

Mind Games: Measuring Education and Intellectualism in Modern America

Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, (Alfred A. Knopf, 1963)
Diane Ravitch, *Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform*, (Simon and Schuster, 2000)

Poets, painters, philosophers, men of science and religion are all to be found, stunted, starved, thwarted, embittered, prevented from taking even the first step in self-development, in this amazing microcosm of our society, a society that stagnates for want of leadership, and at the same time, incurably suspicious of the very idea of leadership, saps away at all those vital elements that produce the leader.

Van Wyck Brooks, *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915)

History is more or less bunk, it is tradition.

Henry Ford

The Power of Knowledge

In his profound jeremiad on the state of modern life, “Bring the Pain,” the comedian Chris Rock explores the role of knowledge and its impact on his own past. In the midst of the discourse he goes into a rap on the acquisition of his G.E.D. (“Good Enough Diploma”). Rock, proud that at least he was able to say that he graduated from High School, comes walking down the streets of his ‘hood to the incredulous stares of the toughs standing on the corner. In fairly peppery language Rock explains that the toughs were not very impressed by his attainments. They seem to take more pride in their ability to beat the frail Rock to a pulp and poke fun of his knowledge.

This story, when I first heard it a few years ago, struck me as something that I could personally relate to. Having grown up as a precocious intellectual in a rigidly anti-intellectual environment ever since I was a child, the attainments of the mind have had great relevance for my own personal biography. The degradation of ideas and wisdom, something that is rather common in the world I grew up in, has greatly impacted on the ways in which education and intellectualism have been processed in the social context of the community.

This degradation has had a profound relevance for the issue of how pedagogy is to be constructed in the community: The passing on of tradition was seen as a forced system of education. Teachers and the “old ways,” the curriculum of the Sephardic heritage, became identified with backwardness and the lack of concern for the “new ways” of this country. Modern education was conceived in terms that were “relevant” and not “coercive.” Traditional education had been seen as irrelevant and quite coercive.

This leads to the question of what a school is and how it should function in our Sephardic community. Questions abound: What is the point of knowing things? What sort of things should be known? How much of our past is relevant to the present? How does one align the ideas and wisdom of the past, coming from a very different part of the world, an “East” that has been juxtaposed to a “West,” with what is currently happening in culture and civilization? What is the role of the scientific advancement as it relates to our sense of who we are as individuals that was maintained within the traditional culture?

Ultimately, the question is: What is self-knowledge and how should it be best realized in Sephardic education?

These questions were decisive in creating new educational paradigms and institutions in the community and led to the emergence of an anti-intellectualism where the **sacredness** of the wisdom that was brought to this country by our immigrant forbearers was altered along with the concept of what it meant to be a human being. The community’s ideals were refigured within the space of a single generation.

The precious remnants of the past were paved over by more pressing concerns with the practical issues that would bring us further away from the knowledge of who we once were. Pressure was exerted from two angles: First, we had to begin to take great care to acclimate to the stringent demands of learning the language and mores of a new country. But beyond that, there was a **cultural** translation that did not merely superimpose a new set of linguistic and social skills for our children, but brought a complete **transformation** of our inherited wisdom into the American idiom.

This is the most striking element of our newfound Sephardi anti-intellectualism: The lack of faith in the tools and mechanisms that were brought over in the move from the Levant. This means in real terms that we have allowed the education of our children to be overseen and executed by people not of our community, causing a new set of priorities in Jewish knowledge, not Sephardic in orientation, to drive the pedagogical.

But, even more importantly, the particular aspects of this Jewish education, run by Ashkenazi teachers and administrators, were fed into a new conception of general education. This new conception of education developed in the wake of the inner-American debate over the utility of intellectualism and knowledge, defined by the Liberal Arts curriculum, within the context of the creation of a unified and comprehensive Public School system in this country.

Thus, we must contextualize Sephardic intellectualism within the overall framework of the American system. Two books, closely interrelated, can illuminate many of these questions for us. In the early 1960s, at the very moment when education would take a substantial “hit” from new theories of the self, Richard Hofstadter, the distinguished American cultural historian (he won the Pulitzer Prize in History in 1964), wrote a huge book, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, which sought to examine these issues anew. Some four decades later, Diane Ravitch, a distinguished educator and historian of the

field of pedagogy, has written another long analysis of the intellectual foundations of American culture closely tied to many of the arguments Hofstadter made in his book.

