



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on February 5, 2019

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From Educational Excellence to Mediocrity

Today, America is facing an educational cataclysm that literally threatens its survival. But the threat did not suddenly materialize out of thin air, or come from natural forces.



More than six decades ago, in 1955 to be exact, Rudolph Flesch wrote his best-selling book *Why Johnny Can't Read*. “The teaching of reading — all over the United States, in all the schools, and in all the textbooks — is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense,” he warned at the time. It was not necessary to be a reading expert to recognize that he was right. How could the abandonment of intensive phonics (teaching reading on the basis of sounds) in favor of the “whole word” method (as if each word was a whole symbol) not cause the deterioration in reading skills that followed? Yet top educators — those who shape education policy via their positions in teachers’ colleges, publishing houses, and government education bureaucracies — did not listen. In 1981, Flesch wrote a sequel to his classic, entitled *Why Johnny Still Can't Read*. No matter; the problem persists to this day.

This is not to say, however, that the calamity, not just in reading but in other subjects as well, is not at least acknowledged by the education establishment. Indeed, as far back as 1983, the feds themselves warned that the future of America hung in the balance. “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,” explained President Ronald Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education. “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.”

Since then, it has gotten worse — much, much worse. And a growing number of Americans have come to realize that far too many Johnnies not only do not know how to read — or write — with any degree of proficiency, but also are handicapped in terms of their ability to add and subtract, or even to apply their minds and think critically.

Yet prior to the appearance of *Why Johnny Can't Read* in 1955, when the reading problem had already manifested itself, many more Johnnies were able to read proficiently. This was true, in fact, prior to the rise of the public education system in America, when most children were taught in church schools or at home. To understand what happened, it is important to know the history.

Where We Came From: Everyone Educated

For the first two centuries of American history, from the mid-1600s to the mid-1800s, public schools as they are known today were almost unheard of. In fact, the institutionalized indoctrination centers that exist today would have been unthinkable to early Americans. It is not that early Americans did not value



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school or education. They did — much more than Americans value it today. But rather than handing over their children to the state to be “educated” by the state, for the state, almost all education was handled by families, religious institutions, tutors, private schools, and the free market. Occasionally, local authorities within the largely homogeneous communities that dominated America played some minor role. But even then, families and Christian leaders were largely in charge — not secular government bureaucrats with a dangerous agenda sitting thousands of miles away.

“Philadelphia, which by 1776 had become second only to London as the chief city in the British Empire, had a school for every need and interest,” explained Dr. Robert Peterson in an excellent overview of Colonial education published by the Foundation for Economic Education, adding that Quaker schools often allowed poor Quaker and non-Quaker children to attend without paying fees. “The Scottish Presbyterians, the Moravians, the Lutherans, and Anglicans all had their own schools. In addition to these church-related schools, private schoolmasters, entrepreneurs in their own right, established hundreds of schools. Historical records, which are by no means complete, reveal that over one hundred and twenty-five private schoolmasters advertised their services in Philadelphia newspapers between 1740 and 1776. Instruction was offered in Latin, Greek, mathematics, surveying, navigation, accounting, bookkeeping, science, English, and contemporary foreign languages.”

But education did not happen just at private and religious schools. Reading, for instance, was often taught to children by their mothers, fathers, and older siblings — at home. Sometimes, grandparents or aunts and uncles played a role too. Early education, then, was typically a family affair. The widespread circulation of simple but highly effective reading primers such as the *New England Primer* and the *Blue-Backed Speller* helped a great deal. From the solid foundation developed at home, young literate citizens could easily continue their own education if they desired, using libraries. These were typically funded and run by churches early on, and later, via membership fees and private donations. Early Americans could also join “mutual improvement societies” to further their own education.

It was an incredibly successful and effective non-system. In 1831, Frenchman Alexis de Toqueville, after traveling across America and studying it, commented on the education of the time in the northern regions. “In New England, every citizen receives the elementary notions of human knowledge; he is moreover taught the doctrines and the evidences of his religion, the history of his country, and the leading features of its Constitution,” de Toqueville explained. “In the States of Connecticut and Massachusetts, it is extremely rare to find a man imperfectly acquainted with all these things, and a person wholly ignorant of them is a sort of phenomenon.”

Consider that the products of this laissez-faire education produced the freest and wealthiest society in human history. “Of the 117 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution, one out of three had had only a few months of formal schooling, and only one of four had gone to college,” explained the late education expert Dr. Samuel Blumenfeld in his book *Is Public Education Necessary?* Founding Father and prolific inventor Benjamin Franklin, widely regarded as a genius among geniuses, was taught to read by his father before going on to study writing and arithmetic at a private school, Blumenfeld recounts. Thomas Jefferson, meanwhile, studied Latin and Greek under a tutor, and later attended a classical academy run by a reverend.

