

PART IV
EDUCATIONAL
ISSUES

THE WRONG FILTER

Headlines were made by the results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. Yet nobody should have been surprised, since our students have been doing badly on international tests for decades.

American 12th graders fell below the international average in general mathematics and general science. In advanced mathematics, our students were tied for last place and in physics they had sole possession of last place.

Students from Asian nations, who usually do very well on such tests, did not take part in these particular tests. So American students are trailing the pack among the also-rans.

While the American educational system is falling behind academically, it is leading the world in excuses. One of these excuses is that more of our students reach the 12th grade, so that we are comparing our average with other countries' elites.

While that may be true for some countries, there are other countries that have as high a percentage of their students finish secondary school as we do—and some have a higher percentage completing secondary education. Both kinds of countries beat out our students.

Another excuse is that our population has so many disadvantaged minorities that this drags down the average. But

when you compare our very top students with the top students from other countries, ours still get clobbered.

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley responded to the sad results from these international tests by calling them “unacceptable.” Nonsense! Such dismal results have been accepted for years and will be accepted for years to come, so long as the National Education Association continues to contribute millions of dollars to political campaigns.

From the standpoint of the NEA, the American public schools are not a failure but a great big success. These schools provide NEA members with jobs where they have iron-clad tenure, automatic raises, and no accountability for bad performances by their students or themselves.

The public schools also have a virtual monopoly on the supply of schoolchildren, except for those whose parents are affluent enough to be able to afford private schools or dedicated enough to homeschool their children. What this all adds up to is that the public schools can do pretty much whatever they want to, including avoiding academic training and indulging themselves in all sorts of fads and psychobabble, including “self-esteem.”

In this latest round of international tests, American students led the world in one department: “self-esteem.” As in previous international tests, American students had the highest perception of how well they had done. Seventy percent said that they thought they had done well. This would be comic if it were not so tragic.

While there are many particular things that can be criticized in our public schools, even the critics often miss the point when they fail to see that the key to all these counterproductive policies are the people who make them. If we purged the public schools of all the time-wasting silliness there today, we would have accomplished little if the same

kinds of people were left in place to bring in new non-academic nonsense tomorrow.

Innumerable tests over many decades have shown that the mental test scores of people who specialize in education are among the lowest of any college students. This is not an accident. Given the incredibly bad courses in education that abound, in even the top universities, intelligent people are repelled, while mediocrities and incompetents sail through.

If you are not going to change that, then you are not going to change the low quality of American public schools. Education courses are a filter. They filter out intelligent students and let mediocrities pass through.

Just as you are not going to catch ocean fish in mountain lakes, no matter how expensive your fishing equipment, so you are not going to get an academically proficient or even academically oriented class of people coming out of education schools and education courses. First-rate people do not come out of such places because they do not go into such places or do not stay if they do.

Raising teachers' salaries will not do it. You will just get more expensive mediocrities in the classroom and more expensive incompetents being graduated from our schools.

TOO MANY Ph.D.s?

When anyone who owns a business discovers that unsold products are piling up on the shelf or in the warehouse, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that it is time to cut back production until the inventory declines. But no such logic applies in the academic world.

Complaints about the excess number of Ph.D.s in the humanities have gone on for years. The answer? Have the government create new programs to hire the excess Ph.D.s that no one else wants to hire. Create more post-doctoral fellowships, so that the taxpayers can carry these people for a few more years before they are finally forced out into the cruel world that the rest of us live in all the time.

Every year, for 12 consecutive years, American universities have broken all previous records for the number of Ph.D.s awarded. The number of doctorates awarded in 1997 was nearly one-third larger than it was just a decade earlier. Forget about supply and demand when it comes to academia.

Ironically, doctorates in science, engineering and mathematics have come down somewhat in recent years, even though American companies are recruiting engineers from India, Russia and other places. But in English, history and other humanities fields, the graduate schools are flooding the market with people for whom there are no jobs.

Behind all these strange goings-on in academia is the simple fact that colleges and universities are spending other people's money—and neither the donors nor the taxpayers have the time to monitor what is happening on campuses across the country.

Professors of English gain prestige and professional advancement by spinning esoteric theories of literature and promoting other avant-garde notions. Whether the sophomores understand English grammar or know any adjectives beyond “awesome” is not their problem. Lower-level courses are taught disproportionately by graduate students who are working toward their own Ph.D.s and earning a meager salary by teaching basic courses that professors disdain to teach.

Reduce the number of graduate students and professors will be forced to sully their hands teaching introductory courses, instead of spending their time preparing papers on sexuality and Sophocles for the Modern Language Association meetings. It is impossible to caricature the papers presented at the Modern Language Association meetings. Indeed, it is impossible to cite some of the titles in a family newspaper.

A rich country like the United States can afford to waste money on many foolish projects. But no country can afford the degeneration and internal strife bred by idle hands for whom the devil finds work.

Among the great curses of the Third World are large numbers of people with degrees and the pretensions that go with them, but without any productive skills to contribute to raising the material standard of living in those countries. Worse, these superfluous degree-holders promote political instability and economic chaos through demagoguery and policies based on fashionable ideologies that have never had to stand the test of results.

It has taken decades for Latin America to get over “depen-

dency theory" that blamed that region's lag behind the industrial nations of Europe and North America on the evil machinations of Yankees and other imperialists. The living standards of whole generations have been sacrificed trying out policies based on half-baked theories that each country should become "independent" of the world market by producing its own products to substitute for the products it formerly imported.

Nor has Latin America been alone in promoting self-defeating economic policies, based on the ideological fashions of superfluous degree-holders. It took many African countries decades of disastrous experiments with socialistic policies before some of them belatedly turned away from these nostrums and toward market-oriented policies that have finally begun raising their people's standards of living above where they were when they were colonies of European imperialist powers.

The United States is not a Third World country, of course. But it has many less fortunate people, whose aspirations for a better life can be needlessly frittered away by ideas from those who have been shielded from reality in the name of education.

“NO EXCUSES”

Tests show that most low-income students in the 8th grade still cannot multiply or divide two-digit numbers by other two-digit numbers. That is, they cannot tell you what 14 times 15 equals or what 60 divided by 12 is.

Against this background, you might think that there would be enormous interest in those particular low-income and minority schools where the students equal or exceed the national norms in verbal or mathematical skills. But you would be wrong.

Some of these successful schools have had to run a gauntlet of hassles from education bureaucrats. A principal of a successful minority school in California was hassled because she used phonics instead of “whole language” and because she taught foreign-born children in English instead of the various languages in the bilingual programs. The fact that she was succeeding where others were failing did not exempt her from being harassed.

In Massachusetts, a principal had trouble even getting approval to set up a school that would be using standardized tests to assess the progress of his students, most of whom were from minority groups. He was called a “racist” and a “Nazi.” His students ended up with the highest test scores in town. Some Nazi!

However phony the accusation, the hostility behind it was very real. The education establishment—the teachers' unions, the schools of education, and state and federal education bureaucrats—are out to protect their turf and their dogmas at all costs. People who challenge their beliefs, in words or deeds, are to be denounced, demonized, harassed or otherwise driven from the scene.

Despite having to buck the education establishment, some brave principals and teachers have created oases of excellence for low-income, minority students in a vast educational desert. A recently published book titled *No Excuses* by Samuel Casey Carter provides sketches of 21 such schools, scattered around the country.

Again and again, this book shows schools where minority students from the bottom of the socioeconomic scale are scoring above the national average on standardized tests that are supposed to be so “culturally biased” that only white, middle-class students can do well on them. That is one of the many widely-used excuses by “educators” who fail to educate. And that is why the very different philosophy in these successful schools is called a “No Excuses” philosophy—no excuses for students or teachers.

How have successful schools for low-income, minority students done it? Largely by ignoring education “experts” and going against the theories and practices that reign elsewhere in American schools. Those schools which have low-income black, Hispanic and other minority students scoring higher than many white, middle-class students elsewhere in math and English typically feature real teaching rather than “activities” or “projects,” phonics rather than “whole language,” standardized tests rather than mushy evaluations, and in general a back-to-basics approach.

However, do not think for one moment that the fact that

one theory of education fails and another succeeds is going to change the people who run our public schools or who control our teachers' colleges. Those people have tenure and their pay is not affected in the slightest by whether or not they produce educated students.

Even incompetent teachers are hard to get rid of in most public school systems. In New York state, it takes an average of 15 months and more than \$170,000 to fire one teacher.

From the standpoint of the education establishment in general, and the teachers' unions in particular, our education system is not a failure, even though American children usually finish at or near the bottom in international tests. The public school system is a success for those who run it, in terms of protecting their jobs, their turf, their dogmas and—above all—their power to use vulnerable children as guinea pigs for the fads that come and go.