The Roots of American Anti-Intellectualism

The first Americans saw themselves as distinct from the elitism and clericalism of the European continent. Having allied themselves to causes such as Religious Freedom, anti-Monarchical behavior, and the need to create a populist Democratic form of government, Americans began to see the intellectual modality as a form of elitism in itself and as a constriction. While the Founding Fathers were themselves men of the mind, bringing to the newly emerging Republic a surfeit of fresh and innovative ideas, lurking in the shadows of American life was the seething pot of religious populism.

Hofstadter traces the movement of anti-intellectualism to the Great Awakening of the 18th century, a movement that was born as a reaction to the deeply entrenched intellectualist pietism of the Puritans:

The most extreme revivalists were undermining the dignity of the profession by their personal conduct; they were invading and dividing the allegiances of the established ministers' congregations; they were trying to discredit the standing ministry by denouncing it as cold and unregenerate; many of them were preaching that not learning but the spirit was important to salvation; and finally (despite the disapproval of some awakeners like Gilbert Tennent), they were threatening to undermine the professional basis of the ministry by commissioning laymen – lay exhorters, as they were called – to carry on the work of conversion.

Anti-intellectualism thus grew out of the evolution of a new and dynamic Christianity as it began to spread out to the American hinterland. The rise of denominations such as the Methodists and Presbyterians began to displace the European forms of Christianity that were brought over on the Mayflower.

This was all to be expected. Seventeenth century America was a country that was settled by religious schismatics who had fled Europe to find a new home. But what was originally left unquestioned, the very scholastic basis of the faith, whatever that version of the faith might have been, was now open to new ways of bringing the Gospel home to the emerging Republic.

In order to mount a credible attack on the established clergy, the Awakeners pointed to the fact that the preachers' sermons were prepared as one would a scholarly essay. These written sermons undermined, it was thought, the directness that populist Christianity was seeking. In the bustle and confusion of creating a new country, the Awakeners promoted religion as a spiritual entity that would inspire rather than educate. Although, as Hofstadter points out, that "the Awakening quickened the democratic spirit in America" and led to the cause of anti-slavery and a more intimate engagement (through

Christianity) with the Indians, the nascent and deleterious effects of anti-intellectualism were quite real.

In the words of a British Anglican minister, Charles Woodmason, who wrote of his travels in the Carolina back-country:

Few or no books are to be found in all this vast Country, beside the Assembly, Catechism, Watts Hymns, Bunyans Pilgrims Progress – Russells – Whitefields and Erskines Sermons. Nor do they delight in Historical Books or in having them read to them, as do our vulgar in England, for these People despise Knowledge, and instead of honouring a Learned Person, or any one of Wit or Knowledge, be it in the Arts, Sciences or Languages, they despise and Ill treat them – and this spirit prevails even among the Principals of this Province.

Preachers like Dwight Moody in the mid-19th century developed the style of evangelical Christianity that has become a ubiquitous presence in the current landscape:

Aside from the Bible, he read almost nothing. “I have one rule about books. I do not read any book, unless it will help me to understand the book.” ... “I would rather have zeal without knowledge; and there is a good deal of knowledge without zeal.”

The religious feelings that drove a man like Moody, ironically, given the non-religious secularist bent of the later educators, were decisive in directing the evolution of new ideas about education that would develop in the late 19th century.

The Role of John Dewey

Progressive trends in education emerged in the early 20th century in the writings of the great American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. Dewey was rewriting the history of democracy by critically examining the educational methods that were traditionally used in the American schools. Dewey saw the backbone of the educational system, rote learning, repetition and recitation, as eviscerating the creative potential inherent in each child. In fact, in tandem with the newly emerging sciences of psychology and sociology, a new focus on the child developed as the role of learning was reconceived in terms of the child's own abilities and wishes. In Hofstadter's words:

Dewey began by thinking of the individual learner as using his mind instrumentally to solve various problems presented by his environment, and went on to develop a theory of education conceived as the growth of the learner. The modern educational system, he saw, must operate in an age of democracy, science and industrialism; education should strive to meet the requirements of this age. Above all, education should abandon those practices, based upon a pre-democratic and pre-industrial society, which accepted the leisured and aristocratic view that knowledge is the contemplation of fixed verities.

Ravitch provides an even more nuanced view of this conception:

The school, said Dewey, was a fundamental lever of social progress and social reform. He told the parents at his school that it was not enough to seek only the education that was best for their own child: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for its own children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy. All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members."

