The Ideology of the American Dream: Two Competing Philosophies in Education, 1776–2006

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This article puts forth 2 competing notions of the American Dream, 1 radical and 1 conservative (both put forth by Thomas Jefferson), as the basis for 2 competing public philosophies of American democracy and education. This article traces out the ecology of inequality that has determined the context of these 2 competing public philosophies, especially in relation to the evolution of U.S. education. The ideology of the American Dream is still a potent philosophical means for constructing reformist discourses for American politics and education. The rhetoric of the American Dream focuses on the unrealized promises found within the Declaration of Independence and it articulates the need of equality and freedom for all members of our society. This article traces the framework of these conflicting American Dreams from their inception and into our contemporary context.

This article introduces a revisionist interpretation of the American Revolution and the formation of the United States of America. It argues for an historical emphasis on conflict in the emerging democracy where segmented classes vied for representational access to the formation of the founding documents and to the emerging federal structure of the new nation. This article puts forth two competing notions of the American dream, one radical and one conservative (both put forth by Thomas Jefferson), as the basis for two competing public philosophies of American democracy and education. This article traces out the main structures of the social-political-cultural-economical history informing the context of these two competing public philosophies, especially in relation to the evolution of education in America, whereby this article highlights the Common School reform movement and the Progressive/technocratic reform movement as two moments where versions of the ideology of the American dream were invoked to legitimate school reforms. The ideology of the American dream (in its two most influential manifestations) is still a potent philosophical means for constructing reformist discourses for American politics and education (Bronfenbrenner McClelland, Wethington, Moen, & Ceci, 1996; *The Economist*, 2005; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003; Jillson, 2004; Patterson, 2001), and invariably surrounds the unrealized promises found within the Declaration of Independence for all elements of a diverse society. This article traces the framework of this still conflicting discussion so as to carry

the unfinished business of the American Dream into the 21st century and open its unfilled promise to future generations.

Conflicting Notions of America

What has been called the American Revolution was more a bourgeois revolt. A landed aristocracy, which was enfranchised predominately due to slave labor and indentured servitude, formed a coalition with a sizable middle class. This American aristocracy skillfully spun an obfuscated rhetoric of unification against a common enemy, England, using language that incorporated fragments of a radical political discourse (Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson), but that rested upon and stressed a more conservative preoccupation with authority, property, and asymmetric power structures (Hamilton, Madison, Jay, Adams, Washington, and also, paradoxically, Jefferson). Propagandizing "We the people" as a "united" band of "Americans," the founding generation of statesmen was able to manufacture the semblance of a common cause (Hamilton, Madison, & Jay, 1788/1961, p. 94). However, as Ellis (2000) noted, "different factions" bought into this "common cause" to get rid of the British, but then "discovered in the aftermath of their triumph that they had fundamentally different and politically incompatible notions" on which to found a new country (p. 10, 15). These "politically incompatible notions" cemented a "contradiction" (p. 16) in the very fabric of the emerging nation and when this foundational contradiction surfaced in political debates, the "dominant legacy," as Ellis explained, "was avoidance and silence" (p. 241)—a silence that has lasted almost 200 years.

In "The Indians' Revolution," Francis Jennings (cited in Zinn, 1999) described the social landscape surrounding the Revolutionary War as a "multiplicity of variously oppressed and exploited peoples who preyed upon each other" (p. 88). After the war, a great debate ensued over adopting the Constitution and setting the framework for a Federal government. Despite all the rhetoric of freedom and equality, Zinn (1999) described the Constitution as a document working to "maintain" the privileges of certain groups while "giving just enough rights and liberties to enough of the people to ensure popular support" (p. 91, 97). Thus, this hallowed political document could afford to leave out four major second-class segments of American society: slaves, indentured servants, women, and men without property (Beard, 1913/1986; Loewen, 1995; Zinn, 1999)—not to mention the precarious position of a fifth segment, Native Americans, who, as a persecuted minority, were largely ignored by the country's founding documents, thus, enabling centuries of exploitation by the political and legal system (Brown, 1970; Calloway, 1995; Loewen, 1995).