Parents, voters and taxpayers also need to understand that our public schools are not failing. They are succeeding in substituting self-serving agendas for the task of conveying the accumulated knowledge of the past to today's younger generation.

While there are many serious social problems making it harder to educate children today, there are nevertheless schools which succeed in spite of those problems—but only because education is their top priority.

Get a copy of *No Excuses*. It is published by the Heritage Foundation in Washington.

BACK DOOR QUOTAS

Ever since racial quotas in college admissions were banned by Proposition 209 in California and by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in Texas, academics and politicians have been racking their brains to come up with something that would allow quotas to continue under new names.

The latest attempt to get away from admitting students by their own individual qualifications is a proposal from the president of the University of California that the standard Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT I) no longer be required of students applying for college admissions.

According to UC President Richard C. Atkinson, an “over-emphasis on the SAT is distorting educational priorities and practice.” Moreover, “the test is perceived by many as unfair” and its results “can have devastating impact on the self-esteem and aspirations of young students.”

This is a masterpiece of mushiness. How much emphasis is “over” emphasis? And if that is really the problem, then why not simply reduce the emphasis instead of throwing out the test? But of course this was just a talking point, so it would be unfair to expect either evidence or logic to back up the claim of “over” emphasis, much less a rational response in the unlikely event that this could be demonstrated.

As for the test being “perceived” as unfair, what isn’t? And

how many other people perceive it as fairer than the alternatives? Arbitrarily singling out those who have one opinion as the one to follow would allow anybody to advocate any policy (or its opposite) on any issue, anywhere and any time.

The same goes for the “self-esteem” argument. Believe me, my self-esteem would suffer if I had to go out on a golf course and compete with Tiger Woods or onto a tennis court and compete with Pete Sampras or Andre Agassi. We would have to throw out every criterion in every field if we wanted to avoid damaging the self-esteem of those who fail.

But do not think that a madman is in charge of the University of California. Dr. Atkinson must know better. These are standard arguments by those who want to bring quotas in by the back door, when they can no longer come in the front door.

These ploys are not even confined to the United States. When courts in India put limits on how far group quotas could go, all sorts of non-academic factors suddenly blossomed in the university admissions process. Subjective factors like “aptitude” and “general abilities” were given great weight, even when these were assessed in interviews that lasted only three minutes per applicant. Dr. Atkinson seeks similar “holistic” criteria.

In India, subjective factors were clearly being used as automatic offsets to differences in academic qualifications. As one Indian court put it, there was a “disturbing” pattern of discrepancy between interview rankings and rankings on other criteria. Students with unsatisfactory academic records nevertheless received “very high marks at the interviews,” while “a large number of students who had secured very high marks in the university examinations and who performed well in their earlier class had secured low marks at the interviews.”

In short, inconvenient academic criteria were being gotten

rid of, so that group quotas could continue in new disguises. That is precisely what getting rid of standardized academic tests is all about. Similarly, admitting the top X percent of each high school's graduates is more of the same deceptive sleight-of-hand. The top 10 percent of students from one high school may be less qualified than the merely average student from another high school.

The claim is often made that the SAT is "culturally biased." But life itself is culturally biased. If you can't handle math and the English language, you are in big trouble.

If the "culturally biased" argument is meant to insinuate that these tests falsely predict a lower academic achievement level for minority students than they later achieve, then that is a purely factual question. And the facts have devastated that theory time and again, for years on end. No wonder the quota crowd don't want to define exactly what they mean by "culturally biased," nor put it to the test of facts.

The tests are not unfair. Life is unfair. If you are serious about wanting minority students to have a better chance in life, then you need to start years before they take the SAT. And you need to stop deceiving them and the American people.

WE ARE ALL “DROPOUTS”

Hats off to Jackson Toby, who wrote in *The Weekly Standard* what few have dared to say in the past three decades: “Let them drop out.” He argues that too many students are finding nothing but frustration and resentment at being trapped for hours every day in high schools that are boring and meaningless to them.

This argument was made back in the 1960s by the late and great Edward Banfield in his classic book, *The Unheavenly City*. Moreover, he had hard facts to back up what he said. Studies indicated that it was not dropping out that led youngsters into delinquency and crime but staying in school after they had lost all interest in it and lost all respect for it.

Nevertheless, incessant propaganda from the education establishment has made the word “dropout” one that inspires horror. But all of us are dropouts—and should be. At some point or other, we all leave the educational system.

Some leave in high school, some leave after high school, some leave in or after college and others leave after completing a Ph.D. or after finishing a post-doctoral fellowship. But nobody’s whole life is spent going to school. Nor should it be.

The right point at which to leave varies enormously from person to person. So does the time to come back, as millions do.

This is ultimately a very individual decision, if we are thinking about either the wellbeing of the students or the wellbeing of society. But if we are thinking about children in school as meal tickets for the education establishment—which is often paid on the basis of “average daily attendance”—then the way to maximize that money is to hold as many kids hostage as long as possible and demonize the word “dropout.”

When mere rhetoric and repetition are not enough, the education establishment points to the fact that high school graduates earn more money than dropouts, and college graduates earn still more. But one of the first things you learn in Statistics 1 is that correlation is not causation. Unfortunately, it is also one of the first things that many people forget.

The youngsters who drop out of high school are different from those who graduate. Keeping everybody in high school to the bitter end will not change this difference in people, just as joining a basketball team will not make you any taller, even though statistics show that basketball players are usually taller than other people.

Most people who drop out of high school resume their education at some later point, either to complete high school or learn a trade or get admitted to college without a high school diploma (like yours truly). These individuals and their incomes are not counted in statistics about the earnings of high school dropouts.

Given the incredible amounts of time that are wasted on non-academic “activities” and “projects” in most public schools, the 12 years it currently takes to complete high school could easily be reduced to 8 years, if not 6, just by getting the junk out of the curriculum and doing some serious teaching of math, English and other basic skills.

This would lessen the burden and the boredom, enabling

many more youngsters to complete their elementary and secondary education. It would also rid the school of the negative and disruptive influence of those students who have no interest in what the school is doing. It would also reduce the pressures to dumb down everyone's education, in hopes of getting the disinterested to stay on for the sake of appearances and fun activities.

It would also shorten the time that youngsters spend in an adolescent subculture and begin sooner the process of their joining the adult world, where they can learn from people who have a lot more experience and maturity than they or their peers have. It might be possible to debate all these various considerations from the standpoint of what is best for the individual and the society. But none of that really matters to the educational establishment.

Their jobs depend on having a large captive audience, and the self-interest of "educators" is served by extending the period of students' incarceration—starting earlier in kindergarten and preschool, and including summer school for all. There will never be a lack of high-sounding excuses for these exercises in promoting the self-interest of teachers unions and educational bureaucrats.

Only if more parents and voters start looking beyond the rhetoric and spin is the present bad situation likely to change. But have their own years of dumbed-down education made that unlikely?

SCHOOL TO SCHOOL?

One of the problems of getting old is that you miss out on so many of the exciting new things that young people enjoy. Often this is because what is new to them is something that has been tried again and again in the past—and has turned out to be a bummer again and again.

One of the many idiotic ideas that reappears in our public schools in new verbal guises is the idea that the school should be preparing young people for the world of work. Since every old idea has to have a new name, this is now called the “school-to-work” program, sponsored by the federal government and spending billions of tax dollars.

This used to be called “vocational guidance” and the idea goes back at least 90 years, when the gurus of so-called progressive education said that schools spent too much time on academic subjects and not enough time on “practical” things that would be “relevant” to the kind of work and life that students would go into after finishing school.

In the latest reincarnation of vocational guidance as school-to-work programs, 8th graders are given tests to determine what kinds of jobs they are supposedly suited for and they are asked to make career choices. Such choices are premature by at least a decade. Some of the best liberal arts colleges allow—and encourage—their students to take two years

of general education in college before deciding what subject to major in.

Such choices are too serious to make without some solid basis. You may be fascinated by chemistry experiments in high school, but that is very different from saying that you can master the difficult analytical skills required for majoring in chemistry in college. Every college has students who enroll in pre-med programs and end up majoring in sociology.

What did you really know about careers when you were in the 8th grade? I didn't even know what an economist was and had never heard of a think tank, such as the Hoover Institution, where I have worked for 20 years. Nor is it at all realistic to expect school teachers to have any such encyclopedic knowledge of the thousands of occupations out there today, much less what the trends are for various fields in the years ahead, when these 8th graders will be working adults.

When meteorologists have trouble predicting the weather five days ahead and financial experts can get clobbered in the stock market, what in the world would lead anybody to seriously expect school teachers to predict the world in which their 8th graders will be living, decades from now? The high rates of obsolescence of jobs and skills doom any such efforts.

