one proposed alternative is to assign a 50% grade in such cases); not counting homework, class participation, or attendance in final grades; giving students additional time to complete tests or assignments; allowing students to retake exams or resubmit papers and only counting the highest score; and giving primary weight to a final test of content mastery at the end of the course. The 0-4 grading scale may include descriptors such as 0 = Incomplete or Retake; 1 = Below Basic understanding; 2 = Basic understanding; 3 = Proficient understanding; 4 = Advanced understanding.

How Equity Grading Harms Students

A recent policy brief by Meredith Coffey and Adam Tyner entitled *Think Again: Does “equitable grading benefit students?”*⁸² recapitulates the arguments offered in support of equity grading followed by a well-formulated critique of that approach. The essence of Coffey and Tyner’s argument is that equity grading causes greater harm than benefit to students, including disadvantaged students that were specifically meant to be helped by this method of evaluation. Not only does equity grading tend to exacerbate grade inflation (which is already a major problem in schools and universities), but lenient grading policies such as no zeros and no penalties for late assignment completion impedes learning by lowering student expectations and accountability. Research cited by the authors demonstrates that when students are subject to rigorous grading standards, they are incentivized to work harder and learn more. Moreover, failure to penalize late work often leads to procrastination because of the absence of a firm deadline. When surveyed, even many

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teachers reported having doubts about equity grading practices such as no zeros, no penalties for late assignments, and no grading of class participation.⁸³ One of the most serious problems stemming from equity grading is that it shields students from the realities of life after school. Do-overs or failure to meet deadlines, for example, may be acceptable in an equity-graded classroom but they are generally not tolerated in the workforce. Habits of high effort and accountability are best learned at an early age rather than later in life when it may be too late to gain admission to a top university or obtain a sought-after position in one's profession.

Immense Damage of Constant Marxist Propaganda

The pedagogical practices described above such as watered-down curricula and equity grading are already harmful enough, but the American public school system has perpetrated immense further damage by subjecting students to constant Marxist-style propaganda, indoctrination, groupthink, and virtue signaling. The reader will recall that the critical theories taught in education classes not only demand left-wing social activism on the part of teachers, but expect the teachers to instill this practice in their students. Despite objections from public school supporters that students are not being indoctrinated,^{84,85} there is abundant evidence that they are. A 2018 publication by Sara Dogan and Peter Collier entitled *Leftist Indoctrination in our K-12 Public Schools*⁸⁶ provides numerous examples of such indoctrination. These include a white teacher in an Oklahoma high school telling their students "To be white is racist, period."; a lesson plan developed for Philadelphia K-12 students that called for 6 days of "social justice action"; curricular standards adopted in 2017 by Washington state requiring the teaching of "gender identity" and "gender expression" to all K-12 students (specifics included teaching third graders that they can choose their own gender and fifth graders that gender roles are social constructs unrelated to biological sex); and students at a Maryland high school

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being required to memorize and recite the Five Pillars of Islam and receiving much more intensive instruction about Islam than about any other religion.

The 1619 Project

2019 was a seminal year for public school indoctrination, as it was the year when the 1619 Project was published by Nikole Hannah-Jones in conjunction with writers from the New York Times.⁸⁷ The thesis of the 1619 Project, which was named to commemorate the year when the first African slave ship landed on North American shores, is that the institution of slavery is a foundational element in the creation of the United States (to the extent that 1619 should be considered the “birth year” of our nation and that the American revolution was fought, in part, to preserve slavery in the colonies) and that systemic racism continues to shape the socioeconomic trajectory of the country by perpetuating racial inequalities. Despite many historians’ objections to the 1619 Project’s historical account,⁸⁸ in 2023 the Pulitzer Center launched the 1619 Project Education Network, which currently boasts a membership of over 400 educators in 30 states who collectively have taught more than 10,500 students ranging from pre-kindergarten to college and beyond.⁸⁹ When teachers’ leftist orientations are combined with class materials like the 1619 project plus additional readings geared to other hot political issues like climate change, immigration, DEI, and transgender “rights”, the result is an ongoing student indoctrination that rarely, if ever, permits discussion of alternative viewpoints.