The American Constitution and the ensuing American Federal government were the work of a "relatively small number of leaders who knew each other, who collabo-

rated and collided with one another" (Ellis, 2000, p. 13). There was no such thing as the "American people" until this aristocratic band invented the term to manufacture a unified base to fight the Revolutionary war and then, later, to serenade enough voters to allow a strong federal government to bind the 13 states together into a "Union" (Ellis, 2000, pp. 10, 13). But within the burgeoning American aristocracy there was a "debate" between liberals/individualists and conservatives/nationalists, which, as Joseph J. Ellis wrote, "was not resolved so much as built into the fabric of our national identity: the United States is founded on a contradiction" (p. 16).

This becomes clear in reading *The Federalist*, especially #10 written by James Madison (Hamilton et al., 1788/1961). Madison proposed that the advantage of a strong federal government would be its ability to "break and control the violence of faction" because too often measures are decided not by the "rules of justice" and the "rights of the minor party" (read: white male aristocracy), but are instead decided by the "superior force" of the "interested" and "overbearing majority" (read: unpropertied white males). This situation had created a "distrust of public engagements" and an "alarm for private rights" (read: private property). Madison went on to label this "overbearing majority" a "faction," which he defined as "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community" (p. 130). Of course he was really saying, "the most common and durable sources of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property," thus the primary job of the government is to regulate and mediate the various interests of the propertied classes while simultaneously controlling the interests of the propertied and unpropertied (read: keeping the unequal balance of power).[1]

Outside of the emphatic class-based economic preoccupations of the founding fathers, there was also an ideological vision at work, infusing the peripheries of the practical with an airy quality that would imbue the contradictions of the American project with a paradoxical hope. Jefferson's (1776/1995) Declaration of Independence is perhaps the locus of that enduring myth, which has often been called the American Dream. This vision made many democratic ideals sacred: equality; inalienable rights; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (and property); government ruled by consent of governed; laws for public good; principles of freedom. Ellis (1997) went so far as to argue that the American dream was, in essence, "the Jeffersonian dream writ large" (p. 59). But as Ellis' analysis made clear, this is not unqualified praise. Jefferson was a "disappointed idealist" (Ellis, 1997, p. 287) and his soaring political vision was always "magisterial in conception, admirable in intention, unworkable in practice" (p. 280). Jefferson's vision of a radical American Dream and his proposition that education in a republic should work towards preventing tyranny were admirable principles, but they were only selectively applied—if at all—to free white males (Cremin, 1980, p. 113–14; Foner, 1998).

The reality of the emerging American republic never fit well with Jefferson's agrarian or democratic ideals, but even his vision was fatally flawed. His notions of agrarian democracy were based on the plantocracy's exploitation of slave labor and indentured servitude, but his educational vision was only for propertied, white males. He even used his slaves to build what he hoped would become an Enlightenment citadel of timeless truth (for whites only until the early 1970s), the University of Virginia. Greene (1988) has shown how, in practice, Jefferson's lofty vision, compounded by the contradictions within the nation (and within Jefferson's own mind), advanced a counter-ideal, which competed with the more radical ideal found in the Declaration of Independence. This counter-ideal can be labeled the conservative American Dream and it was shaped by the contradictions of the American experiment. This ambivalent and conservative vision reinforced a "selective" and "hierarchical meritocratic system," whereby (to use Jefferson's own language) only the "best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish" (Jefferson, 1776/1995, pp. 28–29). This other American Dream was based on aristocratic principles such as authority, order, inequitable property distribution, submissive masses, and a ruling elite. The myth perpetuated by the conservative American Dream was a land of opportunity ripe for the talented few who could seize and exploit that opportunity, however, the masses of impoverished "rubbish" lived in the shadow of Providence.