In an age when "educators" seem to be constantly trying to find things to do instead of educating, school-to-work is just another of those irresponsible self-indulgences which create the illusion that they are doing something useful, when in fact they are wasting precious time and spreading confusion among the young.

It is worse than that. School-to-work programs are also indoctrination programs for politically correct views about careers. They test for attitudes as well as aptitudes. Once you start playing little tin god, micro-managing other people's

lives, it is hard to know where to stop. In reality, the place to stop is before you begin.

School is not a place for make-believe practicality. Schools need to do what they have a special advantage and a special time for doing—conveying to the young the basic skills that they are going to need, irrespective of the particular jobs they may have, which no one can predict anyway.

More important, people need to be educated as citizens and as human beings. For that, they need to be able to draw upon the wisdom of the ages—whether expressed in mathematics, science, history or literature—not the fads of the moment.

Employers are not demanding that job applicants show up knowing all about the work on the first day. But they need people who can read well enough to understand written instructions—and many employers complain that the schools are not supplying that.

Some employers are hiring engineers from India and Russia, not because they are better engineers, but because they have been taught the English language better than many Americans.

What we really need is a school-to-school program, not programs in which schools pretend to be what they cannot possibly be.

THE WAR AGAINST BOYS

The old saying, “Boys will be boys,” has long since become obsolete in schools across the length and breadth of this country. Unknown to most parents, there are federally-financed programs to prevent boys from acting the way boys have always acted before.

The things done by those who have taken on the role of changing boys range from forbidding them from running and jumping during recess to having them wear dresses and pretend to be girls or women in the classroom.

Whatever the particular mix of things done at a particular school, it is accompanied by a barrage of propaganda prepared by radical feminists for nationwide distribution with the blessing—and the money—of the U.S. Department of Education.

The people who are doing this see their role as changing your children into the kinds of people they want them to be—not the kind of people you want them to be. Parents who somehow learn what is going on in school and object are told that “studies prove” that this is the right thing to do, that “specialists” and “experts” know more about this than parents can possibly know.

A newly published book titled *The War Against Boys* by Christina Hoff Sommers not only reveals what these brain-washing programs are doing, it also shows that the so-called

“studies” on which these programs are based are either hopelessly inadequate or just plain non-existent. Christina Hoff Sommers is a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and she not only sees through the fraudulent claims of the radical feminists, she is familiar with real studies—both here and overseas—which show the direct opposite of what the brain-washers claim.

The people who are promoting the anti-male agenda are experts at nothing except manipulating the media and snowing gullible educators, who are more interested in puffing themselves up as “agents of social change” than in teaching children. Boys in elementary school, or even kindergarten, have been punished for being politically incorrect toward girls.

One nine-year-old boy who reached for a piece of fruit in a school lunch line and accidentally brushed against a girl was arrested, hand-cuffed and fingerprinted for sexual harassment, even though the charges later had to be dropped. A boy of three was punished in school for hugging another child. The feminist dogma is that such things are precursors of wife-beating, rape and other crimes of men against women—and so must be nipped in the bud.

According to these propagandists, 4 million American women are beaten to death by men every year. That is four times as many American women as die from all causes put together. The actual number of women killed by men is less than one percent of what was claimed.

However inaccurate and irresponsible the propaganda, it is very effective in creating the kind of paranoia that gets brainwashing programs and draconian punishment of boys into the schools. Staggering as it is to realize that schools are using materials and creating rules based on sheer dogma and outright lies, the tragic fact is that such tactics have been com-

mon in totalitarian countries throughout this century. What is uncommon is their pervasiveness in America over the past generation.

Radical feminists apply the old Hitler-Goebbels doctrine that the people will believe any lie, if it is big enough and told often enough and loud enough. Intimidation and retribution against all who dare to disagree is likewise as much a part of the new agenda as it was in the old totalitarian regimes.

The War Against Boys shows where the propagandists have gotten their facts wrong—where they have any facts at all. But the brainwashers' goals are not accuracy but power. In those terms, they have been an incredible success. They are no more interested in facts than any other power-seekers. Did Hitler study genetics?

Christina Hoff Sommers writes not only as a scholar but as the mother of two boys. Her book is must-reading, not only for parents of boys in school, but for all parents, and should inform any responsible citizen and voter who is concerned about American education.

Tragically, radical feminists are just one of many reckless zealots who have turned our schools into ideological indoctrination centers, instead of places for children to get an education in basic skills. One of the reasons American children do so badly in international tests of academic skills is that our schools are preoccupied with politically correct social crusades.

“RESEARCH” MARCHES ON

If you have tears, prepare to shed them. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that Professor Janet Wright of Dickinson College has only the summer available to do research on wood rats.

Apparently she is concerned that wood rats are disappearing from Pennsylvania and other states for reasons that no one has yet figured out.

When Professor Wright figures it out, there will undoubtedly be an article in some academic journal, which a few people here and there may actually read.

The plight of Professor Wright is only one of a number of personal stories in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* about professors at liberal arts college who are kept so busy teaching during the academic year that the summer is the only time they have available to do their research.

Another whose plight we are presumably supposed to empathize with is a Professor Elmaz Abinader of Mills College who is “writing a three-part performance piece” about the women in her family. It is not clear how a “performance piece” differs from a play or whether this is one of those fine distinctions that keep academic minds occupied.

Professor Michael Womack, a biologist at Macon State College, is out counting mosquitoes for the Federal Emergency

Management Agency. Professor Jane Dirks of Carlow College is doing a study of the ethnic backgrounds of people she encounters while walking her dog. This led to a paper presented at the national meeting of the American Anthropological Association.

Professor Howard Richards of Earlham College says that he is devoting part of his summer vacation to “organizing a whole movement to reconstruct the world.”

Reassuring as it is to know that there are things to do to keep academics occupied and off the streets, nevertheless it somehow recalls that old World War II slogan: “Is this trip necessary?”

For the professors themselves, it may be very necessary to keep their resumés from having blank space where there should be publications. Even at liberal arts colleges that emphasize teaching, at least in their brochures, it is increasingly necessary to keep putting things in print, in order to get your contract renewed and, eventually, enter the promised land of tenure.

We of course have no way of knowing how much of Professor Wright’s interest in the well-being of Pennsylvania wood rats is due to the pure search for truth and good, any more than we have any way of knowing how much NASA’s search for life on other planets is in reality a search for a way to get more money out of the taxpayers on this planet.

At one time, “publish or perish” was the watchword at big research universities but today it is the holy grail from Harvard to Podunk A & M. Criticize the research mania and you will be told that research has produced everything from polio vaccines to the transistor.

A lot of pygmies can hide in the shadows of giants. So the taxpayers are picking up the tab for “research” that serves no other purpose than to fill the library shelves, require more

trees to be cut down to produce paper and—not wholly incidentally—bring in more money to college and university coffers. After all, research grants to support trivialities are just as much hard cash as grants to find a cure for cancer or AIDS.

The costs of these research grants extend far beyond the money directly spent or wasted. In order to free up time for professors to do research, their teaching loads must be reduced.

When I began teaching in 1962, it was not uncommon in most colleges for a professor to spend 12 hours a week in class and by no means unknown for the average teaching load to be 15 hours. Today, 6 hours a week is the norm in many of those same colleges.

When you cut the average teaching load in half, you are going to need twice as many professors to teach the same number of courses. That means twice as much money for salaries, even if the salaries are not going up. But professors' salaries have been going up faster than the rate of inflation. That is one of the reasons why tuition has also been going up faster than the rate of inflation.

Research on wood rats and on people you encounter while walking the dog may sound funny—but only if you are not a student, parent or taxpayer who is footing the bill for all this.

LET'S HEAR IT FOR UNFAIRNESS!

“Fair” is one of those nice words that make us feel good—no matter how much damage or dangers it leads to. The concept has sunk in so deeply that nothing causes such indignation as the charge that some person, policy or institution has been “unfair.”

Yet when I hear educational policies discussed in terms of fairness, my reaction is: Thank God my teachers were unfair to me when I was growing up in Harlem back in the 1940s!

My 7th-grade English teacher, for example, used to require everyone who misspelled a word to write that word 50 times as part of his homework and bring it in the next morning. Misspell three or four words, on top of the rest of your homework, and you had quite an evening ahead of you.

Was this fair? Of course not. Kids on Park Avenue probably heard those words at home far more often than I did. The magazines and books in their homes probably contained many of those words, while my family couldn't afford to subscribe to magazines or buy books.

Fairness was never an option. The only choice was between the temporary unfairness of forcing us to learn things that were a little harder for us to learn and the permanent unfairness of sending us out into the world unprepared and doomed to failure.

