“*Yours*, not mine:”

Contested Notions of Americanism & Americanization

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The nation known as “America” developed over several centuries as a country of immigrants coming (both freely and bound) from diverse parts of the globe and co-mingling (often violently) with the native inhabitants and each other. From its start notions of an “American” nation and an “American” people were contested ideological battlegrounds by which diverse participants verbally, symbolically, and physically fought over the defining contours of a nation. The idea of America and Americanism remains to this day an unsettled and contested ideological terrain – the contours of which remain divisive and ever changing.[1]

According to the founding document announcing the birth of the American nation, “The Declaration of Independence,” “all men” were “created equal” and had certain “inalienable rights” given to them by their “creator.” Among the most important of these rights were “life,” “liberty,” “the pursuit of happiness,” and the right to a responsive representative government that would protect the people’s rights, as well as their “safety and happiness.” But even before this hallowed political document would be approved by the Continental Congress and announced to the world, the wife of one Congressman, Abigail Adams, wrote to her husband on March 31, 1776 and scolded him and his fellow American congressmen for being hypocritical. How could these men proclaim “liberty,” inalienable political rights, and the “emancipation of nations”

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[1] Specifically I am referring the debates over the “culture war” of the last three decades, which reflect a heated disagreement over the very notions of American national and cultural identity. A very short list of this debate might include the following: Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Touchstone, 1987); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society (Revised and Enlarged Edition)* (1991; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998); James Davison Hunter, *Cultural Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why American is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995); Michael Line, *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution* (New York: Free Press, 1995); Lawrence W. Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture, and History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds., *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal* (Chapel Hill, NC: The North Carolina University Press, 2006).

while they were depriving women of their liberty and rights. She pointed out to her husband that American men did not truly know what liberty or equality meant because their idea of liberty and equality were only for a privileged, male few. Abigail warned that women would not take the "tyranny" of men for long and they would rebel, free themselves, "subdue" their masters, and then "without violence throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet."[2]

And yet the assertive Abigail Adams was only willing to extend her critique so far. Just a year earlier she had written to her husband about the fearful "conspiracy of the Negroes," by which she meant those slaves who had the audacity to petition for freedom in return for fighting along side the English against the insurrectionary colonists. Abigail apparently could not understand why black slaves wanted their freedom just as much as she did, nor could she understand that these blacks would do whatever they could to attain their liberty – including fighting against the hypocritical Americans (as Abigail herself threatened) whose "liberty" and "equality" where mainly for propertied, white men.[3] The black American David Walker would later address the American republic in 1829, "Do you understand your own language? Hear your language proclaimed to the world on July 4th 1776 – 'We hold these truths to be self-evident – that ALL men are created EQUAL!!'" In 1850 Frederick Douglass asked, "What, to the Slave, Is the Fourth of July" – "This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*."[4]

At the same time that diverse participants of the American nation were contesting the very meaning of America, there was also a solid tradition of self-assured Americans (ironically, many of them immigrants) trying to consolidate a single, unified vision of America. Not long after the revolution propagandists like J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur praised the "modern"

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[2] Abigail Adams, *Letters of Mrs. Adams, The Wife of John Adams. With An Introductory Memoir By Her Grandson, Charles Francis Adams*. Boston: C.C. Little and J. Brown, 1840.

American nation as everything backward Europe was not. Crevecoeur claimed the original English settlers were "enlightened" as they "discovered," "settled," "embellished," and laid the foundation for what would become America. He also claimed that this new modern nation was being developed by and for white, Northwest Europeans who were busy creating "a new race of men" – "the American, this new man." But to become American these Northwest Europeans ("English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans and Swedes") had to not only leave behind their old culture, language, and customs, but also "embrace" the new American government and culture, which just so happened to be a highly Anglicized culture infused with Protestant and capitalist values.[5] By 1811 John Quincy Adams could confidently write his father, "The whole continent of North America appears to be destined by Divine Providence to be peopled by one nation, speaking one language, professing one general system of religious and political principles." Of course the "one nation" that Adams foresaw was a white man's nation, a Protestant Christian nation, a capitalist nation, and these convictions would lead many white men to proclaim a new self-evident truth. The *Democratic Review* on July 1850 announced, "The fact that the dark races are utterly incapable of attaining to that intellectual superiority which marks the white race is too evident to be disputed." It was a simple extension of deductive logic to thereby conclude, as did James De Bow in *De Bow's Review* in 1854: "The Negro till the end of time will still be a Negro, and the Indian still an Indian. Cultivation and association with the superior race produce only injury to the inferior one. Their part in this mysterious world-drama