Many exemplary lives were held up during the early republic to reinforce this aristocratically infused myth of meritocracy. The life of Benjamin Franklin, who in many ways was a radical figure, came to serve as one of the most powerful examples of the conservative American Dream—in large part due to the tireless self-promotion of Franklin himself. Benjamin Franklin's life was a great success story of rags to riches, whereby his achievements were praised as the result of a strict adherence to the Puritan work ethic (Franklin, 1771/1998, pp. 84–80; Tawny, 1922/1962; Weber, 1905/2002): temperance, self-reliance, and self-education. In his *Autobiography* (1771/1998), Franklin proudly declared his belief in divine "Providence," which rewarded "Industrious" men with "Wealth and Distinction" (pp. 81, 82). Franklin's exemplary life of "Progress" was due to his individual "Virtue" (p. 88) and his tireless drive for self-education. Franklin's *Autobiography* preached the virtuous duty of every individual to work hard and to help himself succeed, which would thereby lead (via Adam Smith's "invisible hand") to the general prosperity of society and the good of all.

Meritocracy, the conservative notion of the American Dream, praised self-reliance, hard work, frugality, dutiful industry, success, and prosperity. In the 19th Century, this ideal would displace Jefferson's more radical American Dream and it would become the binding ideology of the nation, and the prime directive of its emerging system of schools. On the surface, meritocracy held a distinct democratic advance over traditional European systems of aristocratic blood and inher-

ited wealth, but in practice and in relation to the larger socioeconomic systems of American power, the conservative American Dream held false as an empowering ideology. For it ended up not so much raising the few best geniuses, but of blaming and condemning those who were stuck in the rubbish and, further, it solidified an inequitable class system predicated on atomized individualism and exploitative capitalistic relations of power.

A "Common" Culture? A "Common" School?

American education during the 16th and 17th Centuries was rooted in a highly decentralized, local, and private approach to schooling, often based in the home, and infused with a Eurocentric, fundamentalist Protestant ideology, which meant almost exclusive use of the Bible as the central curriculum. By the 18th and early 19th Centuries, small one-room schoolhouses were numerous and education became more of a community-oriented affair, although it was still predominately religious in outlook. The primary purpose of schooling was to indoctrinate the young into a "Protestant-republican ideology" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 18) to inculcate religious faith and morality, while encouraging participation in local communities, state assemblies, and the growing Federal government.

During the early 19th Century, to take one example, the citizens of Sugar Creek, Illinois built a small one room structure called the "meeting and school house," which was the "center of neighborhood activity" (Faragher, 1986, pp. 123, 128), but principally the sight of a local subscription school. Each child's family would contribute a small amount to pay the schoolmaster who taught classes seasonally so children could fulfill their primary responsibilities on the family farm. Education in these early community schools was often crude and far from democratic. Faragher described the common 19th Century teaching method as "memorization and recitation; students learned their lessons by rote" (p. 124). Faragher also documented how teachers "frequently employed the rod," which, one winter in 1838, incited a small controversy in Sugar Creek when a teacher severely beat one of his students, causing one local to angrily write about how the schoolmaster could "torture as well as teach" (p. 122).

Nineteenth-century America was largely composed of small democratic townships like Sugar Creek, averaging a couple thousand people, and American democracy during this time, as described by the French liberal-aristocratic philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, was highly localized and decentralized (1835/2002, pp. 61–79). In *Democracy and America*, de Tocqueville described two ideological forces at work within the early American republic, which he thought were "diverse but not contrary:" a "sprit of religion" and a "spirit of freedom" (p. 43). He went on to describe these forces in detail:

> In the moral world, everything is classified, coordinated, foreseen, decided in advance. In the political world, everything is agitated, contested, uncertain; in the one, there is passive though voluntary obedience; in the other, there are independence, contempt for experience, and jealousy of every authority. (de Tocqueville, 1835/2002, p. 43)

Being aware of these two ideological forces, the founding fathers succeeded in constructing a Federal government and a semblance of national unity that, for a time, seemed to separate the spirit of freedom and spirit of religion via a conscious motivation to keep the realm of religion (culture) apart from the divisive realm of politics so as to avoid the pitfalls of continental Europe ravaged by centuries of violent cultural wars (Fraser, 1999). In the cultural and religious realm, a Protestant oriented worldview envisioned the predestined will of God directing the emerging American nation toward a millennial future; the highly factionalized and practical political realm was a growing furnace of conflict and dispute, testing the endurance of the Federal system and the strength of the fragile idea of national unity. Factional disputes threatened the stability of the centralized government due to the frenzies of localized politics, the influx of European immigrants, the friction between Northern and Southern states, and the expanding Western frontier of Jefferson's Louisiana purchase. The growing social diversity, the secularization of government, the harshness of the frontier, the continuing Indian wars, and the often violent confrontations between political factions (especially between abolitionists and slave holders) really troubled the comfortably located Pietistic and evangelical middle-class citizens of New England (Fraser, 1999; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