Many years later, I happened to run into one of the guys from that school on a street in San Francisco. He was now a psychiatrist and owned a home and property in Napa Valley. If he wanted to live on Park Avenue, I am sure he could afford it now.

As we reminisced about old times and caught up on the things that had happened to us since then, he mentioned that his various secretaries over the years had commented on the fact that he seldom misspelled a word.

“Mine too,” I said. “But, if they knew Miss Simon, there would be no mystery as to why we don’t misspell words!”

Although I never finished high school and struggled to make ends meet for a few years before going to college, when I took the Scholastic Aptitude Test I scored higher on the verbal portion than the average Harvard student. That was probably why Harvard admitted me. No doubt much of that was due to Miss Simon and other teachers like her who were “unfair” to me.

What if they had been fair to me and my schoolmate? Where would we be today? Maybe in some halfway house—if we were lucky.

Some people say that my philosophy is “tough.” But it is life that is tough. My ideas are a piece of cake compared to life.

What about the other kids who went to school in Harlem in the 1940s? Their test scores were very similar to those of white kids in similar neighborhoods, sometimes a shade ahead and sometimes a shade behind, but always in the ballpark—unlike today.

Education is just one of the areas in which the mushy notion of fairness makes those who believe in it feel good about themselves—at the expense of other people’s lives.

We are so used to hearing about policemen warning criminals about their right to remain silent that some of the

younger generation may not realize that this is something that never existed during three-quarters of the history of the United States.

Back in the 1960s, both the Attorney General of the United States and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court thought it was unfair that inexperienced and amateurish criminals would make damaging admissions that more savvy crooks and members of crime syndicates would never make. Therefore cops were required to warn everybody, so as to bring the dumbest crook up to the level of the most state-of-the-art mafioso.

There was no thought of the cost of creating this fairness between different categories of criminals. No one asked: How many women are you prepared to see raped, how many neighborhoods terrorized, how many people killed, for the sake of this conception of fairness?

A police chief who tried to caution a conference of judges in 1965 about the consequences of such decisions was literally laughed at—by two Supreme Court justices, among others. How many victims or their widows or orphans would have laughed is another story.

Someone always has to pay the price of fairness, whether in money or in other ways. This straining for an abstract and impossible kind of fairness and justice is one of the most tragic quests of our time.

DOES IT ADD UP?

For many years now, American students have been coming in at or near the bottom in international tests of mathematics. Meanwhile, our schools have been entertaining themselves with “new math,” “fuzzy math” and everything other than old-fashioned hard-work math that other countries use.

If you want to test your own knowledge of math, here is an example for you. If a school district spends \$8,000 per pupil and pays \$4,000 for a voucher for each pupil who leaves the public school system, will the total cost of educating all the students go up or down when more students begin using vouchers to transfer out of the public schools?

Take all the time you want. I’ll wait. You can even use a pocket calculator if you want to.

If you said that the total cost of educating all the students goes down, then you are a lot smarter than those people who have fallen for the teachers’ union argument that vouchers will cost the taxpayers more money. If you went even further and said that the amount of money left to spend on students remaining in the public schools would enable the spending per public school pupil to rise, you are probably in the top one or two percent.

Unfortunately, the dumbing-down of American education has been going on so long that it may now be impossible for

many people to see through such flimsy arguments that are made in defense of the status quo in the public schools. These schools' own educational failures in the past may insulate them from the changes they need to make for the future—but which an under-educated public does not realize they need to make.

Seldom, if ever, do students who receive vouchers get more than half of what is spent per pupil in the public schools. Moreover, both voucher schools and charter schools have to provide their own classrooms, while school buildings are provided free to the public school system. So the real disparity in resources is even greater than two-to-one in favor of the public schools.

Despite the deck's being stacked in favor of the public schools, students in voucher schools, charter schools and home schooling almost invariably do at least as well, and usually better, by whatever tests are used.

One of the most hypocritical arguments against vouchers is that the amounts of money given to the students are insufficient to pay for an education in a private school. In reality, tuition at many parochial and other low-budget private schools will in fact be covered by half of what the public schools spend per pupil in many communities. But if those who make this argument are serious, they need only advocate larger amounts of money per voucher. But that is the last thing they will do.

The deck is stacked in favor of the public schools in other ways. Teachers' unions and the public school establishment are already organized for political combat in a way that voucher schools or charter schools cannot be this early in their history. The unions and the public schools are thus able to lobby politicians to impose restrictions and red tape on their rivals.

The education establishment wants the teachers in voucher schools and charter schools to be “certified” as having taken education courses, being unionized and surrounded with all the iron-clad job security that makes it an ordeal to fire even grossly incompetent teachers. Sometimes these restrictions and directives are justified in the name of “fairness,” where similar restrictions and directives already apply to the public schools. But this “fairness” argument is completely invalid and misleading.

First, one of the main purposes of voucher schools, charter schools and home schooling is to allow alternative forms of education to escape the bureaucratic rigidities, faddish dogmas and massive red tape that have helped turn too many American public schools into educational disaster areas.

Second, “fairness” is a concept that applies to relations between human beings, not institutions. Institutions are just means to an end. Those institutions that do not serve their purpose—for whatever reason—need to give way to institutions that do.

This does not mean that public schools should be shut down. Rather, they should be forced to compete with alternatives, as other kinds of enterprises have to compete. Whether or not Kodak film is better than Fuji film, both are better than they would be if either had a monopoly.

DIVERSITY VERSUS “DIVERSITY”

Sometimes it seems as if “diversity” is going to replace “the” as the most often used word in the English language. Yet the place where this word has become a holy grail—academia—shows less tolerance for genuine diversity of viewpoints than any other American institution.

In a book titled *The College Admissions Mystique*, an admissions office official at Brown University is quoted as setting ideological litmus tests for applicants. An outstanding high school record would not be enough to get admitted, because such records were seen as signs of people who had sold out to traditional ways of thinking—and who envisaged careers in establishment professions. He called such students “Reptilian.”

What the admissions official wanted were “with it” kids, socially and politically aware—“bellwethers” who “would have a following later on.” In other words, he did not want pillars of society but politically correct pied pipers who could head ideological movements.

In other words, diversity of viewpoints is not welcome. Diversity of physical appearance is the be-all and end-all, but diversity of thought is no more welcome than it has been under the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Such narrowness is not confined to Brown University. Nor

is it confined to admissions offices. Increasingly, ideological litmus tests are applied to the hiring of professors. Candidates for faculty positions report being asked openly ideological questions.

One young scholar who has published very careful and important research that reached politically incorrect conclusions reports being treated with calculated discourtesy and boorishness during job interviews. It was not enough for the cultural commissars to turn him down, they had to try to humiliate him.

This particular scholar has now been hired by a conservative think tank on the east coast. But the real harm that has been done has been done to students who will never learn that there is a factual and reasoned alternative to the one-sided propaganda they will hear in their classrooms.

Incidentally, there is a reason why most of the top-rated think tanks in the world are conservative. When a liberal think tank wants to hire a top scholar in some field, it has to compete with Ivy League universities, Berkeley, Duke, and the like. But conservative think tanks don't have that problem, because the ideological litmus tests in academia bar many conservative scholars from an academic career. Conservative think tanks have little competition when hiring people like the outstanding young man who was dissed at job interviews in places where he was, if anything, over-qualified.

What is remarkable—and appalling—is that so many businessmen keep writing donation checks, some in the millions of dollars, for places where businessmen are demonized by academics who know nothing about business, and where the very possibility that a student applicant might become a businessman is enough reason to blackball him, despite his academic achievements.

Recently, a college student wrote to me that a professor

was shocked to see a book of mine accidentally fall out of his book bag. However, the prof was visibly relieved when the student said that it was just a book that he bought for himself. What this ideological academic had feared was that this book was assigned reading in some course. In other words, four years of steady indoctrination with the left viewpoint might be jeopardized by one little book of essays.

Who knows? It could even lead to diversity.

All this ideological intolerance might seem funny, but it is very serious for those who are true believers on the left and ought to be for those of us who are not. Even if the academic Taliban of the left were correct in all their beliefs about all current issues, it would still be dangerous to leave students unable to weigh and analyze alternatives for themselves, because the issues in the years ahead of them are almost certain to be different. What they were taught will become progressively less relevant and the mental skills that they have not been taught can become a crippling handicap for them—and for our society.

CHOOSING A COLLEGE

For many high school seniors and their parents, this is the time of year when colleges let them know if their applications have been accepted. For those who have been chosen, it is now their turn to make their own choices among the colleges that have sent acceptances.

