

Nos Censuimus Igitur Essemus

In this great nation, it begins and ends with "We, the people."

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Introduction

As an actively involved participant and committed investor in the United States public education system, I have witnessed the vitriolic invective and fallacious rhetoric of pundits, politicians, protestors, and "reformers" on the deleterious state of the standard American classroom. As an educator and scholar for the better part of a decade, I have finally reached my wits end and refuse to sit and rage or fume quietly while we ignore the true, the real, the actual problem we refuse to acknowledge and subject to obloquy because too many have the noble notion that our societal salvation can only be achieved through political correctness and positive affirmations. Such blind and baseless dedication to protecting people from hurt feelings has greatly diminished the once matchless intellectual prowess and reputation of American scholarship. This being said, I posit that the primary saboteur of American public education is, unquestionably, the American public.

The principle problem is that the American public is woefully uninformed. The founding fathers of this great nation made no mention and laid no groundwork for the establishment of a compulsory, publicly funded system of education for all citizens. The Federal government, Congress, the Supreme Court, and the President of the United States cannot ever hope to produce anything more than ephemeral changes with regard to our public schools simply because they lack the power to do so. The responsibility falls to the states under what is constitutionally known as "states' rights." Of course this in no way implies that the discussions never took place.

The Colonial Era

According to historical evidence, many of the founding fathers were actually emphatic in their belief that education is, in the words of S. Alexander Ripa in the fifth edition of the text entitled *Education in a Free Society* (1984), "a public responsibility of the federal government, a bulwark of freedom and security" (p. 67). Our first President, George Washington, in his Farewell Address to Congress, averred that the advancement of education was crucial for the "national welfare." Ironically, the concept was championed by none more than the same founding father one of the great states of our nation wished to remove from the founder's list in social studies textbooks because of his coinage of the phrase "separation of church and state."

No founder fought harder and longer to establish some form of state-funded system of education for American children than Thomas Jefferson. He proposed multiple plans to the state legislature of Virginia, all of which suffered sound defeat "...undoubtedly caused by the refusal of well-to-do citizens

to pay taxes for the education of the poor" (p. 70). He encountered the same classist issues confronted by his colleague and contemporary, Benjamin Franklin. Franklin's and Jefferson's efforts to found and fund grammar schools supported by the taxpayers for the education of all children regardless of class (at that time this of course meant white males) ultimately led to the foundation of the first successful public schools *not* being what we would consider grammar or secondary institutions, but post-secondary colleges and universities: the University of Pennsylvania in 1755 and the University of Virginia in 1825. Intriguingly, colleges are often considered, and at this time this sentiment was a definitive fact, to be elitist. Many people are convinced that these institutions further perpetrate the aspects of the economic caste system that limit the upward mobility of lower class citizens. Is it a coincidence that the first successful publicly funded academic institutions were bastions of higher academia and not grammar or secondary schools? Is our interest not even slightly piqued that the first American public schools embodied and formed the crux of the very values we decry as part of the problems in public education today?

The Modern Era

Let us continue on our brief journey through time and we learn that the following influential period of American growth and prosperity was the Antebellum and subsequent periods comprising the Industrial and Progressive Ages. Aside from propelling American industry and economy to unparalleled heights, it also demanded the need for a large and inexpensive (to increase profits for shareholders) labor force that could be easily exploited but not make too much of a fuss (probably due in part to the fact that, at least on paper, slavery would be, and was, abolished). In the mid to late 1800s through the 1940s, the seemingly eternal influx of immigrants began to inflict as many social issues as it offered economic gain.

Major issues that affected the educational sphere arose when the social reformers of the late 1800s bared their teeth and pushed for the revision of child labor laws. This put a substantially high number of immigrants' children out of work and, essentially, on the streets during normal business hours. In an arguably small amount of time, densely populated areas began to experience the societal ills that accompany a growing population of idle children and teenagers. The political response was the gradual passage and enforcement of state compulsory education laws requiring minors of school age to attend public schools. Institutions intricately designed to develop and prepare students for higher scholarship were, almost overnight it may have seemed to some, inundated with a crippling volume of children and adolescents whose aspirations and goals may or may not include rigorous academic pursuit. This spurned a reconceptualization of the purpose of public schools. The primary objective transitioned from "the education of republican ideals and democratic principles" to the "Americanization" of all citizens. Again, was there ever a time we the people made a true effort to ensure that *all* students had the opportunity to attain a collegiate education that took precedence over maintenance of the status quo?