Ravitch thus sees Dewey as a reformer who wished to use the schools as an instrument to effect the sort of social change, Progressive in orientation, that he wanted society to adopt.

It is, first and foremost, the very **method** of Dewey's reforms that strike one as being modernist in orientation. The key for Dewey was to be found in dealing with the individual child rather than in the strict formal demands of the curriculum. Again, quoting Hofstadter:

Dewey's difficulty was of another order: having insisted that education, being growth itself, cannot have any end set for it save still more education, he was unable to formulate the criteria by which society, through the teacher, should guide or direct the child's impulses. The teacher was left with a firm mandate to exercise some guidance, to make some discriminations among the child's impulses and needs, but with no directional signposts. The child's impulses should be guided "forward" – but in which direction? Such a set of criteria presupposes an educational goal, an adult prevision of what the child should know and what he should be. "Let the child's nature fulfill its own destiny," Dewey urged, but the suggestion that the child has a destiny implied an end or goal somewhat removed in time and not envisaged by the child. For this reason, what came to be called Progressive education, although often immensely fertile and ingenious concerning means was so futile and confused about ends; about what these methods should be used to teach.

This assessment of Dewey takes into account the idea that education should not discriminate intellectually; the values of intellectual tradition must be subordinated to the existential needs of the child. As Hofstadter and others have pointed out, this did not mean that Dewey sought to eliminate the substance of the curriculum; it simply meant a reorienting of method and a shift in perspective.

Reforming the Educational System

This, however, was not how things worked themselves out in the American educational system. In Diane Ravitch's important study of these reforms, *Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform*, she details the nightmarish evolution of Dewey's ideas that turned American education on its head.

Ravitch goes back to the beginning of this reforming process in the 19th century. With the emergence of modern reform movements in education, a debate took place between those who wished to preserve the classical humanistic curriculum and offer that curriculum to all students, regardless of race, creed or color. But there were others who began to apply the thoughts of social scientists such as Herbert Spencer, a modernist, to the effect that not all students would benefit from the classical humanistic education:

In the 1850s, the English philosopher Herbert Spencer asked, “What knowledge is of most worth?” and concluded that the purpose of education was “to prepare us for complete living.” Every study must be judged by whether it had “practical value” and would be useful in later life.

These seminal ideas, slow to filter into the American pedagogical system (but later they would become the central feature of the Progressive educational movement in this country), reflect the development of the modern social sciences. Rather than remain wedded to the old conception of the epistemological, vital to democracy, which taught that all students would advance with the adoption of knowledge and wisdom by studying the identical academic curriculum, the new science proclaimed that each child had certain innate capabilities and propensities that must be individually addressed – at the expense of a uniform pedagogical paradigm as it had been embodied in the classical curriculum.

Instead of bringing knowledge to the student, the student would be analyzed for what her innate needs and capabilities might be. Such a development would radically alter the state of education in this country.

One of the first reactions to these developments was the creation in 1893 of a blue-ribbon panel, called the “Committee of Ten,” that studied the issues:

The high schools, said the committee, should be committed to academic excellence for all students in a democratic society. They should foster the continuous intellectual growth of their pupils through study of the major academic disciplines. The report urged that young people should go as far in their school as their talents and interests would take them.

The key point here for Ravitch is that the Committee of Ten maintained the traditional curriculum and its egalitarian application while continuing to look for ways to employ, in a modest and conservative manner, the new ideas in method developing in the social sciences. For instance:

It urged colleges to admit students who had not studied the classical languages. It supported new subjects such as history, the sciences and modern foreign languages as coequals with Latin, Greek and mathematics. It recommended active teaching methods instead of rote memorization. It endorsed the democratic idea that all students should receive a liberal education.

The report prepared by the Committee of Ten was attacked by the reformers for being too dependent upon substance and by the traditionalists for not being substantive enough. Progressive educators wanted to see the curriculum changed to reflect advances in the social sciences. The social reformers would eventually have their day.

The Progressive Movement

Throughout the early 20th century, a new Progressive movement was afoot that would have profound ramifications for the study of the humanities in American schools:

Crusaders for educational change attacked the high school curriculum as rigid and elitist, falsely implying that all students were involuntarily compelled to study the classical curriculum of Latin, Greek and algebra... Educational reformers denounced the academic curriculum as if it were the classical curriculum, heaping as much scorn on history, modern foreign languages and literature as they had previously reserved for the ancient languages.