One of the most over-rated factors in these choices are the big names of some colleges and universities. There may be some famous professors at Ivy U., but that doesn't mean much to an undergraduate who is more likely to be taught by graduate students or by temporary "gypsy faculty" who teach introductory courses that the academic stars consider too boring to teach themselves.

For the kind of megabucks tuition that can leave both students and parents in hock for years, this is no bargain. A far better education may be obtained at a good quality college where courses are taught by professors who are competent and available, rather than by the graduate assistants of some research grant baron, to whom undergraduates are a nuisance that he doesn't want to be bothered with.

For minority students, there are further dangers in big-name colleges and universities that want them as warm bodies which visibly demonstrate "diversity" on campus, regardless of whether these students last long enough to graduate.

Despite a recent book by a couple of retired Ivy League university presidents, suggesting that it is imperative that blacks go to elite colleges, whether or not their qualifications match those of the other students there, the cold fact is that it is infinitely better to graduate from Hillsdale College or Birmingham Southern than to flunk out of Berkeley or Columbia. It is also better to get an engineering degree from Cal State at San Luis Obispo than to squeak through some Ivy League school by taking soft courses in subjects that prepare you for nothing but unemployment.

It is a monument to the dedication of many parents that they are willing to take out second mortgages on their homes, in order to pay exorbitant tuition at some prestige institutions. Seldom is it worth it.

Some people point to the fact that students who graduate from big-name colleges earn higher incomes later on. But kids who go horseback riding undoubtedly also go on to earn higher incomes than kids who don't. Does that mean that parents should buy their child a horse, in order to ensure bigger paychecks down the road? Prestige colleges, like horseback riding, are signs of other things that are often the real reason why some people have better chances in life.

Harvard turns out bright students because Harvard takes in bright students—and usually does not ruin them during the four years in between. But that is wholly different from saying that the reason such students do well in later life is because they went to Harvard.

Graduates of Harvey Mudd College go on to receive Ph.D.s a far higher percentage of the time than do the graduates of Harvard. Graduates of Franklin & Marshall College have scored higher on the medical school examination than the graduates of Berkeley.

Parents should also consider the non-academic aspects of

college. Do they really want to send their daughter to a college that has co-ed showers? Many big-name colleges and universities go in for all sorts of dangerous fads like this. Parents can also see their hard-earned tuition money go down the drain when their child is suspended or expelled for a politically incorrect remark.

College guides are often used to help decide where to apply for admissions. There are a couple of guides that should be consulted before deciding where to choose to go after being accepted.

Two guides that tell a lot about the social atmosphere, as well as the curriculum, at colleges across the country are *Choosing the Right College* and the *National Review College Guide*. They are not always in the bookstores and may have to be special ordered. But it is worth the trouble, not simply to avoid wasting money, but also to avoid having a life distorted.

Parents are often regarded as mere obstacles to the student's making his or her own college choices. Not only do some headstrong students feel this way, so do many high school counselors and college admissions office staffers. But it is not their money and not their child—and these know-it-alls are not the ones that will have to pick up the pieces if they steer your child into disaster.

A PAINFUL HISTORY

The public in general and parents in particular are shocked from time to time when tests reveal the intellectual incompetence of public school teachers, or when some of the weird fads to which school children have been subjected come to light. But neither the public nor the media seem to see anything beyond the oddities of a particular school or particular teachers.

In reality, there are not only nationwide networks promoting everything from “whole language” to homosexuality in the schools, there is a large body of literature by education gurus—going all the way back to John Dewey in the early 20th century—urging schools away from their traditional role as conveyors of an intellectual heritage toward being “agents of change” in society.

What that means in plain English is that educators should be shaping children to be the kinds of people they want them to be—as distinguished from the kinds of people their parents want them to be. It means that educators should not be so preoccupied with developing intellectual skills and more concerned with inducing in children the kinds of attitudes that would make them receptive to collectivist economic, social and political thinking.

This used to be called progressive education. Its de-empha-

sis of academics in favor of social engineering, its de-emphasis of teaching in favor of “activities” and “projects,” and its de-emphasis of intellectual development in favor of social adjustment and ideological indoctrination are all alive and well today under new names.

An incisive new book titled *Left Behind* by Diane Ravitch, a leading historian of American education, traces the history of the controversies which have raged around educational trends over the past hundred years—“a century of failed school reforms,” as Professor Ravitch’s subtitle aptly puts it.

These reforms have failed repeatedly because what the public wants—the three R’s, for example—conflicts with what the education establishment is determined to do, in its more grandiose vision of its social and political mission. Given this heady feeling about themselves and their role, it is understandable that the education establishment simply dismisses, denigrates and demonizes its critics.

For example, as Professor Ravitch points out, a group of critics who called for rigorous academic standards in the 1930s were likened by John Dewey to religious fundamentalists and were said to be supported by “reactionaries in politics and economics.” When the University of Chicago’s legendary president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, dared to criticize progressive education, the head of Columbia Teachers College said: “Dr. Hutchins stands near to Hitler.” This is the level at which too many educators continue to answer critics today.

American leaders of the progressive education movement, including its supreme guru John Dewey, went to the Soviet Union in the 1920s, when their theories were being put into practice on a mass scale there. They came back gushing with praise for Soviet education, as well as other aspects of Soviet society.

It was only after progressive education failed to turn out

competently educated people that Stalin purged its advocates—and Dewey and others then began to develop some belated skepticism about the Soviet Union in general.

This whole story was played out once again, decades later, in China under Mao during the “cultural revolution.” Here again, these romantic theories led to gross incompetence and China was forced to return to practices that were not so romantic, but which produced results.

Ignorant of history, undaunted by facts, and undeterred by logic, American educators have subjected generations of American children to the same practices, with the same dismal results. Our children now regularly come in at or near the bottom in international tests, especially in no-nonsense subjects like math.

In a sense, this is not failure, but success at a different agenda. It took progressive education generations to achieve complete hegemony in our schools and teachers’ colleges. Diane Ravitch’s *Left Behind* traces how it happened and the assumptions and goals behind it. After you read this book, the strange things that go on in our schools today may not seem inexplicable any more.

What this book demonstrates is that the decline of American education was no accident, but the by-product of a mind-set and an agenda with a long pedigree.

“FORCED TO VOLUNTEER”

The term “liberal” originally referred politically to those who wanted to liberate people—mainly from the oppressive power of government. That is what it still means in various European countries or in Australia and New Zealand. It is the American meaning that is unusual: People who want to increase the power of government, in order to accomplish various social goals.

Typical of what liberalism has come to mean in the United States today is a proposal by California Governor Gray Davis that the state’s colleges and universities make “community service” a graduation requirement. His plan immediately won the unconditional support of the state’s largest newspaper, the liberal *Los Angeles Times*. There was no sense of irony in its editorial claiming beneficial effects for “students who are forced to volunteer.”

Forced to volunteer. That is the Orwellian notion to which contemporary liberalism has sunk.

“What could be wrong,” the *L.A. Times* asks, “with teaching students, as the governor puts it, that ‘a service ethic . . . [has] lasting value in California?’” A community service requirement “could reap a valuable return in a new generation of civically minded citizens.”

Here we get to the heart of the so-called community ser-

vice idea. Its central purpose is to create a certain set of attitudes in the students. It is compulsory submission to state-sponsored propaganda for the liberals' vision of the world. That is what students must be "forced to volunteer" for.

What is wrong with the idea of a free people, using their own time as they see fit, for those things that matter most to them, instead of being pawns in a propaganda program more in keeping with what happens in totalitarian societies? What is wrong with each individual defining for himself or herself what being civic minded means, instead of having the government define it and impose it?

In a country where more than 90 million people already volunteer for civic projects of their own choosing, why must students be drafted to become "volunteers" for environmentalism or other causes dear to the heart of the *Los Angeles Times* or Governor Davis? The casual arrogance of those who define for other people what is a "community service" is breathtaking.

Environmentalism can—and does—reach extremes where it is a disservice to the community. Programs which subsidize the homeless lifestyle can turn able-bodied men into idle nuisances on streets across America. We need not try to force liberals to believe this. But they have no right to use the educational system to force young people to submit to propaganda for their version.

The totalitarian mind-set behind the liberal vision shows through in innumerable ways. There are no institutions in America where free speech is more severely restricted than in our politically correct colleges and universities, dominated by liberals.

Students who openly disagree with the left-wing vision that they are being taught in class can find themselves facing lower grades and insults from the professor in front of their

classmates and friends. Offend the hyper-sensitivities of any of the sacred cow groups on campus—even inadvertently—and stronger punishments, ranging up to suspension or expulsion, can follow.

On the other hand, if minorities, homosexuals or radical feminists want to shout down speakers they don't like or engage in vandalism or other mob actions to promote their agendas, that's OK.