A large religious revival emerged in the early 19th Century to combat what was seen as the disintegration of the American republic due to the sectarian conflict, self-interest, and the seeming godless chaos of the political realm. One of the major by-products of the revival was the Common School movement. Horace Mann formed the Common School movement out of the belief that schools and churches should be "institutions designed to produce a homogeneous moral and civic order and a providential prosperity" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 19).[2] Reformers like Mann preached the virtues of a nationalistic Americanism, patriotism, godliness, prosperity, aversion to conflict, and capitalism (pp. 21–28). The Common School was touted as an institution serving the public interest, but it was, above all else, a pan-Protestant religious revival and missionary enterprise that clearly benefited urban and rural elites, indoctrinated new immigrant populations into the stratified capitalistic order,[3] and employed the growing and ever pietistic middle class in a self-serving moral crusade. The conservative, evangelical, and nativist reformer Horace Mann preached a pacifying platform of political "neutrality" and "civic morality" (Tyack & Hansot, 1983, p. 61), whereby, the Common School as a "thousand-eyed police" (Reese, 2000, p. 23) was fashioned to administer order on

behalf of ruling political elites, the pietistic fears of middle-class evangelicals, and the growing industrial economy.

The American South was a special case of inequality and educational social control. Schooling was a jaundiced institution that enforced an inequitable and oppressive status quo under rhetorics of Southern exceptionalism, pan-Protestantism, and racialized Americanism. Unlike the North, the Southern states were organized by an extremely rigid caste system based on a feudal hierarchy of race, gender, and class (Anderson, 1988). Schooling was an option for only a small minority of wealthy, white elites. Tyack and Hansot (1982) commented on how Southern elites saw public schooling as a "threat to the social order" because a Common School movement had the potential to upset the ritualized oppression of both "poor and powerless" whites and the Southern "class of noncitizens," the black slaves (p. 85). The small degree of schooling that went on in the South was purely for the benefit of white elites, so as to breed a genteel cadre of aristocratic privilege to perpetuate the cruel and unjust Southern caste system and to manage the cultivation and distribution of vast plantation resources.

Over the course of the 19th century, the Common School movement spread across the county and preached the virtues of social mobility, individual responsibility, hard work, and morality so as to inaugurate a meritocratic system embodying the conservative American dream. Many saw American schools as a progressive turn from the aristocratic classes of Europe, but below the surface lurked deeply rooted structural inequality. The American economic system firmly concentrated the wealth of the nation in the hands of a small, elite minority. Over the course of the 19th Century, wealth became more concentrated and the gap between rich and poor increased dramatically (Bronfenbrenner McClelland, Wethington, Moen, & Ceci, 1996; Phillips, 2002; Reese, 2000, p. 24). Within this context, American schools were a battleground marked by diverse interests each seeking a path to security and prosperity for their children. Working classes and racial minorities increasingly fought over access to schools, but ironically, simple access to schools was not enough to succeed in America. In fact, as schools became more populated and diverse, the curriculum became more differentiated so as to steer working class students back down into the underside of the Industrial economy.

In light of the structural determinants of class, race, and gender, the Common Schools were not really designed as democratic instruments for the good of all. In fact, the emerging system of schools seemed very much at the service of Madison's elite cadre of wealthy men seeking to check the unruly factions of the working class, immigrants, and racial minorities. Given widespread structural inequality, the Common School rhetoric of progressive optimism obfuscated the deeper problems of American society. Take, for example, an excerpt from William T. Harris:

> Education protects one class against another by giving an opportunity to the children of all classes free competition in the struggle to become intelligent and

> virtuous. An aristocracy built on the accident of birth, wealth, or position can not resist the counter-influence of a system of free schools wherein all are given the same chances. (cited in Reese, 2000, p. 30)

Not all classes had equal access to education (most lower class and ethnic minorities had to struggle for inclusion). And when diverse socioeconomic and ethnic classes did mix within the public schools, there was little free competition where institutional racism, concentrated social capital, and stark economic inequality pervaded the political ecology of the school. It seems clear that over the course of the 19th Century not all children were "given the same chances" and that the American aristocracy "built on the accident of birth" did quite well in defending its interests and expanding its domain.