These attacks impacted the ability of minorities and immigrants to assimilate the humanistic components of a literate American civilization:

Immigrant children, it was widely believed, lacked the intellect for academic studies. In contrast to earlier arrivals from England, Germany and other northern European countries, these immigrants were allegedly incapable of intellectual work.

The implicit and covert racism of the Progressive movement, which perhaps was indeed based on an idealistic notion of a truly free and egalitarian society, was at the core of the debate between the black reformers W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Du Bois, the founder of the NAACP, sought the best quality academic education for blacks. This education was to be on a par with the education offered to whites. Washington, as exemplified by the philosophy of his Tuskegee Institute, a vocational college, accepted the idea that blacks would be given vocational training as opposed to the standard academic training:

Du Bois questioned whether industrial education was the best strategy for the black population. To rely wholly on industrial education, he warned, would be a mistake, for it would preclude the education of future leaders, who would require a liberal education. He insisted that the "Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men," whom he called the "Talented Tenth." Du Bois asked, "Can the masses of the Negro people be in any possible way more quickly raised than by the effort and example of this aristocracy of talent and character?"

The words of Du Bois are the harbinger for Ravitch's argument that the new ideas emanating from the social sciences were not fully compatible with the high ideals of the democratic process.

The Emergence of the Social Sciences

Rather than continue to maintain the traditional educational methods by asserting that all students would rise to the expectations demanded by the academic curriculum which had been designed to develop the mental traits of a disciplined intelligence, the new educational psychology sought to determine how the mental process affects the development of the intellectual faculties; an inversion of the older conception. One of the most influential scholars in this regard was the psychologist Edward L. Thorndike:

Thorndike formulated "laws of learning" that were based on the observed connection between stimulus and response and on whether the response was rewarded or punished, whether it produced satisfaction or annoyance. His behaviorism led him to conclude that school studies were effective only for specific, particular purposes, not for general improvement.

Thorndike's conclusions, though based on the most rigid behaviorist assumptions, were rapidly adopted in the burgeoning field of the educational sciences. As a corollary to the Progressive movement in culture and education, new programs had been developed to teach teachers the new educational science, rather than having teachers learn the academic subjects they were hired to teach. This too was a result of Thorndike's far-reaching assessments:

Some educational psychologists, citing Thorndike and Woodworth, insisted that nothing learned in one situation could be applied to any other, so that all training must be specific to the task at hand. Seen in this light, nothing taught in school had any value or utility except to satisfy college admission requirements or to prepare those who planned to teach the same subject in the future or those who might have an occupational purpose for learning subjects such as algebra, chemistry, history or German.

The point in training teachers was not to focus on academic subject matter but on method, because the traditional archaeology of knowledge was only a chimera according to the scientific findings.

The new view of intelligence encouraged educators to ignore the traditional academic curriculum. The Progressive educators then began to use the school as a means for social re-engineering. One prominent case was that of the G. Stanley Hall, one of Dewey's teachers. Hall rejected the tenets upon which the traditional education had been scaffolded.

In his words:

The guardians of the young should strive first of all to keep out of nature's way, and to prevent harm, and should merit the proud title of defenders of the happiness and rights of children... We must overcome the fetichism of the alphabet, of the multiplication table, of grammars, of scales, and of bibliolatry.

The echoes of these words reverberate into the New Math and Whole Language movements that sought to free the student from academics and place him into a less constricted context where his education would be linked to the primitive, Romantic concept of self that had been developed by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the 18th century.

The new spin of behaviorism led to a mechanistic and deterministic view of an autonomous, romantic self. Once the self had been objectified, the idea was to construct a science that would appraise the individual and allow for a scientific and precise formulation of his biologically inherited skills. The paradigmatic manifestation of this idea was the creation of an I.Q. test:

Lewis Terman had studied at Clark University with G. Stanley Hall, who espoused the critical importance of biology and heredity. Terman rose to prominence in 1916 after he revised the Binet intelligence test; known as the Stanford-Binet intelligence test, it became the most widely used individual mental test in the next two decades. A former teacher and school principal, Terman saw the intelligence test as an instrument that would facilitate Progressive reforms in education, especially identification of the feeble-minded and the gifted, curricular differentiation, vocational guidance, and grouping based on students' ability. Terman expected that the schools eventually would employ intelligence tests rather than tests of students' knowledge to determine readiness for promotion.