Campus ideological conformity extends to faculty hiring and even the inviting of outside speakers to give talks on campus. There are scholars of international distinction who would never be offered a faculty appointment in most Ivy League colleges and universities today because they do not march in step ideologically. You can find a four-leaf clover faster than you can find a Republican in most sociology departments or English departments.

If the liberals are teaching any civics lesson with all this, it is that power is what matters—including the power to force people to keep their thoughts to themselves, if those thoughts do not conform to the liberal vision.

Community "volunteer" work is only the latest in a series of uses of schools and colleges to propagandize political correctness, instead of teaching individuals to think for themselves. If liberals do not understand that this is the antithesis of liberation, that makes it all the more urgent for the rest of us to recognize that fact and that danger.

DRUGGING CHILDREN

The motto used to be: “Boys will be boys.” Today, the motto seems to be: “Boys will be medicated.”

Of nearly 20 million prescriptions written last year for drugs to treat “attention deficit hyperactivity disorder,” most were for children and most of those children were boys. This is part of a growing tendency to treat boyhood as a pathological condition that requires a new three R’s—repression, re-education and Ritalin.

Some schools have gone to such extremes as banning recess, since boys tend to be boisterous at recess. Competitive sports are likewise banned or made non-competitive, sometimes by banning winning and losing. An aptly titled book, *The War Against Boys* by Christina Hoff Sommers, catalogs the amazing array of things that schools do to keep boys from being boys.

Some of this is being pushed by propaganda from radical feminists who want boys to be like girls. Their dogmas declare that the behavior usually seen in boys is a result of society’s indoctrinating them with a male role stereotype. The answer? “We need to raise boys like we raise girls,” according to Gloria Steinem. Gloria Allred is more specific, “we need to socialize boys at an earlier age, perhaps to be playing with dolls.” Some

schools have followed such advice, even to the point of encouraging boys to wear dresses.

Despite the radical feminist dogma that sex differences are created by society, and that maleness in particular needs to be changed by society, a growing body of scientific evidence shows that boys and girls differ from day one, beginning in the womb, before society has had anything to do with them. The radical feminist response to such evidence? They say such research should be banned! Even without such bans, their mindless dogmas prevail over scientific evidence and pervade the education establishment.

Meanwhile, there are drug companies making well over a hundred million dollars a year each by selling drugs for “attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.” Knowing a good thing, they are now not only advertising these drugs to doctors and school officials, but are also trying to gain more widespread acceptance from parents by running ads aimed at mothers through such outlets as the *Ladies' Home Journal* and 30-second TV commercials.

Yet how does “attention deficit hyperactivity disorder” differ from just being bored and restless with the mindless stuff being served up in school? The question is not simply how does it differ in principle, when diagnosed by high-level specialists, but how does it differ in practice when the term is applied by lower-level people in the local schools?

A large body of research shows that high-IQ students are often bored and alienated from school. These include Einstein and India's self-taught mathematical genius Ramanujan. Fortunately, there was no Ritalin around when they were children, to drug them into passivity—and perhaps into mediocrity.

No doubt life is easier for teachers when everyone sits around quietly, not making any waves. But schools do not

exist to make teaching easy. Moreover, some of the brightest youngsters have some of the strongest reactions to what they see and hear.

According to a study of gifted children by Professor Ellen Winner of Boston College: "These children have been reported to show unusually intense reactions to noise, pain, and frustration." Biographies of some famous people show the same pattern.

Einstein, for example, had tantrums until he was seven years old. In one outburst, he threw a stool at his tutor, who fled and was never seen again. According to a biography of the great pianist Arthur Rubinstein, he became fixated on his family's piano as a toddler and, whenever he was asked to leave the room where it was kept, he screamed and wept. When his father bought him a violin to play, he reacted by smashing it.

Too many parents have gone along when schools have wanted their children drugged. When some parents have objected, they have been threatened with charges of child neglect for not letting drugs be used to control their youngster's behavior.

Belatedly, in response to many revelations of the widespread use of Ritalin and other drugs in schools, some states have begun to pass laws restricting what school personnel and social workers can push parents to do. A new law in Connecticut will limit such medical advice to doctors. It's about time. That common sense restriction should be nationwide. Schools have too many busybodies posing as "experts."

GOODBYE TO SARA AND BENJAMIN?

Recently a couple of dear friends visited us, bringing with them their six-year-old twins, Sara and Benjamin. These are some of the loveliest children you could meet—not just in appearance, but in their behavior. They are the kinds of kids you can see in Norman Rockwell paintings, but less and less in the real world.

Now Sara and Benjamin are going off to public school and it is painful to imagine what they might be like a year from now. Most people are unaware how much time and effort the public schools—and some private schools—are putting into undermining the values and understanding that children were taught by their parents and re-orienting them toward the avant-garde vision of the world that is fashionable in the educational establishment.

Today's educators believe it is their job to introduce children like Sara and Benjamin to sex when and in whatever manner they see fit, regardless of what the children's parents might think. Raw movies of both heterosexuals and homosexuals in action are shown in elementary schools.

Weaning children away from their parents' influence in general is a high priority in many schools. Children sit in what is called a "magic circle" and talk about all sorts of personal things, with the rule being that they are not to repeat any of

these things to anyone outside this magic circle. Sometimes they are explicitly told not to repeat what is said to their parents.

Some handbooks for teachers warn against letting parents know the specifics of what is being done and provide strategies for side-stepping parental questions and concerns. Glowing generalities and high-sounding names like “gifted and talented” programs conceal what are nothing more than brain-washing operations to convert the children from their parents’ values to the values preferred by educational gurus.

Right and wrong are among the earliest targets of these programs. “There is no ‘right’ way or ‘right’ age to have life experiences,” one widely used textbook says. Another textbook tells children that they may listen to their parents “if you are interested in their ideas.” But, if there is a difference of opinion, parent and child alike should see the other’s point of view “as different, not wrong.”

Sara and Benjamin are only six years old and are going into the first grade. Will any of this apply to them? Yes. There is a textbook designed for children ranging from pre-school to the third grade, which tells children about their rights and about asserting those rights to parents. Whenever “things happen you don’t like,” you have “the right to be angry without being afraid of being punished” it says.

In other words, don’t take any guff off mommy and daddy. Who are they? As another textbook says, parents are just “ordinary people with faults and weaknesses and insecurities and problems just like everyone else.” In many of the textbooks, movies and other material used in schools, parents are depicted as old-fashioned people who are out of touch and full of hang-ups.

What these smug underminers of parents fail to understand is that the relationship of a child to his or her parents is

the most extraordinary relationship anyone is likely to have with another human being. No one else is likely to sacrifice so much for another person's wellbeing. If the avant-garde ideas taught to children in schools blow up in their faces, it is the parents who will be left to pick up the pieces, not the glib gurus.

Most of the classroom teachers who carry out such educational fashions and fetishes have no idea where they originated or what their underlying purpose is. In reality, many of the techniques and strategies used to break down the child's values, personality and modesty are straight out of totalitarian brainwashing practices from the days of Stalin and Mao.

That is the origin, for example, of the personal journals that children are required to keep in schools all across the United States. These journals are not educational. Gross mistakes in spelling, grammar and usage are ignored, not corrected. These journals are gateways to the psyche and the first step in manipulating little minds.

As our friends departed and went off to enroll their children in the public schools, I could not help wondering if I had seen Sara and Benjamin for the last time. Would they still be the same sweet children after they have been used as guinea pigs by those who claim to be trying to educate them?

SUCCESS CONCEALING FAILURE

Among the many clever and misleading defenses of our failing educational system is the assertion that our universities are among the highest rated in the world and Americans consistently win a disproportionate number of Nobel Prizes. Both these claims are accurate—and irrelevant.

While Americans won the lion's share of Nobel Prizes in 1999, not one of these winners was actually born in the United States. If people born and raised elsewhere choose to come here and use their talents, fine. But do not claim their achievements as some vindication of the American educational system.

On the contrary, the painful question must be faced: Why were a quarter of a billion native-born Americans unable to win a single Nobel Prize in 1999, when a relative handful of naturalized Americans won so many? This is not a vindication but an indictment of our educational system.

The top-rated American universities owe much to the generosity of American donors and the largess of the American government, which enable them to attract top scholars from around the world. It is research, rather than teaching, which determines world rankings, and our well-financed Ph.D.-granting universities are unquestionably among the best at research.

However, when you look at who gets degrees in what, again the picture is very disturbing as regards the track record of the schools and colleges that prepare students to enter these top-rated institutions.

Less than half the Ph.D.s in engineering and mathematics awarded by American universities are received by Americans. Even more revealing, there is a systematic relationship between the difficulty of the subject and the percentage of American doctorates which go to Americans.