[3] Mia Bay, "See Your Declaration Americans!!! Abolitionism, Americanism, and the Revolutionary Tradition in Free Black Politics." In *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal*, ed. Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 25-52.
[4] Ibid.
[5] De Crevecoeur, J. Hector St. John, *Letters form an American Farmer* (1782; reprint, New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1904).

has been played, and, like the Individual, the race must cease to exist."[6] But of course this drive for cultural unity, racial purity, and national solidarity as a white man's nation was contested all the way. Elizabeth Cady Stanton addressed the New York State Legislature in 1860 and let them know that the "white Saxon man['s]" ridiculous "prejudice" against "color" and "sex" were not congruent with "The Declaration of Independence." She declared sarcastically that "negroes" and women were not "monsters" and thus they too deserved liberty and political rights. She wanted the nation to remove all the prejudicial legislation against women and blacks and then to "strike the words 'white male' from all your constitutions."[7]

The historian Gary Gerstle has examined the close interrelationship of race and nationalism (2001).[8] *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* focused on the presence of two "powerful and contradictory" nationalist "ideals" in America, especially during the 20th century. One ideal has been called the "American Creed" of "civic nationalism," which describes the political principles of freedom and equality found in the foundational document "The Declaration of Independence." This civic nationalism was developed in a long tradition of democratic political initiatives to expand suffrage, political rights, freedom, and general welfare to larger swaths of the American population (women, ethnic minorities, labor, and radicals).

The other nationalist ideal is a "racial nationalism," which was also consecrated in foundational documents, the constitution and the naturalization law of 1790, both of which

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[6] Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
[7] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Address to the Legislature of New-York, Adopted by the State Woman's Rights Convention, Held at Albany, Tuesday and Wednesday, February 14 and 15, 1854* (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons: 1854).
[8] Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). While he does make mention of particular gender issues, Gerstle does not make explicit reference to gender discrimination within his two conceptualizations of nationalism. However, his analysis does leave the door open conceptually for a "gendered nationalism" as another distinct conceptualization of American national identity.

limited American citizenship to "free white persons." The ideal of a "white republic" would not be legally overturned until 1954 (Brown vs. Board of Education) and more completely in 1964 with Civil Rights Act. Gerstle pays particular attention to liberals and the liberal state, which utilized civic nationalism and often expanded "equal rights for ethnic and racial minorities" while also reinforcing the "rhetoric and policies" of racial nationalism. The often progressive and/or liberal rhetoric of "new nationalism" and the "melting pot" were always "invariably racialized" and "always, and deliberately, excluded one or more races." As Gerstle points out, the civic nationalist tradition had its own heritage of "exclusiveness" by which it was extended fully to only certain groups often under certain conditions.

Gerstle discussed the centrality of the "Rooseveltian nation" and he traces Teddy Roosevelt's nationalism as it influenced both the New Deal and the Great Society policies. The Rooseveltian "civic nationalist creed" was based on a clear racial nationalism and together it contradictorily articulated three main platforms: 1) "political and social equality for all, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or nationality, and a regulated economy that would place economic opportunity and security within the reach of everyone;" 2) the maximizing of "opportunity" for racially superior Americans while also limiting opportunity for racially inferior Americans and immigrants; 3) dealing out "harsh discipline" by means of "marginalization" and "punishment" and/or "Americanization" to those like immigrants, radicals, or labor activists who seemed to "imperil the nation's welfare." The Rooseveltian nationalism pivoted around a conception of "controlled hybridity" by which both "racial hybridity and purity" and "racial inclusion and exclusion" combined into a more expansive Americanism, but one still marked by racial prejudice, intolerance, and WASP superiority. Roosevelt embraced many of the new European immigrants, both Catholic and Jewish, but he continued to exclude Afro-Americans

