



Is Public Education Necessary?

We would not have to ask the above question if public education had not become the great, costly, and tragic failure that it is. It has failed the children, but in reality it has not failed the progressives. They were the ones who engineered the dumbing-down process which parents and taxpayers continue to pay for. But it is the children who suffer in terms of becoming intellectually disabled, semi-literate, disoriented, frustrated, and terribly unhappy. But what is even a bit disheartening is that many liberals still believe that government schooling has been a noble experiment.



Perhaps Walter Lippmann, the great liberal pundit, best expressed liberal disappointment in the great experiment when he wrote in 1941, while World War II was raging in Europe: “Universal and compulsory modern education was established by the emancipated democracies during the nineteenth century. ‘No other foundation can be devised,’ said Thomas Jefferson, ‘for the preservation of freedom and happiness.’ Yet as a matter of fact during the twentieth century the generations trained in these schools have either abandoned their liberties or they have not known, until the last desperate moment, how to defend them. The schools were to make men free. They have been in operation for some sixty or seventy years and what was expected of them they have not done. The plain fact is that the graduates of the modern schools are the actors in the catastrophe which has befallen our civilization. Those who are responsible for modern education — for its controlling philosophy — are answerable for the results.”

Unfortunately, they have not been answerable for the results. In fact, if you read today’s slick professional education journals, you detect great pride in what they’ve accomplished. And of course, since the time Lippmann wrote as he did, we have had any number of wars — Korea, Vietnam, First Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan — with no end in sight. Not even Lippmann would have foreseen our war against Islamic terrorism. In fact, on September 11, 2001, the United States was attacked in a manner that no one could have predicted. It was worse than Pearl Harbor, and the reason why the terrorists succeeded was because what they planned and successfully carried out was too diabolical to be believed. It required believing the unbelievable. A well-educated people is supposed to believe the unbelievable when warranted.

There were many seductive arguments for free universal public education at the time of its first promotion in the early years of the nineteenth century. Horace Mann spoke of compulsory free education as the means of perfecting humanity, the “great equalizer,” the “balance wheel of the social machinery,” the “creator of wealth undreamed of.” Poverty, ignorance, prejudice, social injustice, and every other evil afflicting the human race, it was thought, would disappear.

Others argued that free education for all would help us preserve our way of life. Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York said in 1826: “I consider the system of our common schools as the palladium of our



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freedom, for no reasonable apprehension can be entertained of its subversion as long as the great body of people are enlightened by education.”

Daniel Webster, the famous Senator from Massachusetts, eloquently echoed those optimistic sentiments in 1837 when he said: “Education, to accomplish the ends of good government, should be universally diffused. Open the doors of the school houses to all the children in the land. Let no man have the excuse of poverty for not educating his offspring. Place the means of education within his reach, and if he remain in ignorance, be it his own reproach.... On the diffusion of education among the people rests the preservation and perpetuation of our free institutions.”

But of course neither Daniel Webster nor DeWitt Clinton could have foreseen what would happen to public education once atheistic socialists got their hands on it. We have seen a steady erosion of our domestic freedom to an ever growing dependence on government to solve all of our problems. Most Americans, living in a capitalist society, still cannot understand such basic economic concepts as supply and demand, or the meaning of the word profit, or how government can cause inflation with the printing press and thereby destroy the value of our currency. Even the President of the United States, a graduate of Harvard Law School, seems unable to understand some fundamental economic principles that govern a free, capitalist society.

It is important to note that our system of compulsory state-controlled education was not brought about by any spontaneous popular demand, for education was already virtually universal in America before it became compulsory. And most people did not relish the idea of paying taxes to support schools that were not really necessary. But the politicians and professional educators wanted government financed education because running successful private schools was not easy.

According to Prof. E. G. West: “The supplier of educational services to the government, the teachers and administrators, as we have seen, had produced their own organized platforms by the late 1840’s; it was they indeed who were the leading instigators of the free school campaign. Whilst conventional history portrays them as distinguished champions in the cause of children’s welfare and benevolent participants in a political struggle, it is suggested here that the facts are equally consistent with the hypothesis of self-interest behavior as described above.”

It has become abundantly obvious that all of the totalitarian states of the modern world have used the instrument of public education, with the willing cooperation of most public school teachers, to keep their people enslaved. School teachers, even in a free society, are not necessarily freedom fighters. They generally do what the government tells them to do. That’s the way they keep their jobs, particularly in a down economy.

Most Americans are not aware that our own compulsory education system was based on the Prussian model, which was criticized by wary citizens as being inappropriate for a free country. It was suspected that such a system transplanted to our country would not promote freedom. Horace Mann, who was most instrumental in getting America to adopt the Prussian system, addressed the critics. He wrote in 1844:

“If Prussia can pervert the benign influences of education to the support of arbitrary power, we surely can employ them for the support and perpetuation of republican institutions. A national spirit of liberty can be cultivated more easily than a national spirit of bondage; and if it may be made one of the great prerogatives of education to perform the unnatural and unholy work of making slaves, then surely it must be one of the noblest instrumentalities for rearing a nation of freemen.”



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One of the great uses of history is to be able to study the foolishness of past leaders who today are upheld as great benevolent statesmen. Horace Mann is certainly one of these moral idiots who gave us an education system that has gradually dumbed-down the American people to the point where their enslavement is virtually assured. If under the present regime in Washington, the American people manage to fend off their enslavement, it won't be because of anything they learned in the government schools. It will be because of a spirit of independence and love of freedom that is enabling them to rise up in face of a potential dictatorship.

Public education was not only unnecessary, it has become the major destructive force of American culture, a destroyer of academic excellence and moral behavior. The growth of the home-school movement has demonstrated that parents can become better educators than the so-called professionals. Our colleges of education are producing educators who have no idea of how to teach reading, writing, or even simple arithmetic. Their minds have been filled with a collectivist ideology that makes them unwitting accomplices in the enslavement of the American people. Unbelievable, but true. If you want to survive in today's America, you'd better start believing in the unbelievable.

Dr. Samuel L. Blumenfeld is the author of nine books on education including *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education*, *The Whole Language/OBE Fraud*, and *The Victims of Dick & Jane and Other Essays*. Of *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education*, former U.S. Senator Steve Symms of Idaho said: "Every so often a book is written that can change the thinking of a nation. This book is one of them." Mr. Blumenfeld's columns have appeared in such diverse publications as *Reason*, *The New American*, *The Chalcedon Report*, *Insight*, *Education Digest*, *Vital Speeches*, *WorldNetDaily*, and others.



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