Among the leading lights of American history, many were educated primarily at home, including President George Washington, widely regarded as the father of America. President John Quincy Adams never attended a formal school until he went to Harvard, which was a fervently Christian university



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then, in his early teens. And except for one year of formal schooling, Abraham Lincoln received virtually all of his education in the home. James Madison was taught to read and write at home before going to spend a few years at a private academy and then college.

The Founding Fathers were certainly learned and accomplished men, but their educational backgrounds were by no means unique. Even among everyday Americans, literacy was widespread. Founding Father John Adams noted in 1765 that “a native of America who cannot read or write is as rare an appearance as a comet or an earthquake.” Thomas Jefferson, meanwhile, observed in a 1787 letter to St. John de Crèvecoeur that American farmers “are the only farmers who can read Homer.”

According to *National Education in the United States of America* by DuPont Nemours, published in 1812, literacy was practically universal back then. “Most young Americans, therefore, can read, write and cipher. Not more than four in a thousand are unable to write legibly — even neatly,” Nemours found. Many other sources support his findings. And consider that today, government studies show almost half of Americans are either illiterate or so close to illiterate that they might as well be lumped in with them. In some areas, such as Washington, D.C., more than two-thirds of the adult population is functionally illiterate, according to recent government data.

And it was not just basic reading skills that were ubiquitous before institutionalized government “schooling” — early Americans could think and comprehend, too. As The New American’s Editor-in-Chief Gary Benoit explained in a 1997 piece headlined “Before the Public Schools,” the *Federalist Papers* published in the late 1780s provide ample evidence of the high literacy and phenomenal education that was ubiquitous in those times. In fact, those newspaper columns about the newly drafted U.S. Constitution were aimed at the common American man — the farmer, the merchant, the laborer. Today, many college graduates struggle to understand those documents — and many would undoubtedly struggle even if the documents were presented in modernized English.

Aside from being a non-government education, the classical education of the Founders and many of their contemporaries was much different than what passes for schooling today. The three schools that trained more of America’s Founders than any others were Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Interestingly, though, all of them were actually founded to train ministers of the gospel, and the Bible was at the center of the education provided at each of those universities.

With the Bible at the heart of schooling, early Americans understood the role of government to be a simple one: protect from evildoers the God-given rights to life, liberty, and property. And they understood the role of education as coming to know God and the scriptures, gaining knowledge about creation, learning what was needed for a productive life, and learning to live right by God. As John Milton famously put it, “The end of learning is to repair the ruin of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him.” Such views were dominant back then, when Americans were far more educated.

Government Becomes the “Educator”

Officially, at least, the history of “government” involvement in education begins in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1647 with the very first public act on education and schooling: the *Old Deluder Satan Act*. “It being one chief project of the old deluder Satan to keep men from the knowledge of the Scripture ..., to the end that learning may not be buried in the graves of our forefathers, in church and



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commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavors ... it is therefore ordered ... [to] appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read, whose wages shall be paid, either by the parents or masters of such children or by the inhabitants in general.”

The primary purpose of the Puritan schools, therefore, was to ensure a knowledge of the Bible. In any case, though, these were hardly the institutionalized government propaganda centers of today. Even in Boston in the late 1600s, there were only one or two “public” schools, and virtually all students starting there already knew how to read, according to historian Samuel Eliot Morison, who wrote about education in Colonial New England. Many knew more than just reading, too, having learned much from their families at home.

It is worth noting, too, that the Puritans in Massachusetts were outliers in America in terms of having government laws touching on education. And as the experience of the other Colonies showed clearly, a law mandating reading instruction in larger towns was not needed at all. In fact, Americans were zealous for education, and did not need government to provide it for them in order to obtain it.

The first giant step away from traditional, classical, Christian education toward socialistic and humanistic indoctrination and the dumbing down of education began under Horace Mann. In 1837, again in Massachusetts, Mann was appointed as the first-ever “Education Secretary” of an American state. And as a unitarian who rejected the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, Mann had big ideas about reforming the highly successful educational system that existed at the time. His efforts would ultimately lead to the fundamental transformation of education in America, putting it on course to end up where it is today.

Mann went to Prussia in 1843 and was very impressed with what came to be known as the Prussian Model. It was essentially the first systematic effort by a Western government to seize total control over education. Under the model, government schooling became compulsory. Statism and unquestioning obedience to government was instilled in all children. Indeed, teachers were themselves trained by the state, ensuring that the teachers taught what the state wanted. And unlike in America, children were segregated based on age. Mann imported this model to America, forever transforming the country.