and Asians from the "crucible" of America. Teddy Roosevelt adopted Herbert Croly's conception of "New Nationalism" and used it as a Progressive platform to extend full citizenship to the new immigrants if they left behind their old cultural affiliations to became completely American and improve themselves in American society via the American way of life.[9]

However, the first two decades of the 20th century also saw a rise in the more intolerant racial nationalism, which was infused with the notion of Anglo-Saxon white supremacy. Up until this time it was assumed that immigrants in American would naturally assimilate and conform to the Anglo-Protestant culture, however, this faith was eroding. Fears of immigrant recalcitrance in America coupled with labor unrest spurred a self-conscious "Americanization" movement at the turn of the 20th century, which saw as its duty a "drive to hasten the assimilative process." Some have argued that this Americanization movement started as a liberal attempt to assimilate foreigners while keeping the irrational fears of nativists and white supremacists at bay, and only later during the lead up to World War I did it become coercive and intolerant, but most scholars who have written on the subject have seen the Americanization movement as coercive from the start, especially when efforts were focused on non-Europeans.[10]

The primary institution of assimilation in America had been the public school. One high school principle in New York remarked, "Education will solve every problem of our national life, even that of assimilating our foreign element." However, during the first three decades of the 20th century there was a push to "Americanize" immigrants faster and more comprehensively than simply using the public school system. Settlement houses sprang up in large cites to help immigrants adjust to American life; scores of private organizations, like the Sons of the

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[9] Ibid., 4-9, 43, 46-51, 71.

[10] For a favorable review of the Americanization movement see Noah Pickus, *True Faith and Allegiance: Immigrant and American Civic Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 118-123. For a celebratory portrait see: John J. Miller, *Unmaking of Americans: How Multiculturalism Has Undermined American's Assimilation Ethic*

American Revolution and the American Legion, took it upon themselves to initiate "programs of patriotic education" and "indoctrination;" industrialists and boards of commerce initiated worker training programs in English and citizenship; and government organizations, like the Committee on Public Information, the Bureau of Naturalization, and the Bureau of Education, initiated propagandistic and programmatic drives for Americanization. Frances A. Kellor was one woman who through various organizations, most influentially through the National Americanization Committee from 1915 – 1920, tried not only to organize and coordinate many of the various Americanization movements across the country, but she also tried to articulate and orchestrate a national Americanization program through the Bureau of Education.[11]

Bernard J. Weiss (1982)[12] described how many educators during the first two decades of the 20th century felt the primary concern of public schools should be the "Americanization" of foreign students. Ellwood P. Cubberley of Stanford University wrote in *Changing Conceptions of Education* (1909) that American schools must "assimilate and amalgamate these people as a part of our American race, and to implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo-Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government." Weiss noted that "conservative reformers of the Progressive Era" believed that "conformity to what they considered 'American' values was necessary if the nation was to operate as a single efficient, moral, and rational community." However, the Americanization theory of assimilation, albeit a dominant impulse, was not the only assimilative conception at the time. Weiss also noted the

(New York: Free Press, 1998). The overwhelming majority of studies on Americanization efforts paint these initiatives in an unfavorable light and a selective list would be too long for a footnote.

[11] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1955; reprint, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), Ch 9.

[12] Bernard J. Weiss, Introduction, In *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940*, edited by Bernard J. Weiss. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982. Papers originally prepared for 12th annually Duquesne History Forum, Oct. 18-20, 1978.

presence of “melting pot” theories and “cultural pluralism” as other alternative conceptions of immigrant assimilation, which were used to foster educational programs and curriculum.