One can see in these pronouncements the seeds for the educational paradigms that we currently have in our schools: The idea that children cannot progress beyond where the cognitive behaviorist tests say they can; whether children can be taught, or whether they have to be placed in remedial classes; what subjects should be compulsory for the student; what electives should be made available to the students, etc.

One of the most painful things that must be learned from Thorndike, Hall and Terman's attempts to scientifically classify education was its dependence on the science of eugenics. Eugenics linked intelligence to biology, a static and deterministic science, in a formal manner. Students' capabilities were assessed biologically rather than providing the children a merit-based system which would then permit them to rise and fall according to their individual academic accomplishments.

Although the science of eugenics, adopted by many in the Progressive era as Ravitch has shown, has been utterly and thoroughly discredited because of the Nazi era, many of the ideas that continue to animate teachers' colleges are based on the psychological ideas developed in the eugenics program. Modern education is far more susceptible to arguments from Biology, than it is from intellectual concerns.

The Victory of the Progressives

A few decades after the report of the Committee of Ten, a new group was assembled to examine the issue of public education in America. In 1918 the Committee on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE) produced a report that was fully in keeping with the new educational ideology of the Progressive social scientists. The CRSE, led by the most prominent members of this new educational elite, began to turn the ideology into reality:

Based on these assertions, the CRSE identified the main objectives of secondary education as "1. Health. 2. Command of fundamental processes. 3. Worthy home membership. 4. Vocation. 5. Citizenship. 6. Worthy use of leisure. 7. Ethical character." All of these objectives were utilitarian, derived from analyses of the activities of adults. These "cardinal principles" reflected the leaders' belief that students should learn only what they actually needed to know.

The idea was to eviscerate the academic curriculum, as we have been saying, and begin the process of dividing up groups of students into categories that would "manage" them and provide an education that would be determined, not by the objective standards of the historically tested academic virtues, but by the students' propensities for educability.

Academic standards, though modified over the centuries, were traditionally predicated upon a solid sense of intellectual attainment marked by a formal curriculum independent of the so-called "needs" of the individual students. The institution of Progressive education thus eliminated the traditional dominance of the intellectual values.

One of the extremes of this child-centered movement was the "Project Method" developed by William Heard Kilpatrick of Teachers' College:

The starting point of curriculum instruction, Kilpatrick asserted, was to learn what children were interested in and know how to stimulate these interests: "Most people get into trouble by choosing first what children should learn, then hunting about for the best way of teaching it." Kilpatrick firmly opposed the idea of "sugar-coating" subject matter by trying to make it interesting. He insisted that the curriculum must begin with the child's interests, not with subject matter selected in advance.

Kilpatrick's idea was to give the student control over their school activity: The student would choose what they wanted to do with no interference from the teacher:

What was a typical project? A girl making a dress; a boy producing a school newspaper; a class presenting a play; a group of boys organizing a baseball team.

This was not a willed sense of permissiveness for its own sake; beyond the need for children to "express themselves" was the scientific belief that children **could not** realize the acquisition of critical and intellectual skills that would be demanded by an academic curriculum. In very pointed terms, it was science rather than some abstract philosophy that demanded the adoption of this new pedagogical system:

By the mid-1930s, it would have been difficult to find a school that did not reflect the pervasive effects of Progressive reforms. School officials routinely tested students to determine their IQ and aptitudes; they used this information to determine whether students belonged in one of several vocational curricula or in the academic curriculum, which was becoming known as the college preparatory track...

As the bureaucratic school systems adopted the new science, a marriage of pragmatism and ideology took place. This wedding of the exigencies of dealing with millions of children, after the great influx of immigrants from the turn of the century, with the neo-science developed by the eugenicists and the educational psychologists created a crisis for those who still believed in the power and efficacy of the academic curriculum. From now on, education would be parceled out in different packages for the students who would be measured by a battery of tests and placed in the “appropriate” educational program.

While Ravitch spends a good bit of time reviewing the work of those who sought to do battle with the new trends, it is quite clear that the tide had shifted permanently – for the worse. The two most egregious changes occurred in the study of literature and history. Changing the focus of literature and history from the transmission of precious texts and ideas from the past to the development of “relevant” material served to erode the academic value of the subjects in question.