One of the key goals of the education system he imported from Prussia, Mann declared, was to “equalize the conditions of men.” In short, this was a socialistic view of education, holding that everyone would be more equal if everyone received the same education. This approach, which manifests itself today in the form of Common Core, achieves mediocrity, not excellence. As much as politically possible in his day, Mann worked to ensure that religious instruction was purged from education, too. While it was done under the guise of combating sectarianism among the different Christian denominations, the real goal was to remove the Bible, which until that time had been an inseparable part of America and education. Mann was so passionate about institutionalized government schooling based on the Prussian model that he traveled across the country promoting it. He visited the legislatures of other states to urge them to join the bandwagon. By the mid-1800s, compulsory attendance laws and government schools were popping up across the northern United States. Aside from Massachusetts, New York and Connecticut were early adopters. By 1900, despite major resistance from some segments of the populations and many parents, dozens of states had imposed similar Prussian-style systems with compulsory attendance laws.



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Institutionalized Illiteracy

Another key development that would have devastating effects that continue to plague America was Mann's experiment with a new method of teaching reading. In the 1830s, Reverend Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet developed a way to teach reading to deaf children under his care. Because deaf children could not hear sounds, it was impossible for them to learn to read phonetically — they could not sound out the letters because they had no idea what the letters might sound like. And so Gallaudet taught the children to memorize entire words, treating the word itself as a symbol representing something, as in Chinese, rather than a combination of phonetic symbols representing sounds that can be blended together to form a word. For deaf children, this was clearly a major improvement.

However, Mann wanted to try it out on non-deaf children. And so, the so-called whole word method of teaching reading was introduced in the public schools of Boston. It was a total disaster. In fact, it was so disastrous that in 1844, 31 Boston schoolmasters published a blistering critique of the “new method” that remains as relevant today as it was the day it was published. “Such a change, as that proposed by Mr. Mann and others, is neither called for, nor sustained by sound reasoning,” they wrote, systematically demolishing the quackery that had infected Boston schools under Mann's reign. Among other problems, the whole word scheme produced illiteracy, reading disability, a hatred of reading, and symptoms that today are often referred to as dyslexia.

It was so discredited that it took more than 50 years to be resurrected. More than a century later, Flesch would once again expose the quackery. But the damage done was incalculable — and the quackery continues to wreak havoc on America.

John Dewey Picks Up the Baton

The education architecture put in place by Mann and his disciples was only the beginning of America's descent into government-sponsored mayhem and ignorance under the guise of “education.” After Mann came John Dewey, the next major reformer and a man who today, alongside Mann, is widely regarded by educators as the founding father of the American public education system. Dewey was, to put it bluntly, an anti-Christian socialist and humanist with a fanatical zeal for reforming mankind to fit his atheistic, collectivist vision. And remarkably, he did not conceal his ideology, writing openly and frequently about his political, religious, and educational views. While Mann went to Prussia for educational inspiration, Dewey would visit Vladimir Lenin's Soviet Russia, returning home to shower the brutal mass-murdering regime with praise in the *New Republic* for creating a “collectivistic mentality” through education and propaganda.

Dewey's zeal for socialism and communism was a frequent topic of his writings. “The only form of enduring social organization that is now possible is one in which the new forces of productivity are cooperatively controlled,” wrote Dewey in *Liberalism and Social Action* in 1935, promoting socialism and collective ownership over the means of production. “Organized social planning ... is now the sole method of social action by which liberalism can realize its professed aims.” As a model, Dewey frequently pointed to the 1888 novel *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy that envisioned a communist America without private property in the year 2000. It was a radical vision, especially at that time, but it animated Dewey and his supporters in their quest to re-shape America by re-shaping its children by re-shaping their education.



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Major insight into Dewey's radical ideology and beliefs can be gained from reading the *Humanist Manifesto*, which Dewey signed and played a key role in developing. This document is essentially a complete rejection of freedom and the Creator — and therefore also a rejection of the inalienable rights bequeathed to individuals by their Creator, as America's Founding Fathers put it in the Declaration of Independence. "FIRST: Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created," affirmed Dewey and the other signers of the document in a blatant attack on the very first sentence of the Bible. It was a full-blown assault on the very foundations of Christianity, Western civilization, America, morality, and individual liberty. And it was not even concealed.

Forty years after Dewey's original *Humanist Manifesto*, his comrades were even bolder. In the *Humanist Manifesto II*, they openly called for world government. "We deplore the division of humankind on nationalistic grounds," the document declares. "We have reached a turning point in human history where the best option is to transcend the limits of national sovereignty and to move toward the building of a world community in which all sectors of the human family can participate. Thus we look to the development of a system of world law and a world order based upon transnational federal government."

The original, 1933 *Humanist Manifesto* that Dewey helped write and signed went on to attack the free enterprise system, too, arguing for collectivization of the means of production. "The humanists are firmly convinced that existing acquisitive and profit-motivated society has shown itself to be inadequate and that a radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted," the document reads. "A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established to the end that the equitable distribution of the means of life be possible. The goal of humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good."