Selma Berrol (1982)[13] has described the public schooling experience for immigrants in New York City. She claimed that public schooling had a unified purpose of teaching the immigrant children English (while also “erasing their first language”), instilling good “morals,” improving their “manners,” and making them good “little citizens.” The process of acculturation often revolved around programs of “cleanliness, subordination and order.” The “knowledge” that public schools imparted was the type that would “inculcate loyalty, patriotism, and an understanding of the democratic process.” Americanization then was a program to “educate and improve the morals of the lower classes” through a three tiered curriculum of American history, morals, and manners. Educators were “not especially interested in changing [immigrant’s] social and economic position.” Berrol made clear, however, that public schools were not always very successful in their Americanization educational efforts (for many reasons), but primarily because immigrant youths opted for employment over education. As Oscar Handlin (1982)[14] has described, public schools were part of a “wider cultural conflict” over whose values and culture should be transferred to the young. Handlin made clear that historians need to separate the “intentions” of educators and politicians from the actual “implementation” of education in specific schools because, he claimed, between “the intention” of school reformers and the “implementation” of school reforms, “the context intervened.”

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[13] Selma Berrol, “Public Schools and Immigrants: The New York City Experience,” In *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940*, edited by Bernard J. Weiss. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982. Papers originally prepared for 12th annually Duquesne History Forum, Oct. 18-20, 1978. 31-43.

[14] Oscar Handlin, “Education and the European Immigrant, 1820-1920.” In *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940*, edited by Bernard J. Weiss. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982. Papers originally prepared for 12th annually Duquesne History Forum, Oct. 18-20, 1978. 3-16.

In 1978 John F. McClymer[15] took up this challenge and addressed the question of effectiveness of the movement for Americanization, while also questioning its legacy. According to the Bureau of Naturalization 3,526 cities and towns in 1921 had Americanization programs or classes in their school systems. They also found that around 1/3 of all towns gave up on these Americanization efforts after about a year. McClymer argued that it was safe to assume that between 750-1000 communities organized Americanization programs or classes during the early 1920s and a minimum of 1,000,000 immigrants enrolled in "formal public school Americanization classes during the whole period." However, he also noted that while many immigrants did enroll for these classes, fewer actually attended on a regular basis, and far fewer actually completed the course (McClymer estimated that less than ½ actually finished Americanization programs). Herbert A. Miller conducted The Cleveland Foundation's Education Survey on Americanization programs, *The School and the Immigrant* (1916), and his research pointed towards an 80% drop out rate: "the official records indicate that the great majority of the men who enter these classes become discouraged and drop out after attending for a few nights." The Bureau of Education studied Passaic, New Jersey and also found low rates of attendance between 1915 and 1919. McClymer thus argued that the 1,000,000 immigrant enrollments actually translated into around 400,000 regularly attending students nationwide. These numbers led many to conclude, in the words of J. Mahoney, Massachusetts director of immigrant education, that "the Americanization of the immigrant ha[d] failed" up until 1920.

But Michael R. Olneck (1989)[16] argued that changing immigrants was perhaps not the primary emphasis of these programs. He analyzed the symbolic action of the Americanization

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[15] John F. McClymer, "The Americanization Movement and the Education of the Foreign-Born Adult, 1914-25," In *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940*, edited by Bernard J. Weiss. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982. Papers originally prepared for 12th annually Duquesne History Forum, Oct. 18-20, 1978.

movement and argued that the "lasting import of the movement lies less in its bias toward cultural homogeneity and more in its symbolic delegitimation of collective ethnic identity and in its affirmation of the autonomous individual." Olneck argued that by "instrumental criteria" (the overt purpose of changing attitudes and behavior) Americanization programs were "failures." Yet Olneck investigated a deeper significance of the movement to Americanize the immigrants. He argued that Americanization efforts had "symbolic," rhetorical, "ritualistic," and "ceremonial" outcomes whereby the "symbolic behavior" of participating in Americanization brought about "idealized normative standards" and "cultural and ideological hegemony through configuration of the symbolic order:" "Doing Americanization symbolically constructed or enacted a relationship of benevolent control and social superiority between native and newcomer" whereby native-born Americans were able to "fix *public* meanings" and even the *language* of public meanings as a way to secure their own version of American nationalism and, thereby, their privileged position in that social order.[17] Olneck argued that it was the "symbolic redefinition of American civic culture" (the "constructing" of "national identity") "not the transformation of immigrants" that was the truly important consequence of the movement.