The old McGuffey readers, which presented in miniature the classics of English literature were to be replaced by new readers known as the “Dick and Jane” series:

The “Dick and Jane” readers and others like them contained simple stories about children, home life, animals and toys. In line with Progressive educators’ emphasis on children’s interests, reading reformers insisted that reading methods should be as natural as possible and that the content of readers should be connected to the children’s point of view.

Rather than requiring that the acquisition of language skills be accomplished in a formal manner, using methods of decoding and deciphering the letters (and what better way to do that than by reading the great writers of our literary past), the onus was placed on the literature to presume the interest of the student. It was the student that would determine the relevance of the literature rather than the literature making demands on the student.

In terms of the history curriculum, the idea was much the same: Rather than teach history as a sequence of events, the key was to make history “relevant” by integrating the human life cycle and the civil culture of mankind into the curriculum. This change led to the displacement of history by the new subject “Social Studies” which emphasized, not the events and processes of the past, but the events and processes that directly impacted on the student’s own experiences.

The chief consultant on the social studies in Virginia was Paul R. Hanna, a researcher at the Lincoln School (and later dean of education at Stanford University). Hanna criticized “romanticism,” which occurred when children “learn to escape from this suffering world” by “reliving the days of old when knights were bold and rode through the land in search of great adventure” and when “they draw and paint the symbols of heraldry, dance the festivals of historic peasant folk...”

Through such a caricature of history and the manner in which it was traditionally taught, the history curriculum was transformed. Rather than maintaining a direct engagement with the ideas and texts of the past, students would be trained to think of the past, if the past was even presented at all, in terms of the present and its concerns. But the lack of historical, literary and scientific context left the children with no ability to see things in the sense of their larger **duration**. It was due to this new form of education that historical knowledge eroded. The elision of the study of history, a concomitant partner in the development of self-knowledge, would serve to reshape the way students saw themselves as human beings.

The Breakdown of the 1960s

Through the development of these ideas and their application throughout the America of the post-War era, a new orthodoxy had been created. The new standards of Progressive education collapsed the academic curriculum. The academic curriculum of the Arts and Sciences was the desideratum of the American Founding Fathers in their belief that a strong education made for good, loyal citizens. The purging of the academic curriculum led to an even stronger and more focused attack on standards of knowledge by the forces of anti-intellectualism in the 1960s.

After a generation of relaxed standards, there was a new youth society raised on pop culture and market-driven capitalism. This culture became its own self-perpetuating orthodoxy, making new demands that drove society. A book called Summerhill, written by the British educator A.S. Neill, became the rallying call for a new and even more permissive sense of pedagogy than had been imagined previously.

Summerhill appealed to radical Progressives not only because it tapped their deeply ingrained belief in the overweening importance of child-centered education but because Neill championed radical egalitarianism and sexual liberation.

On the one hand, the freedom movements of the 1960s can be seen as the legitimate attempt to enlighten and liberate individuals from the false chains that constrict them from expressing themselves in a spontaneous and freely willed manner. In this sense, feminism, the campaign for civil rights in the African-American community and the anti-War movement opened up new avenues for the struggle for freedom which is so much a natural part of the American experience.

But, on the other hand, the relaxing of standards and discipline, particularly in the field of education, drove a stake deep into the heart of the more worthwhile and salient elements of the 60's Counterculture. This anti-intellectual tendency goes back to the Beat movement of the 50s. As explicated by Hofstadter:

In their own way, the beatniks have repudiated the path of intellectualism and have committed themselves to the life of sensation – to put it perhaps a bit too sympathetically, as Lawrence Lipton does in the title of his illuminating book about them, The Holy Barbarians, to lives of inverted sainthood, marked by an acceptance of poverty and by their willingness to do without the usual satisfactions of a career and a regular income. Not surprisingly, the beatniks, even as their sympathetic commentators are apt to concede, have produced very little good writing.

One can see in this analysis a fulfillment of the Progressive mentality that was developed by Dewey and his disciples back at the turn of the century. But Dewey, ironically, would be seen by the Beats and their Hippie epigones as himself too much a “square,” as too much of a stuffed-shirt conservative. Dewey continued to promote the study of the classic curriculum and the attainment of standards that were anathema to the 60's radicals.

But one thing that puts a huge wrinkle into the dual aims of social and cultural liberation of the 1960's Counterculture was the opportunities offered to Blacks in the march to the restoration of their dignity and cultural advancement after generations of shameful neglect. Having attained great advances with the Supreme Court's *Brown vs. The Board of Education* (1954) and the passage in 1964 of President Johnson's Civil Rights Act, Black America was afforded, after decades of intense struggle, a tremendous opportunity to claim their rightful place in American society.