In a mushy and undemanding field like education, more than four out of five of the doctorates go to Americans. It is when you start getting into the physical sciences that the proportion drops to barely half and when you get into engineering and math that Americans become a minority among American university Ph.D.s.

Foreign graduate students predominate so heavily in difficult subjects that a common complaint across the country is that undergraduate math courses are being taught by people whose English is hard to understand, quite aside from the difficulty of learning the subject itself.

Yes, our top universities are the cream of the crop. They are so good that people educated in American schools and colleges cannot hold their own with foreign students who go there.

The period during which American public schools have had declining test scores has coincided with the period during which Americans were increasingly displaced by foreigners in the graduate programs of our top universities.

In every field surveyed by the Council of Graduate Schools, the proportion of graduate degrees in the United States going to Americans has declined over a period of two decades, with the worst declines being in the more demanding subjects.

A closer look at those Americans who do still hold their own in difficult fields is also revealing. Nearly 22 percent of all Ph.D.s in engineering received by Americans are received by Asian Americans. Here is the group that is most out of step with the prevailing easy-going education, with its emphasis on “self-esteem” and other mushy fads. Again, this is not a vindication but an indictment of what is being done in our public schools.

Ironically, people who go ballistic when minorities are “under-represented,” relative to their percentage of the population, whether among college degree recipients or in various professions, remain strangely silent when the whole American population is under-represented among those receiving post-graduate degrees in science, math and engineering in their own country.

Such under-representation might be understandable if the United States were some Third World country just entering the world of modern science and technology. It is staggering in a country whose people led the world in such things in the recent past. Clearly something has gone very wrong in our educational system.

Our current world leadership in science and technology, like our leadership in Nobel Prizes, owes much to people who never went through the dumbed-down education in American schools and colleges. Many come from countries which spend far less per pupil than we do but get far better results for their money.

THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

Recently I got together with a guy who grew up in my old neighborhood in Harlem, around 145th St. and St. Nicholas Avenue. As we talked about the old days, the world that we discussed seemed like something from another planet, compared to today.

There have been many good changes but, on net balance, it is doubtful whether kids growing up in our old neighborhood today have as much chance of rising out of poverty as we did.

That is not because poverty is worse today. It is not. My friend remembers times when his father would see that the children were fed but would go to bed without eating dinner himself. There were other times when his father would walk to work in downtown Manhattan—several miles away—rather than spend the nickel it took to ride the subway in those days.

Things were not quite that grim for me, but my family was by no means middle class. None of the adults had gotten as far as the seventh grade. Down South, before we moved to New York, most of the places where we lived did not come with frills like electricity or hot running water.

Some people have said that my rising from such a background was unique. But it was not. Many people from that

same neighborhood went on to have professional careers and I am by no means either the best known or the most financially successful of them.

Harry Belafonte came out of the same building where my old school-mate lived. One of the guys from the neighborhood was listed in one of the business magazines as having a net worth of more than \$200 million today.

If anyone had told me then that one of the guys on our block was going to grow up to be a multi-millionaire, I would have wondered what he was drinking.

Not everybody made it. One of my old buddies was found shot dead some years ago, in what looked like a drug deal gone bad. But many people from that neighborhood went on to become doctors, lawyers, and academics—at least one of whom became a dean and another a college president.

My old school-mate retired as a psychiatrist and was living overseas, with servants, until recently deciding to return home. But home now is not Harlem. He lives out in the California wine country.

Why are the kids in that neighborhood today not as likely to have such careers—especially after all the civil rights “victories” and all the billions of dollars worth of programs to get people out of poverty?

What government programs gave was transient and superficial. What they destroyed was more fundamental.

My old school-mate recalls a teacher seeing him eating his brown bag lunch in our school lunchroom. A forerunner of a later generation of busybodies, she rushed him over to the line where people were buying their lunches and gave some sign to the cashier so that he would not have to pay.

Bewildered at the swift chain of events, he sat down to eat and then realized what had happened. He had been given charity! He gagged on the food and then went to the toilet to

spit it out. He went hungry that day because his brown bag lunch had been thrown out. He had his pride—and that pride would do more for him in the long run than any lunches.

His father also had his pride. He tore to shreds a questionnaire that the school had sent home to find out about their students' living conditions. Today, even middle-class parents with Ph.D.s tamely go along with this kind of meddling. Moreover, people like his father have been made superfluous by the welfare state—and made to look like chumps if they pass it up.

What the school we went to gave us was more precious than gold. It was an education. That was what schools did in those days.

We didn't get mystical talk about the rain forests and nobody gave us condoms or chirped about "diversity." And nobody would tolerate our speaking anything in school but the king's English.

After finishing junior high school, my friend was able to pass the test to get into the Bronx High School of Science, where the average IQ was 135, and yours truly passed the same test to get into Stuyvesant High School, another selective public school that today's community "leaders" denounce as "elitist."

The rest is history. But it is a history that today's young blacks are unlikely to hear—and are less likely to repeat.

WASTING MINDS

Menlo-Atherton High School in an affluent California community is considered to be very good academically, at least by current standards, in an era of dumbed-down education. Yet its problems are all too typical of what is wrong with American education today.

A gushing account of the free breakfast program and other giveaways to lower-income students who attend this high school recently appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, while the *Wall Street Journal* presented a sympathetic account of the school's attempt to teach science to students of very disparate abilities in the same classroom.

Even more revealing, the villains in this story—as seen by both the educators and by the reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*—are those parents who want their children to get the best education they can, instead of being used as guinea pigs for social and educational experiments.

Creating a science class that included students of very different levels of ability and motivation was one of these experiments. These disparities were especially great in this particular school, since its students come from both highly-educated, high-income families in Silicon Valley and low-income Hispanic and other minority families from the wrong side of the local freeway. Moreover, they were fed into the high

school from their respective neighborhood schools with very different standards.

The science class turned out to be a disaster. While the principal admired the good intentions behind it, he also admitted “it was almost impossible to pull off in real life. The disparity was too great.” Yet the science teacher blamed the ending of this experiment on affluent parents who “really didn’t give it a chance” and the principal spoke of the “heat” he got from such parents, who “thought their kids were being held back by the other kids, that their children’s chances for MIT or Stanford were being hampered.”

This was seen as a public relations problem, rather than as a perfectly legitimate complaint from parents who took their responsibilities for their children’s education seriously—more seriously than the “educators” who tried to be social workers or world savers.

In a school where 40 percent of the children are Hispanic and 38 percent are white, sharp income and cultural divisions translate into racial or ethnic divisions plainly visible to the naked eye. This also arouses the ideological juices and emotional expressions of resentment, both inside and outside the school.

Stanford University’s school of education is reluctant to send its graduates to teach at Menlo-Atherton High School because the latter doesn’t make enough effort to overcome “inequalities” and uses politically incorrect “tracking” by ability “to keep affluent kids protected from the other kids.”

In other words, a school that takes in fifteen-year-olds from radically different backgrounds is supposed to come up with some miracle that can make them all equal in ability, despite fifteen years of prior inequality in education and upbringing. Somehow, there are always magic solutions out there, just waiting to be found, like eggs at an Easter egg hunt.

Make-believe equality at the high school level fools nobody, least of all the kids. White kids at Menlo-Atherton refer to the non-honors courses as “ghetto courses,” while a black kid who enrolled in honors courses had his friends demand to know why he was taking “that white-boy course.”

If you are serious about education, then you need to start a lot earlier than fifteen years old to give each child a decent shot at life in the real world, as distinguished from make-believe equality while in school. Ability grouping or “tracking”—so hated by the ideological egalitarians—is one of the best ways of doing that.

If you were a black kid in a Harlem school back in the 1940s, and you had both the desire and the ability to get a first-rate education, it was there for you in the top-ability class. The kids who were not interested in education, or who preferred to spend their time fighting or clowning around, were in other classes and did not hold back the ones who were ready to learn.

Our egalitarian dogmas prevent that today, destroying low-income and minority youngsters’ opportunities for real equality. A mind is indeed a terrible thing to waste, especially when it is the only avenue to a better life.

THE “NON-PROFIT” HALO

You may never have heard of the University of Phoenix, but it has more students than Harvard, Yale and Notre Dame—combined.

There is a reason you probably have not heard of the University of Phoenix. It represents a new development in higher education and one that the establishment does not welcome.

The vast majority of colleges and universities are non-profit organizations, but the University of Phoenix is not. To some people, non-profit organizations have a sort of halo around them. It is another example of the power of mere words that the fact that one organization’s income is called “profit” and another’s income is not makes such a huge difference to so many people, including the government, which treats non-profit organizations differently.