But not all Americans or educators during the early 20th century agreed with "100 percent Americanism" or coercive Americanization programs. Raymond A. Mohl documented a "liberal assimilationist" Americanization program called the International Institute, which practiced a "policy of cultural pluralism."[18] The International Institute movement was started in 1910 by Edith Terry Bremer under the organizational guidance of the Immigration Department of the

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[16] Michael R. Olneck, "Americanization and the Education of Immigrants, 1900-1925: An Analysis of Symbolic Action." *American Journal of Education* 97 (Aug 1989): 398-423.

[17] This of course had the byproduct of "symbolic delegitimation of *collective* ethnic identity:" "American identity is construed as exclusive and unitary. Particularistic identifications and bounded ethnic communities are stigmatized as divisive, isolating, and backward, and are largely denied symbolic existence."

YWCA[19] in New York City. Bremer did not agree with the coercive tactics of Americanization programs, nor did she agree with heavy handed melting pot theories, which required the immigrant to give up all traditional values and cultural identity.[20] She criticized the "'Americanization' furor" in 1919 as a wrong-headed program based on "ignorance," "arrogant assumption[s]," "fear" and "hate." She described Americanization as a "nationalistic and political effort to make 'assimilation' a compulsory thing." Bremer did not think that foreigners or their cultures were "dangerous" to America because she believed that "all races and nationalities of mankind are essentially of equal worth." Bremer built out of this respect for difference a fundamental policy of pluralistic cultural understanding: "there is no richer material for cultural growth than that which can be saved for the foreigner out of his own inheritance." The International Institutes were to be a "centre for information, service, education, and assembly for the use of people of all nationalities; to develop international fellowship and understanding…to preserve and stimulate an interest in racial cultural values; to assist the older and newer citizenry in their orientation." Mohl described the most important task of the International Institutes as "fostering cultural identity and a positive self-image among immigrants, and encouraging interethnic cooperation and understanding." William S. Bernard, who succeeded Bremer as head of the American Federation of International Institutes, argued, "The Institutes thought cultural pluralism was good for the immigrants and also good for

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[18] Raymond A. Mohl, "The International Institutes and Immigrant Education, 1910-40," In *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940*, edited by Bernard J. Weiss. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982. Papers originally prepared for 12th annually Duquesne History Forum, Oct. 18-20, 1978. 117-41.

[19] Mohl discussed the "irony" of the International Institutes springing from the Protestant YWCA: "the YWCA's work with the foreign-born began as a part of the agency's growing consciousness of the women's movement, but at the International Institutes took on a life of their own the differences between the two agencies became more apparent. The irony here, of course, is that a pluralist immigrant social service agency sprouted from a Protestant, Americanizing organization."

[20] Alice Sickels, the director of the International Institute of St. Paul, Minnesota, described Americanization as an "obsolete idea" because it wanted to remove "all" of the immigrant's "old world ways and memories" so that the immigrant could be "filled up with something vaguely referred to as 'Americanism.'"

America." Mohl noted that "this sort of education was very different from what immigrant children and adults were getting in the public schools and in the official Americanization classes."