Ravitch examines this issue through an analysis of the work done by the psychologist Kenneth B. Clark:

Clark lashed out at the nest of related assumptions that had dominated educational policy since the 1930s. The idea that “each child should be educated in terms of his own needs and capacities,” he said, allowed teachers to have lower expectations for black children, whose capacities they doubted. He challenged the belief that children from working-class backgrounds need “a different type of education from that provided for children from middle-class families,” which encouraged schools to supply an education of lesser value to children from working-class families. The belief that one cannot expect much from children whose families don't have books in the home rationalized the failure of children from poor families, he said. He challenged the use of IQ tests to predict a child's ability to learn, saying that they should be used instead to determine what a child needs to learn.

It is through the lens of the dilemma of minority education that we might see the failings of the Progressive movement more clearly. Rather than raising up blacks and Hispanics

through a Progressive movement that would have these minorities realize their true worth, Progressive education, by taking away their right to **know things**, has robbed those in American society who could least afford to be kept without knowledge.

The Failure of Progressive Education and What We Should Do About It

The failure of Progressive education goes way beyond the issue of minorities. Education is the right and privilege of all citizens of this great country. Knowledge is power and a lack of knowledge is weakness. Enlightened self-interest can only be realized by intellectual attainment. As Hofstadter continually points out in his book, wealth and material attainments cannot, in and of themselves, substitute for the culture that is created by intellectual knowledge.

The power of the intellectual throughout history has led to the gradual development and application of man's innate genius. Religion, philosophy, art, literature, science and music have all been enriching factors in the human odyssey. The rejection of the Liberal Arts, as exemplified by the Progressive mentality, a mentality formed out of the rubric of a failed Darwinism, is an all too common factor in the culture we live in today.

To get back to the issue of Sephardim and knowledge that should concern us, it is impossible to rely on an educational system, which has clearly impacted on our communities, that is being overseen by an ideology and by teachers and administrators of that ideology and philosophy, which is so wrapped up in the cult of "relevance" and "child-centeredness."

The classical Sephardic tradition is deeply immersed in the study of academic subjects such as grammar, history, philosophy, science, literature and the like that have been cut out of the current system of pedagogy. Teachers in the current system are not merely ignorant of these academic subjects, but their formal training has allowed them to be judged as **capable** because of their skills as **teachers** rather than in terms of their **knowledge** of the subject matter that they are teaching.

Thus, we have produced generations of Sephardic-American children who lack formal critical skills as well as anything approximating a working knowledge of the multiple civilization(s) they have been born into.

The twin concepts of ideological affiliation and existential relevance have engulfed our schools. Rather than bringing the students to the vast reservoir of Knowledge, we have created a few reference points of belief and have set the students adrift in a sea of unknowing. Rather than have the students esteem Knowledge for its own sake, the students display contempt for the great genius of civilization and the intellectual pinnacles of Mankind's history and achievements.

In previous essays we have analyzed the specific crisis that exists in our community's schools and have here linked that crisis to the overall malaise in the modern American educational system.

Answers are hard to come by: Ravitch has attacked a number of entities such as Multiculturalism and Postmodernism and is off base. She has also promoted the idea of a movement of national standards which has merely replaced one form of faulty testing with another. As we have seen in George W. Bush's program in Texas, the promotion of testing as the answer to our pedagogical ills will just lead to a greater lack of respect for knowledge and intelligence. Improved standards and testing might be part of the solution but cannot substitute for actively engaged and engaging pedagogy and a revalorization of the Intellectual.

The answers are found not at the end of the Ravitch volume, but at the beginning where she analyzed what went wrong. It is on her painstaking critical analysis of the history of the collapse of the American educational system that we must focus. We need to create curricula of great intellectual depth and creativity. We must begin to bring back a formal respect for ideas and texts. We are required to train students to read books and make reading something that animates their lives, rather than something that they do to pass a test.

With these ideas in mind, we should go back to our community's schools and the students in them to determine how these salient facts relate to the cutting issues we face as a culture and society. Once we have analyzed these essential issues, then we can institute a process of renewed creativity and self-knowledge through critical examination and the renewal of intellectual standards. Only then can we look seriously at our schools and make the changes necessary to raise the bar for our own children, children who have been denied the very privilege of learning things that will turn them into civilized and productive members of their society.

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