The structure of the 19th-century U.S. economy benefited wealthy industrial and plantation elites (Phillips, 2002) as well as an emerging middle class. The American economic system fed off of indentured servants, women, and, after the Antebellum period, an impoverished and racialized industrial working class—not to mention the displacement of Native Americans and Spanish Americans enabling the usurpation of Western lands. Working classes and immigrant populations were squeezed of their labor to produce huge pools of capital that expanded the borders, yet consolidated access to the vast national enterprise of manifest destiny and prosperity into relatively few hands. The conservative American dream preached the virtues of competition and individual struggle, but it ignored the structural framework that gave certain individuals, via their favorable race, class position, and inherited or exploited wealth, extreme advantages, and it placed insurmountable obstacles in the path of other individuals, via lower class positions, not to mention the abject oppression of African Americans slaves and Native American "savages." However, despite its hollow morality and hypocritical principles, at the turn of the 19th Century the conservative American dream of meritocracy remained a strong ideal in the minds of most educational leaders, and it marked the guiding philosophy of the Progressive era reformers who would set up a centrally administered and federally funded system of education that remains to this day.

Two Visions of Democracy

At the turn of the 20th Century, the birth of motion pictures heralded a widespread glimpse of human ingenuity and technological progress. If one were to analyze the work of two of the most influential movie stars of the silent picture, era one would see contrasting characterizations of the American dream along the radical and conservative lines that have been sketched in this article. Harold Lloyd constructed a comic persona that, in the words of the film historian and critic Gerald Mast (1979), was "pure literature:"

> Harold is the affable boy next door, anxious to get ahead, not very good at anything, but willing to compensate with energy for his lack of talent. He is the American Dream of what a mediocre man can accomplish with a lot of hard work…"he can do anything he tries"…the motto of all of Lloyd's films…earning a success defined by other people's standards…[Lloyd's films] take place in a literary world where banal values are taken for granted and clichés of human conduct go unquestioned. (p. 152)

In Lloyd's most famous feature film, *Safety Last* (1923), he braved insurmountable obstacles in the fast-paced capitalist world of New York City to win, through his tenacity, hard work, and quick thinking, a successful career, which will enable him to marry the woman he loves. This conception of the American dream is in stark contrast to the more dramatic films of Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin, whom Mast called "the greatest film artist in motion-picture history" (p. 62), built up a body of work surrounding a down and out tramp who, as hard as he tries, cannot succeed in the brutal streets of capitalist America. The tramp is "doomed to fail at obtaining earthly rewards" (p. 72), and thus he bumps across the ravages of the industrial landscape inadvertently examining the discrepancy between the "apparent" surfaces and the "real" substance of the American dream (p. 110). In film after film (most notably his 1936 classic, *Modern Times*), Chaplin exposed the hypocrisies of the meritocratic ideal by showing how the structural determinants of the capitalistic and industrial order keep many Americans stuck in the mean streets of an urban-industrial environment. Given the ecology of inequality, as characterized in *The Kid*, Chaplin poked malicious fun at the moral sermonizing and good works of middle-class reformers whose ideological and behavioral programs for the individual could not make a bit of difference—and who often served up humiliation to go along with the tragedy of circumstance.

One can also see these two contrasting visions of the American dream at work within the so-called Progressive reform movements at the turn of the century, especially in the field of education. On the one hand, there were conservative technocratic managerial reforms, which stressed a vision of the American schools that mirrored the new industrial management ethic, i.e. using a newly developed "science of education" to create and manage an "educational/pedagogical machine:" an atomized approach to curricula and students along with "distinct roles and rules" for each; "standardized curricula and procedures;" an administrative ideology of efficiency, rationality," "precision," "continuity," and "impartiality" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, pp. 98, 97, 95).