Nicholas V. Montalto has discussed and analyzed another liberal educational endeavor, the Intercultural Education Movement.[21] His essay looked at one early educator, Rachel Davis DuBois, and her attempt to develop "intercultural education," which Montalto described as "a more 'scientific' Americanization, a modified expression of the same impulse. The goal remained the same, only the methodology had changed." DuBois was a high school teacher in Woodbury, New Jersey before becoming a graduate student at Teachers College in 1929 where she was influenced by and worked with Harold Rugg, George Counts, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Leonard Covello. DuBois worked on educational projects with Jewish and Afro-American students in the early 1930s and through this work she would form the Service Bureau for Education in Human Relations in 1934 (later to be called the Bureau for Intercultural Education). She would also become executive secretary of the Progressive Education Association's Commission on Intercultural Education in 1936. Her work had already been controversial, "divisive," and "dangerous" to many because her curriculum focused on separate ethnic groups by which to celebrate individual ethnic group achievements as "separate units of study." Progressive Education Association consultant Margaret Harrison told the PEA that DuBois work resulted in an "unwarranted cultivation of group pride," which apparently offended the consensus nationalism of Progressive educators because it was seen by many as the "obverse of Anglo-Saxon racism." By the 1930s one could "talk openly about cultural differences in an

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[21] Nicholas V. Montalto, "The Intercultural Education Movement, 1924-41: The Growth of Tolerance as a Form of Intolerance," In *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940*, edited by Bernard J. Weiss. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982. Papers originally prepared for 12th annually Duquesne History Forum, Oct. 18-20, 1978. 142-60.

abstract way" and work to "transcend them," however, the "cultivation" of group differences was seen as dangerous. Montalto pointed out that Progressive "cultural pluralism" meant "tolerance for diversity, not an acceptance of it." DuBois' educational philosophy and programming went, as she once said, "beyond tolerance." DuBois' work with the PEA commission met with widespread criticism and she was asked to resign in March of 1938. She would try to publicly put her philosophy to the test again with a multicultural radio project called "American All – Immigrants All," however, an internal review condemned DuBois' separatist approach to intercultural education and she was eventually forced to resign from the project in 1941. Montalto claimed that "her departure symbolized the demise of the first movement for multicultural education in American history."

Other, more radical Americanizing educational programs were also at work. William J. Reese and Kenneth Teitelbaum wrote an article on the socialist commitment to education in America via the Socialist Sunday School movement (1983).[22] They noted that while socialist groups and parties did align in political coalitions with "liberal Progressives and other radicals" over public school reform issues, they also had strong educational initiatives of their own. These Sunday schools sought in most causes to supplement the public school education of working class children by teaching them democracy, "the socialist spirit," and "cooperative effort," so as to instill in them the socialist cause and hopefully produce "good rebels."

C. A. Bowers[23] has described two factions within the early 20th century Progressive educational movement. The more powerful and mainstream faction represented a romantically oriented "cult of the child" and they articulated a child-centered pedagogy. The other, a more

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[22] Kenneth Teitelbaum and William J. Reese, "American Socialist Pedagogy and Experimentation in the Progressive Era: Te Socialist Sunday School," *History of Education Quarterly* 23 (Winter 1983): 429-454.
[23] C. A. Bowers, *The Progressive Educator and the Depression: The Radical Years* (New York: Random House, 1969).

radical faction, came to be known as the "Social Reconstructionists." They wanted the schools to be part of a larger effort to address current social problems so as to use the schools to reform society. The Social Reconstructionists used the rhetoric of class struggle to advocate a platform of social planning and socialistic collectivity.

When George S. Counts gave his landmark speech, "Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?" in 1932, he was both criticizing the movement's political neutrality and urging Progressive educators, specifically members of the PEA, to forsake moderate liberal reformism in order to embrace more radical educational, social and political pieties. Counts of course meant the rejection of capitalism so that schools could embrace and propagate socialism. To further this mission, Counts wanted teachers to become political actors inside the nation's classrooms and, thereby, not be afraid to use "indoctrination' to "check and challenge" capitalist dogma. Counts believed that schools would indoctrinate students no matter what and, thus, the question became, in whose interests would the public school curriculum serve?