Student Indoctrination and How to Prevent It

A recent magazine article illustrates how defenders of public school teachers are so imbued with the obvious “correctness” of their positions that they fail to even recognize obvious instances of indoctrination. The article in question discussed the 2021 dismissal of Tennessee high school teacher Matthew Hawn for “assigning readings about white privilege

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and discussing race in his class.”⁹⁰ Hawn was later reinstated after a court ruled that his firing was unjustified. The article’s author argued that Hawn was actually trying to teach his students “how to think, rather than what to think,” seemingly oblivious to the fact that the mere assignment of a reading about “white privilege” assumes that such a thing exists and is a source of racial inequality. This is not to say that contentious topics such as climate change or racism must be avoided in the classroom. However, preventing student indoctrination requires that (1) teachers do an adequate job of putting aside their pre-existing biases and avoid framing class materials using DEI or “social justice” rubrics; (2) contentious topics be discussed in an appropriate context (e.g., climate change in a general science, geology, or physics class; racism in a history class); (3) discussions be conducted in an even-handed manner, presenting multiple positions on the issue, bringing to bear the available empirical evidence, and then using reason and logic to assess that evidence; and (4) students be made to feel comfortable expressing their own position on the issue even if it differs from that of the instructor and the majority of their classmates. This final point is critical for helping students develop the capacity for independent thought and the confidence to express their beliefs freely.

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9. THE WAY FORWARD: EDUCATION UNDER PURE CAPITALISM

The Fundamental Importance of a Nation's Education System

“For Ayn Rand, a nation’s long-term direction is set not by today’s political headlines and debates, but by the ideas and ideals that come to dominate its culture. Above all else, such dominance depends on trends in a nation’s educational systems, which train young minds and impart fundamental ideas and convictions. If students learn to think rationally and scientifically and to value themselves and their intellectual independence, the culture will come to reflect that. But if education fails in this task, the culture will degrade, with succeeding generations less able to think and to deal with the abstract requirements of life and more willing to follow authority. Such a nation will not remain free for long.”⁹¹

This quote from the Ayn Rand Institute summarizes Rand’s position on education as laid out in an essay entitled *The Comprachicos* published in 1970 in the *Objectivist Newsletter*. Despite the fact that this essay was published more than 50 years, it accurately predicted the current breakdown of our culture stemming from the premises underlying the public education system. Fundamentally, a society collapses because of its basic philosophical principles, which in our case is a meta-epistemology of relativism and a sociopolitical philosophy of collectivism. Once embraced by the intellectuals, those principles are passed down in an escalating spiral to future generations through the education system. The result is what we see now.....a once-great country that is now both morally and fiscally bankrupt, riots and looting in the big cities, rampant crime with shocking attacks and murders of both civilians and law enforcement officers, state- and local-level politicians who refuse to follow lawful orders of the federal executive branch, punitive taxes and soaring inflation that have hollowed out the middle

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class and rendered the working class desperate to meet its basic needs, wasteful government spending on boondoggles such as “green energy”, widespread deceit of the public by government officials while censoring critics and labeling counterarguments as “misinformation” or “disinformation”, a federal government that is increasingly authoritarian, with almost daily presidential dictates and a state security apparatus that (especially since the events of 9/11) engages in massive surveillance of its citizens, and the once inconceivable election of an openly socialist candidate to the mayoralty of America’s crown jewel, New York City.

American Public Education Beyond Repair

The American public education is well beyond any attempt to repair it. Over time, numerous proposals for education reform have been adopted, always requiring more funding and always promising that **this** time, the system will improve. The evidence presented in this essay proves that reforms have not worked because the system is fundamentally flawed.