This new science of education called for a technocratic elite of paid educational professionals—the educational trust—who would push for a more centralized approach to schooling via state and federal governments. They sought to expand federal financial and bureaucratic commitment to the Department of Education (created in 1867) and also expand state departments of education so as to present a

unified curricula that balanced the older forms of moral edification and nationalistic indoctrination[4] with new forms of technical and vocational training (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). This educational trust saw itself managing the school system towards noble ends; however, they were far from the radical ideal found in the Declaration of Independence. These educational experts engineered, via a language of technical expertise and business efficiency, what they called the depoliticizing of education. In essence, this very political program sought to remove schooling from its heretofore localized context so as to place it within a more structured, hierarchical order based on what the Frankfurt School theorists would call a *technocratic* rationality (Marcuse, 1964). Tyack and Hansot (1982) summarized this ideology as "experts would run everything to everyone's benefit:"

> The goal of such structural changes in urban school governance was to turn controversial political issues—formerly decided by large numbers of elected representatives on ward and central committees—into matters for administrative discretion to be decided by experts claiming objectivity. This was, of course, not depoliticization at all; it was another form of politics, one in which authority rested not on representativeness or participation but on expertise. (pp. 107–108)

The professionalizing and depoliticizing of education represented a deeper collusion of Progressive administrators with the economic interests, whereby older forms of American democracy based on republican virtues were being not so subtly replaced by forms of aristocracy, oligarchy, crony-capitalism, and managerial expertise.[5] As a predominant force reforming schools, corporate efficiency experts helped refashion the guiding aims of education towards material opportunity via the American dream of meritocracy. This conservative ideal of cutthroat competition only served to reinforce established forms of authority, hierarchy, and gross inequality by focusing not upon the larger structures of an unequal and exploitative class-based society, but instead focused on the improvement of the individual by making him/her more marketable for the corporate workplace. In this environment, as Greene argued (1988), the "dream of wealth and upward mobility" had become "*the* American dream" (p. 41).

In response to these disturbing reforms, coupled with the corporate politics of oligarchy, there arose a group of radicals who sought to challenge the injustice of the American system by retheorizing and restructuring the educational system so as to encourage more open and critical forms of democratic participation and, thereby, help ferment larger sociopolitical, progressive change. Educators like Ella Flagg Young and Margaret Haley, social reformers like Jane Adams and Helen Keller, and, perhaps above all, philosopher, educational theorist, and social critic John Dewey helped worked toward this end.

Dewey had an idealized notion of democracy, which as an ideal was a possible end that could be realized only through the "hard stuff of the world of physical and

social experience" (Dewey, 1934/1962, pp. 23, 48–49). Dewey believed that democracy was to be actualized primarily as a means, lived and practiced through daily experience, which eventually, through the development of already present human capacities, through a new pattern of human relationships, and through cooperative action, would affect the ends of progressive social and political change (Fott, 1998). However, Dewey did not consider himself an educator and his move toward education was an extension of his grand philosophical and political project: "if philosophy is ever to be an experimental science, the construction of a school is its starting point" wherein one could "work out in the concrete, instead of merely in the head or on paper, a theory of the unity of knowledge" (Menand, 2001, p. 320). For Dewey, knowledge was an extension of action: one learns through doing; knowledge should always be pragmatically related to the particular needs of any given sociohistorical context. In essence, Dewey argued, all theoretical and cultural constructs, like knowledge, belief, and common sense, should be practical means of promoting personal agency, which in turn was the foundation for Dewey's conception of democracy as a free association of individually motivated agents (Menand, 2001).