Officials of non-profit organizations are not volunteers donating their time. The average university president has a six-figure salary and many also get free use of a big, expensive house. There are three university presidents whose annual salaries and benefits exceed half a million dollars a year each. In addition, it is not uncommon for top professors in medical schools to earn even more than their university presidents, while college athletic coaches often have the highest incomes of all.

Nevertheless, it is considered shocking in genteel academia that the University of Phoenix is legally set up as an organization that is out to make a buck, even though most of us get our food, our shelter and our medical care from such organizations. Indeed, those of us who were not born rich and who don't want to live on welfare are out there every working day trying to make a buck.

Ironically, the real reason for the opposition to the University of Phoenix is precisely because it would threaten the money coming in to conventional, non-profit colleges and universities. As a new institution, Phoenix does not have to do all the costly things that conventional academic institutions have been doing for many generations, so it can charge lower tuition.

For example, it does not have the expenses of a huge campus, a football stadium and dormitories. Its students are largely adults scattered all around the country, who communicate with the university on the Internet. The University of Phoenix also does not have to have the huge and costly libraries that most universities have because it provides electronic access to more than 3,000 journals, while the need for books is not nearly as great, because this university specializes primarily in business courses, and so does not need to cover everything from astronomy to zoology.

What an economist might call greater efficiency is depicted by conventional colleges and universities as "unfair competition." Unfortunately, the various licensing and accrediting agencies have requirements which reflect the situation of liberal arts colleges and universities catering to a younger clientele, studying a wider variety of subjects.

Worse yet, political pressures from the existing educational establishment add to the hurdles facing any fundamentally new academic institutions that do not take on the costly

ways of operating that the old ones use, including tenure for professors and adolescent activities and lifestyles for the students.

I have no idea what the quality of education is at the University of Phoenix—and it is none of my business. It is the business of the university's 53,000 students and whatever new students it may get wherever it is allowed to compete with conventional non-profit colleges and universities. It is the business of employers who are thinking of hiring University of Phoenix graduates and it is the business of postgraduate institutions who need to judge their qualifications for admissions.

Much of the enormous costliness and irresponsible self-indulgence of the academic world comes from the fact that it has neither accountability nor competition. It has little or no incentive to do things efficiently and every incentive to appease every campus constituency by giving them their own turf, at the expense of the taxpayers, donors and tuition-paying parents.

Accountability is so remote in academia that conventional colleges and universities need all the competition they can get. The academic establishment's fear and resentment of the University of Phoenix is a sign of how much some real competition is needed. But such competition may be stifled by arcane laws that serve to protect the academic dinosaurs.

DO FACTS MATTER?

Recently a young black man sent a thoughtful e-mail to me. Among his kind comments was an expression of sympathy for the racism that he thought blacks of my generation must have experienced in going through college.

In reality, it is his generation of blacks who have encountered more racial hostility on campus than mine. But his was an understandable mistake, given how little attention is paid to accuracy in history and how often history is used as just a propaganda tool in current controversies.

My college and early postgraduate education took place during the 1950s—that decade before the political left brought its light into the supposed darkness of the world. During the decade of the 1950s I attended four academic institutions—a year and a half at a black institution, Howard University, three years at Harvard, where I graduated, nine months at Columbia, where I received a master’s degree, and a summer at New York University.

I cannot recall a single racist word or deed at any of these institutions. The closest thing to a racist remark was made about a student from England who was referred to as “nasty, British and short.” It was I who made that remark.

My first encounter with racism on campus came toward the end of my four years of teaching at Cornell in the 1960s—

and it erupted after black students were admitted under lower standards than white students and were permitted to engage in disruptions that would have gotten anyone else suspended or expelled. I was not the target of any of these racist incidents, which were directed against black students. I received a standing ovation in the last class I taught at Cornell.

One of the black students at Cornell moved in with my wife and me for a while, because she was afraid of both the black militants and those whites who were increasingly bitter about both the trouble that the militants were causing and the way the administration was catering to them. This backlash was not peculiar to Cornell, but developed on many campuses and became so widely known over the years that it acquired a name—"the new racism."

In the late 1980s, for example, a dean at Middlebury College reported that—for the first time in her 19 years at that institution—she was getting requests from white students not to be housed with black room mates. People who had taught at Berkeley for similar periods of time likewise reported that they were seeing racist graffiti and hate mail for the first time. More than two-thirds of graduating seniors at Stanford said that racial tensions had increased during their years on campus.

All this is the direct opposite of what you might be led to believe by the politically correct history or theory of race in America. The endlessly repeated mantra of "diversity" implies that such things as group quotas and group identity programs improve race relations. Quotas are often thought to be necessary, in order to create a "critical mass" of black students on campus, so that they can feel sufficiently comfortable socially to do their best academic work.

That there are various opinions on such things is not surprising. What ought to be surprising—indeed, shocking—is

that these social dogmas have been repeated for decades, with no serious effort to test whether or not they are true.

When elite liberal institutions like Stanford, Berkeley and the Ivy League colleges have been scenes of racial apartheid and racial tensions on campus, have more conservative institutions that have resisted quotas and preferences been better or worse in these respects? My impression has been that they have been better. But the real problem is that we must rely on impressions because all the vast research money and time that have gone into racial issues have still not even addressed this key question that goes to the heart of the dogmas pervading academia today.

Over a period of more than three decades, during the first half of the 20th century, 34 black students from Dunbar High School in Washington were admitted to Amherst College. Of these, about three-fourths graduated and more than one-fourth of these graduates were Phi Beta Kappa. But there were never more than a handful of black students at Amherst during that era—nothing like a “critical mass.”

Is this evidence conclusive? No. But it is evidence—and the political left avoids evidence like the plague.

DO FACTS MATTER? PART II

The history of the education of blacks in America has become politicized to the point where it is barely recognizable as history, rather than as an arsenal of horror stories to be used in the political wars of today. Many of these horror stories are true, even if increasingly dated, but there is an almost complete disregard of other important aspects of the history of black education that are also true.

Yes, Governor Wallace stood in front of the entrance to a building on the campus of the University of Alabama, in order to try to prevent black students from being enrolled. Yes, white mobs jeered and attacked the first black college students to enroll in previously segregated Southern colleges and universities. Worse, such mobs tried to impede the enrolment of black youngsters in public schools in various Northern cities, as well as in the South.

But the real story is that all these efforts failed. And they failed because the American government, with the support of the American people, would not stand for letting them succeed. More important, these episodes were just episodes in a much larger epic.

During the era of slavery, it was illegal to teach slaves to read and write, throughout the Western Hemisphere. In parts of the antebellum South, it was also illegal for free blacks to be

educated and there was no provision for them to be educated in much of the North. Yet the census of 1850 showed that more than half of the 500,000 free blacks were able to read and write.

How did that happen? It happened because they set up their own schools, even in places where such schools were illegal and had to operate underground. What an insult to their memory when blacks in ghetto schools today who want to get an education are accused by their peers of “acting white”! Black people risked jail to set up schools for their children before the Civil War.

One of the most inspiring and heroic episodes in the history of black education in America came after the Civil War, when numerous white school teachers from the North went South to teach the children of the freed slaves, often under the auspices of religious organizations—and in defiance of ostracism by Southern whites. Voluntary and privately financed efforts to educate blacks were so widespread that it was 1916 before there were as many blacks in public high schools as in private high schools.

Blacks themselves went to extraordinary lengths to create an educated class. The building of Tuskegee Institute, literally with the students’ own hands, is a story seldom told, because it was done under the leadership of Booker T. Washington, who is not politically correct today. He is excoriated by those who have never bothered to study the facts about the man or his times.

As far back as 1899, the one black academic high school in Washington scored higher on standardized tests than two of the three white high schools in the nation’s capital. In the decades that followed, its graduates went on to college at a higher rate than that of white Americans. From this school came the first black federal judge, the first black general to lead

men in combat, the first black Cabinet member, the first black elected to the Senate and many other firsts. All this from one school.

Yet this story too is seldom mentioned today, because it too was done in ways that are not considered politically correct. Far from looking inward at the ghetto or being Afro-centric or teaching—or even tolerating—“black English,” it opened the students’ minds to a wider world of culture, including requiring the learning of Latin and the study of the classics.

Facts about other successful black schools, past and present, get very little attention from the intelligentsia because the stories of these schools would not forward the agendas of the left. In short, history is treated as just the continuation of politics by other means.

But for anyone who is serious about wanting to see black youngsters get a better education, the story of what works and what doesn’t work is more important than what is fashionable and not fashionable in the education establishment, or what is or is not considered politically correct among the intelligentsia, politicians, the education establishment or the media.

The real question is: How many people are serious about improving the education of black youngsters, as distinguished from advancing the many other agendas that stand in the way of that improvement?