The Logic of Abolishing Public Education

The poor academic accomplishments and philosophical indoctrination of publicly educated students should be sufficient to question its continuance, but there are much more fundamental reasons to abolish public education. The first reason is that public education is immoral because the taxation used to support it is stolen from one family to support the education of another family’s child. No excuses about the societal value of educating other people’s children can invalidate that basic point. The second reason, which is consistent with the first, is that education is **not** a proper function of government. Ayn Rand cogently argued that the only justifiable function of government is that of protecting individual rights, that is, using retaliatory force against someone who has initiated physical force (including fraud) against an

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individual. By this overarching mandate, governments are morally justified in creating a defense system, a police force, a judiciary system, and a prison system. Anything else, including education, is a fundamental misuse of government power. From this logic, it follows that all education should be in private hands.

What a Fully Private Education System Would Look Like

What might the education system look like in a completely free, capitalist society? First, there would be no federal Department of Education nor any state or local government education departments. Second, all schools, ranging from pre-kindergarten to universities, would be privately established and managed. Some would be for-profit businesses, other might be non-profit. Third, tuition and other fees would be paid for by the student and their family, and just as is the case now, there would undoubtedly be scholarships available for promising students provided either by the school or by private charity. Fourth, attending school would **not** be compulsory, as individuals would be free to decide whether to learn by personal experience, be homeschooled by family members, or attend a school of their choosing. Some individuals do not benefit from the restrictive environment of a school, as evidenced by Thomas Edison and other great inventors and entrepreneurs in American history who had very little formal education.

An Explosion of Different Kinds of Schools

We can predict an explosion of different kinds of schools with varying sizes (ranging from small, highly personalized schools to larger schools more similar in size to current K-12 institutions), teaching philosophies, staffing, and curricula, each aimed at a particular group of consumers. While some schools might offer a general liberal arts and sciences education, others would be more focused on specific preparatory instruction for entry into the manual trades including carpentry, metal working, electrical trades, plumbing, HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), or general construction; business; the arts including visual

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arts, music, dance, and theater; communication, including writing, mass communication, and media; or general STEM to prepare for later specialization in the natural sciences, biotechnology, computing and AI, engineering, or the health sciences, including human and veterinary medicine, nursing, and dentistry. Other schools might specialize in teaching children with special needs (which exists currently) or highly gifted children (which has mostly disappeared in the current climate of “equity”). Subjects that require the physical presence of students, such as the manual trades, arts, and those that require laboratory training (i.e., natural sciences, health sciences, and engineering) would be taught at “brick-and-mortar” schools, whereas many other subjects could be taught more cheaply through remote, on-line instruction. Similar to the model used by current colleges and universities, many K-12 schools would likely offer a mixture of both classroom and on-line instruction that maximizes student benefits while containing costs. Considering that this year the United States will spend an average of \$17,090 per public high school student (with New York State having the highest state cost of \$32,210)⁹², it should not be difficult to cut expenses dramatically. Depending on the school and the area of specialization, students would “graduate” (i.e., complete the required course of study) with either some type of diploma (similar to today’s high school diploma) or a certificate that verifies a certain level of proficiency in the student’s chosen discipline.

The Many Administrative and Economic Benefits of Privatization

Many other facets of K-12 schooling would also benefit from privatization in a free society. For most schools, the amount of money spent per student would drop substantially because of trimming of bloated administrative staffs, the removal of onerous governmental regulations, and the likelihood that the teachers at many schools would not be unionized, as teacher unions at public schools have used their political clout to negotiate exorbitant raises that far surpass the rate of

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wage increases in the private sector. Imagine also that poorly rated teachers could readily be fired in non-unionized schools, and that disruptive students who don't want to be in school would either choose to opt out of schooling or would be expelled since school attendance is no longer compulsory.

In a Private System, the Marketplace, Not Government, Rates Schools and Students

Schools would be rated in the same way that many products and services are currently evaluated. Commercial ratings and accreditation services would evaluate schools on a number of metrics such as teacher quality, strength of the curriculum, student academic performance, and student outcomes (e.g., successful placement of students in their desired positions or admission to institutions of higher education). Those ratings would be supplemented by consumer ratings from parents and students. In this way, the **marketplace**, not some government bureaucrat, would decide which schools will survive and prosper, and which will fall by the wayside.