However, as Dewey grew older and the technocratic elite further stratified the corporate governance of education, he began to loose faith that "schools can be the main agency" (Dewey, 1934/1962, Westbrook, 1999, p. 508) of progressive sociopolitical change. He increasing realized that his ideal vision did not readily fit within schools (or American society) as they actually existed nestled within the "prevailing structures of power" (Dewey, 1934/1962,Westbrook, 1991, p. 509). Within this ecology of inequality, schools would be "extremely difficult to transform into agencies of democratic reform" (Schutz, 2001, pp. 7–8). But part of the problem also lay in Dewey's failure to address sociopolitical divisions of power based on conflicting class-based and ethnic-based interests.He tended to simplify or pass over these central problematics in his expansive educational projects, which were always more focused on individual agency, cooperation, and collective action. He failed to theorize, as Greene (1988) and others have pointed out, how matters of human agency, education, and sociopolitical change are also matters of power as they involve contested notions of public space and conflicting notions of the public good (Greene, 1988).[6] Dewey and his followers offered an expansive vision of democratic education built within the tradition of the radical American Dream, but it seemed (as with Jefferson) never to really touch the ground to take root. Philosophers like Greene and Gutmann (1987), educators and theorists like the Critical Pedagogues (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003), and many others, have carried on Dewey's preoccupation with teaching a more equitable version of democracy based on the radical American dream found in the Declaration of Independence, however, these educators and philosophers have never seemed to be able to enact the widespread change they hoped for or promised would come. Why?

Conclusion

It took several major ruptures in the very fabric of American society in the later half of the 20th Century to awaken a large segment of the American people to realize the unfilled promise of the radical American dream found in the Declaration of Independence. Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, and the larger Great Society programs, were all progressive legislative initiatives built out of the ferment of grassroots protest and these legal enactments worked toward addressing fundamental inequalities based on race and class (and somewhat on gender), however, the legacy of these governmental programs in terms of addressing inequality and equal access to opportunity via education has been mixed (Katznelson, 1989; Patterson, 2001), and inequality in the U.S. during the later half of the 21st century is growing (Bronfenbrenner et al., 1996; *The Economist*, 2005; Ehrenreich, 2001; Frank, 2000; Gosselin, 2004; Harrington, 1962, 1969, 1981; Kozol, 1991; Phillips 2002). Princeton economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman has called 21st century America a "new Gilded Age" and has stated outright that "the reality of increasing inequality is not in doubt: inequality in the United States has arguably reached levels where it is counterproductive" (Krugman, 2002; see also Krugman, 2003; Phillips, 2002). In this context, a recent study of education in relation to the American Dream (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003) found that there is still "contention over the goals of the American dream:"

> Sustained and serious disagreements over education policy can never be completely resolved because they spring from a fundamental paradox at the heart of the American dream. Most Americans believe that everyone has the right to pursue success but that only some deserve to win, based on their talent, effort, or ambition. The American dream is egalitarian at the starting point in the "race of life," but not at the end. That is not the paradox; it is simply an ideological choice. The paradox stems from the fact that the success of one generation depends at least partly on the success of their parents or guardians. People who succeed get to keep the fruits of their labor and use them as they see fit; if they buy a home in a place where the schools are better, or use their superior resources to make the schools in their neighborhood better, their children will have a head start and other children will fall behind through no fault of their own. The paradox lies in the fact that schools are supposed to equalize opportunities across generations and to create democratic citizens out of each generation, but people naturally wish to give their own children an advantage in attaining wealth or power, and some can do it. When they do, everyone does not start equally, politically or economically. This circle cannot be squared. (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003, p. 2)

Hochschild and Scovronick's study concluded with the phrase "the ennobling vision the dream sometimes represents" and acknowledged that without larger social and political reforms, "the ideology of the American dream will be just a cover for systematic injustice" (p. 201). This is an argument leftist theorists, educators, and activists have been making for almost 2 centuries (for some recent articles on the subject see Brantlinger, 2001; Galen, 2000; Giroux, 2002; McLaren, Martin, Farahmandpur, & Jaramillo, 2004; Nicholson, 2003; Schutz 2001) and that even moderate neoliberal organs like *The Economist* are beginning to document (2005).[7] Phillips (2002) has recently chronicled the disheartening statistics of contemporary America: 60% of American households earn, on average and after taxes, less than $32,000 (and this does not take into account the homeless, unemployed, and illegal immigrants); the top 1% has seen a net income increase of 119% and accounts for over 40% of Household Wealth (pp. 129, 123). Jillson (2004) has also detailed many more current statistics and in the end of his study he stated bluntly: "The United States has the greatest concentration of wealth, the greatest income inequality, and the highest poverty rates in the advanced industrial world" (p. 275). In the face of these disheartening trends, Brantlinger (2001) has recently asked, "Will we continue to allow traditional elites in large institutions to control important discourse and decisions, or will we take our democratic traditions seriously?" (p. 8).