Interestingly, Dewey and his more than 30 co-signers acknowledged that their beliefs were religious in nature. Darwinian evolution was at the heart of the new religion being advocated by Dewey's humanists. And even aside from the moral and spiritual implications, the implications as far as liberty and Americanist principles go are obvious, too: Without a Creator, there can be no God-given rights. And without God-given rights, there can be no objective reason for protecting individual rights at all, much less for limiting the power and scope of government.

Like so many others, Dewey viewed education as the key to bringing about the societal changes he sought. Indeed, in his book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey argued that education is "the process through which the needed transformation may be accomplished." And with millions in funding from the Rockefeller dynasty, Dewey and his allies had everything they needed. However, they knew that if parents or teachers understood what was happening, they would rebel. And so, Dewey argued in his essay *The Primary Education Fetich* (sic) that deception and stealth would be required. "Change must come gradually," Dewey wrote. "To force it unduly would compromise its final success by favoring a violent reaction."

There were many avenues pursued by Dewey and his cohorts in their ultimately successful effort to hijack and weaponize government schools. For one, they worked to quietly take over the most important teaching colleges — especially the University of Chicago and Teachers College at Columbia University — so that future educators could be trained up to do their bidding. With funding from Rockefeller's General Education Board, they also set up an "experimental school" in which they tested out and refined their ideas.



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But perhaps one of the most damaging and diabolical aspects of the Dewey program was the resurrection of the discredited reading quackery known as the “whole word” method first pioneered by Mann in the 1840s. Dewey allies helped produce reading primers that would eventually be rolled out across America that systematized the use of the quack methodology. This directly led to a national illiteracy crisis that persists to this day, with “sight words” still mandated in government schools across America under Common Core, starting in kindergarten. That is a large part of why today, almost two-thirds of high-school seniors are not even *proficient* in reading, according to the government’s own National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Ramping Up Federal Control: Common Core and ESSA

Eventually, with Dewey and his allies having successfully indoctrinated generations of Americans through public schools, it was time for the rogue federal government to formalize it all. In 1962, the Supreme Court lawlessly banned prayer in school in the *Engel v. Vitale* ruling. New York had officially encouraged students to begin their school day with the following prayer: “Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country. Amen.” But the Supreme Court, apparently unable to read the plain text of the First Amendment prohibiting *Congress* from establishing a religion or prohibiting the “free exercise thereof,” ruled it illegal.

In 1963, the increasingly bold U.S. Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice Earl Warren, banned Bible reading in school, too. But at least one member of the high court understood perfectly what was happening: Justice Potter Stewart. As the only dissenting voice in *Abington School District v. Schempp* that banned Bible reading, Stewart slammed the ruling. “It led not to true neutrality with respect to religion, but to the establishment of a religion of secularism,” he said. Indeed, it did exactly that, with the dangerous humanist religion advocated by Dewey, and its totalitarian demands, becoming the official state religion, to be taught to all children in all government schools, at taxpayer expense.

And today, data compiled by the Nehemiah Institute shows the overwhelming majority of public-school children from Christian homes will leave the church and end up with a secular worldview. Two years after that ruling, with the federal government clearly ditching the constraints on its power imposed by the Constitution, Congress decided to formally begin the process of seizing control over public education. And so, in 1965, it passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the proverbial camel’s nose under the tent, which opened the federal funding spigot. Then, less than 15 years later, Congress and Jimmy Carter unleashed the U.S. Department of Education on America. It did not take long for the feds to demand more control, and then more control, until the Obama administration finally came out and openly nationalized education standards using Common Core (see article on page 15). Now, education is being globalized, with the United Nations and the U.S. Department of Education leading the way (see article on page 27).

But by the time the federal government began openly hijacking control of education from the states and local communities, America had already undergone a fundamental transformation via education. Norman Dodd, who led an investigation by Congress’ Select Committee to Investigate Tax-Exempt Foundations and Comparable Organizations, explained that foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation, which funded Dewey and others, had orchestrated drastic changes that were so serious they constituted a “revolution.” However, this “could not have occurred peacefully, or with the consent



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of the majority, unless *education* in the United States had been prepared in advance to endorse it.” (Emphasis added.)

In a few centuries, America went from being the best-educated society in all of human history — a moral and intellectual superpower — to being a dumbed-down, ignorant, and increasingly immoral nation on the brink of destruction. But it was not by accident. In fact, it was all a deliberate plan, as this writer and Dr. Blumenfeld showed in *Crimes of the Educators: How Utopians Are Using Government Schools to Destroy America’s Children*. This incredible transformation was brought about by seizing control of education and weaponizing it. The only viable solution to this catastrophic problem is to neutralize that weapon by protecting America’s children from it and restoring true education.



Photo at top: Wolfgang Sauber

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