The Crucial Role of Educational Philosophy

We mentioned earlier that once the education system has been privatized, various schools might adopt different educational philosophies. Unfortunately, almost all of these philosophies fail to grasp that the essential function of education is to **imbue the child with the ability to reason and to think conceptually**. This requires the presentation of fundamental factual material in an appropriately structured and sequential manner that motivates the child and engages their inductive and deductive reasoning capacities. The principles of a rational philosophy of education are presented in Leonard Piekoff's book entitled *Teaching Johnny to Think. A Philosophy of Education Based on the Principles of Ayn Rand's Objectivism*.⁹³ Besides outlining **how** children should be educated, Piekoff goes on to discuss the most

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important educational **content**, which consists of the 3 Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic), history, literature, mathematics, and science. While it is not Objectivist-based, the philosophy of Italian educator Maria Montessori has proven to be beneficial for the development of young children. Montessori schools believe that “children learn best in an environment that values their individuality, fosters curiosity, and encourages self-directed growth. By emphasizing independence, hands-on activities, and individualized instruction, Montessori education challenges traditional models by offering a holistic approach to learning. It not only focuses on academic achievement but also on nurturing emotional, social, and cognitive development.”⁹⁴

This Essay Applies Equally to K-12 and to Higher Education

Although this essay focuses on public K-12 education, many of the issues discussed pertain equally to higher education in the United States and elsewhere. It’s worth mentioning, therefore, that in a free, capitalist society, all colleges and universities would also be private. If anything, bureaucratic bloat is even worse at the college level than in K-12. Elimination of myriad administrators would drastically reduce tuition costs, thereby freeing students from the crippling debt caused by current federal loan programs (which would no longer exist, anyway). Moreover, by eliminating the “publish or perish” mandate for tenure and advancement, most colleges and universities would be staffed by professors who actually love teaching more than conducting research. Indeed, a model for one type of future college already exists, namely the University of Austin. As described on its home page, the University of Austin is a non-profit institution “dedicated to the fearless pursuit of truth”, that “champions academic freedom”, and that is “committed to liberal education”.⁹⁵ Its educational model involves teaching through the great works of Western civilization, which are said to be “not antiquated relics but guides toward intellectual liberation.” Current sources for on-line learning based on Objectivist philosophy or general free market

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principles include the Ayn Rand Institute (ARI)⁹⁶, Atlas Society⁹⁷, Prometheus Foundation⁹⁸, Prager University⁹⁹, Mises Institute¹⁰⁰, and Reason Foundation¹⁰¹.

All Families, Regardless of Income, Thrive Under a Fully Privatized System

Skeptics will undoubtedly argue that poor families would suffer under a fully privatized education system. The reply to this argument rests on a number of premises. First, by jettisoning almost all current government activities, a true capitalist society would benefit from an enormous reduction in taxation at all levels, including federal, state, and local. This would free up a family's resources to be spent on its own perceived needs, which may or not include schooling of its children. Second, instituting a capitalist society would unleash a torrent of economic growth (as it has everywhere historically) that is currently restrained by burdensome government regulations. This would raise everyone's standard of living significantly and free up resources to be spent on education, if needed. Third, as discussed earlier, average school costs would almost certainly decrease under free market conditions. Fourth, to the extent that children from some families might still require assistance to obtain their desired education, numerous sources of philanthropy (e.g., individual giving, community-based or national educational charitable organizations, or religious charities) would certainly exist to provide such assistance. Help of this kind for needy families existed in the early history of the United States and would arise once again in a free society. Lastly and most importantly, we reiterate that removing schools from government funding and control is the only **moral** solution to the question of how to educate the populace. There is no justification for taking the fruits of one family's labor to pay for another child's education, nor should any element of government be permitted to dictate who can be a teacher, what is taught in school, or how the material is delivered.

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In Conclusion...

The way forward advanced by this essay is defined by a single concept, properly understood: Capitalism, **a social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights**, in which all property is privately owned, and the sole function of government is the protection of those rights.

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