This question has been asked since the country's foundation. How long can the radical American Dream be deferred? The Christian minister Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) argued, "Progress never roles in on wheels of inevitability" (p. 86). At about the same time, the atheist moral-philosopher Camus (1956) argued that justice would come only through the perpetual struggle of committed human beings who daily practiced the ends they preached. Both King (1963) and Camus (1956, 1960) stated as a matter of fact that, in an unjust society, there is no neutral position—either one is living and working to eradicate injustice and structural inequality or one is living and working to support such a system.

As the American democratic project crosses the threshold into unambiguous Imperial ambition, the ideology of the radical American Dream remains deeply seated in the American consciousness, and yet unresolved. As a sign of the times, even the conservative American Dream of meritocracy is in deep trouble as inequality and class lines have become more entrenched (Meritocracy in America, 2005). Given the priorities of the American one-party political system of centrist opportunism, the ideals of equality; inalienable rights; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; government ruled by consent of governed; laws for public good and principles of freedom for all seem far, far away from public debate. The consequences of a dream deferred is upon society, and Counts' (1932) indictment of the U.S. educational system still has currency for the country as a whole: Dare Americans build a new social order? Dare more Americans take responsibility for their country, their communities, their schools, their families, and their own lives? As an

ideal, the radical American Dream is but a guiding beacon of possibility. It has yet to be realized because the concerted action of a large coalition of Americans has yet to build a foundation for that vision. A century of piecemeal liberal reform driven and prodded by large-scale grassroots initiative has given this country great hope and expanded the frontiers of democracy beyond the narrow interest of the founding fathers. But reaction has set in over the last 3 decades and the conservative American Dream is giving way to the interests of managerial capitalism, evangelical fundamentalism, neoliberal globalism, and naked Imperialism. What will you do?

> America is a dream.
> The poet says it was promises.
> The people say it *is* promises—that will come true…
> Great thoughts in their deepest hearts
> And sometimes only blunderingly express them,
> Haltingly and stumbling say them,
> And faultily put them into practice…
> Together we are building our land…
>
> —Langston Hughes, "Freedom's Plow"

Notes

1. The editor of this issue of *The Federalist* brings in a contrasting view to Madison's use of the word "faction." Burke used the term *party* in *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* (1770), but defined it in more neutral terms as "a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed" (p. 33). Under Burke's definition, the unpropertied majority need not be a negative, self-serving, and destructive group of individuals out for their own good at the expense of a nation. One must be reminded, however, that Burke was not one to support democratic causes and thus this contrast should be contextually qualified by his intended usage, although it does give modern readers a glimpse of how Madison could have conceptualized his term if he had not been bent on disparaging a truly democratic government.
2. One Common School proponent in Kansas wrote, "Americanism is Protestantism… Protestantism is Life, is Light, is Civilization, is the spirit of the age. Education with all its adjuncts, is Protestantism. If fact, Protestantism is education itself" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 76).
3. A Republican candidate for governor in 1891 declared, "The public school is needed to Americanize our youth. It is the great digestive apparatus by which the many nationalities in our state will become assimilated" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 81).
4. In 1909, Ellwood P. Cubberley of Stanford University, a member of the educational trust, proudly stated, "Each year the child is coming to belong more to the state, and less and less to the parent" (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 103).
5. The top 1% of the U.S. population earned 33.9% of all personal income; the bottom 20% earned only 8.3% (Tyack & Hansot 1982, 109)
6. Educational theorists like Schutz (2001) worry that even Greene's (1988) philosophy does not acknowledge "extensively enough" the "affects of power and oppression" on an individual's ability to participate in even the smallest of communities" (Schutz, 2001, p. 14).

7. The neoliberal English weekly *The Economist* has recently run several stories on the subject of the "American Dream" and the ever-hardening class system within the United States (Meritocracy in America, 2005; Middle of the Class, 2005; Missing Rungs in the Ladder, 2005).

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