The Social Reconstructionists had a very definite idea. In a PEA pamphlet drafted by the Committee on Social and Economic Problems, *A Call to the Teachers of the Nation* (1934), they exhorted teachers to reject capitalism and renew American democracy: "[teachers] owe nothing to the present economic system, except to improve it; they owe nothing to any privileged caste, except to strip it of its privileges…a powerful organization, militantly devoted to the building of a better social order and to the fulfillment…of the democratic aspirations of the American people." Bowers called this "one of the most extreme and utopian statements to be made by any group during the depression" – even more so than the 1934 Manifesto of the Communist Party of the U.S.A.[24] But alienating themselves from other Progressives and ignored by other radicals,

[24] Ibid., ix-x, 4-5, 15, 20, 41. Bowers noted that the editors of *The Social Frontier* did not agree with Roosevelt's New Deal plan to implant a welfare state within a capitalistic society. The plan was to organize teachers and then

the Social Reconstructionists eventually abandoned their radical socialism. They took a conservative turn during World War II, which intensified afterwards: Calls for class war were exchanged for slogans urging the saving of democracy and the fighting of totalitarianism. Ironically, after their journal folded, the more moderate Social Reconstructionists took the field as the most powerful and influential Progressive educators and exerted an important authority over curricular debates in the late 1940s. The message had now become community centered schools, democratic deliberation, democratic cooperation, and fostering "democratic living." This "new doctrine" would have wide and lasting imprint on the American public schools, but would eventually be rhetorically coopted more conservative forces in the 1950s.[25]

So while most scholars associate Americanization programs at the turn of the 20th century with culturally insensitive attempts to force immigrants to assimilate into a racist Anglo-Protestant American culture, there were many educational endeavors that challenged this particular vision. Conceptions of Americanism have always been contested. Dominant and minority factions, and traditional and transgressive parties have symbolically battled over the legitimacy of competing visions of America, the American people, the American state, American aims, and American values. The competing Americanization programs and philosophies discussed in this paper highlight the diversity of positions that infused the Americanization movement at the dawn of the 20th century, and these competing visions complicate simplistic reductions of "Americanization" efforts or American identity. Nationality is a battleground were diverse factions physically and symbolically fight for legitimation, power, and control.

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participate with the labor movement in larger unionizing efforts, while also giving students in the classroom a "labor orientation" towards the issues of the day. They even warned their readership that there may be violence, in which case, teachers should feel justified that the "onus will fall on the shoulders of those few who cannot gracefully surrender their privileges in the face of a popular decision" (134,140).

[25] Ibid., 48-51, 144, 151, 181, 201-54.

American democracy, if a democratic vision and praxis is still at the heart of the American political and social project, must address what Alexander Hamilton and James Madison once called "factional" politics.[26] Articulations of national identity and the public good have often mystified and legitimated the particular interests of the economically, culturally, and politically *powerful*, but never have the political efforts of the powerful gone uncontested. An honest, open, and more complex understanding of American history must help inform current policy makers about the divisive messiness of factional politics, especially in national debates over the public good and notions of Americanism. The political project of America, the national identity of Americanism, and the cultural values of Americans are all part of a two century-old unfinished project that demands committed engagement, constant vigilance, and the broadest of social-democratic vision. The importance of such a project, in its past, present, and future manifestations, should never be surrendered to the impulses of supremacists, reactionaries, or conservatives.

[26] Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist*. Benjamin Fletcher Wright, ed. (1787-1788; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961; reprint, New York: Metrobooks, 2002).

<u>Afterward</u>

I would like to end with a few lines from a poet I consider to be America's greatest, Walt Whitman, a man who I think profoundly understood the battleground of nationality, and who sought within his poetry to legitimate democracy, diversity, and freedom. In "Song of the Open Road" (1891-92) Whitman wrote:

> We will sail pathless and wild seas…
> Allons! To that which is endless as it was beginningless…
> To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as
> Roads for traveling souls…
> Have the past struggles succeeded?
> What has succeeded? yourself? Your nation? Nature?
> Now understand me well – it is provided in the essence of
> things that from any fruition of success, no matter
> what, shall come forth something to make a greater
> struggle necessary.
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> My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion…
> Allons! the road is before us![27]

[27] Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road," *Leaves of Grass (1891-92)*, in *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: The Library of America, 1982): 297-307.