The Post-Modern Era

By 1950, every state in the Union at that time had imposed, and was vigorously enforcing, compulsory education laws along with methodologies for funding their public schools with taxpayer dollars. In the time between 1850 and 1950 (a short but eventful century), America had endured Civil War, Reconstruction, WWI, the Suffragette Movement, Herbert Hoover, the Great Depression, and WWII along with the realization of *manifest destiny* (the informal doctrine that enumerated the belief that the United States was destined to stretched from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast). We may have been knee deep in the Cold War, but we knew we really had nothing to fear because we were enriching

uranium and building a nuclear arsenal so vast that for the next few centuries we will be armed to the teeth (despite the "Red Scare," which was probably politically motivated to limit civil liberties because the government was scared of being overrun by the communists availing themselves of the democratic process. But we digress.). By the middle of the 20th Century, the United States had emerged as the leader of the free world. We were, arguably, "the greatest country in the world." Or were we?

At the same time we were becoming a major power broker on the world stage, our domestic social policy was still being held hostage by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* doctrine of "separate but equal." While young Americans were abroad fighting and dying for the world to be free, domestically an entire subset of our population was legally required, via *de jure* (legal) segregation, to sit in the rear of buses, enter homes and hotels through the kitchens, work for asinine wages, and then pay taxes without the ability to exercise the right to vote! (Can someone say "taxation without representation?" Did we not revolt against the British Empire for this exact type of tyranny?) Likewise, this same social caste was expected to attend sub-standard schools with sub-standard materials and teachers who may or may not have attained proper teacher education and training. Perhaps the meaning of the word "equal" has been misconstrued, but these circumstances indicate, with certainty, that our educational system (not to mention society) at that time was most assuredly not.

Nevertheless, and despite the many obstacles in their way, this caste spoke out. They found the right advocates and appropriate poster-children to mount a decent enough counterstrike concluding with the reversal of "separate but equal" in 1954 by the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In the majority opinion, Chief Justice Warren states that segregating children "from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone." The Court also ordered that every publicly funded school in America serve all students regardless of race, class, or gender, and, at that time, to do so "with all deliberate speed." But:

the federal courts did not simply say what states and educational officials could not do in the struggle for equality of opportunity; they moved actively and positively to tell officials and school boards what they *must* do to eliminate discrimination in school systems and promote equality of educational opportunity. States and school boards were ordered to take 'affirmative action' against segregation and prejudice (Rippa, 1984).

Also, the passage of "the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the education amendments of 1972 [which went into effect in 1975] specifically applied to affirmative action to benefit women" and specifically ordered that: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (Rippa, 1984 pp. 277, 280). We can conclude, therefore, that among Blacks and other non-majority ethnic groups, women were also a minority being shafted by our educational and social system. However, these judicial actions came with a price-tag that no one could have foreseen we would still be paying for more than seven decades later. Civil Rights has proved to be a double-edged sword and yet another nail in the coffin of our public educational system; not because of the policies themselves, but their implementation.

As previously stated, the Supreme Court ordered public schools to make all of the aforementioned

changes "with all deliberate speed." The problem with legalese is that it tends to be vexingly literal *and* ambiguous. Consequently, with reference to *Brown*, states were able to interpret the phrase almost unilaterally as long as the *perception* was that the policies were being implemented. Combining the study of history with eyewitness accounts, the upset to the status quo prompted a societal backlash that we are still paying for today.

To start: many majority parents (who could afford it) removed their children from the public schools, pooled their resources, and created private institutions where they could continue to educate their children without the pressures of liberal legislation that would force them to integrate. In some locales, like Prince Edward County in Virginia, the local officials, predominantly comprised of majority citizens, shut down their public school system altogether. Apparently, so many districts took up this practice that in 1968 the Court required all of those that followed suit to reopen their public schools and develop "workable" desegregation plans. The Court then went even further to decree that federal judges could order schools to integrate their staff (Rippa, 1984). To boot, the Court upheld the *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg* (1971) decision to support the practice of busing. Busing was a

remedial plan [that] required a massive, long-distance transportation program: students residing closest to inner-city schools were to be assigned to suburban schools; students residing closest to suburban schools were to be assigned to inner-city schools. Thus the neighborhood school concept, a principle argument against busing, was substantially weakened by the Court decree. Although the United States Supreme Court did not outlaw 'schools all or predominantly of one race in a district of mixed population,' it did create conditions that would make such schools difficult to maintain (p. 283).

As an added blow, many of the qualified majority teachers, who deigned to teach students they did not deem worthy or capable of higher scholarship, found positions elsewhere. The quick fix was to fill the vacated teaching positions with majority teachers who may not be as qualified but were willing to teach in an integrated classroom. Likewise, they system mostly hired minority teachers who would not rock the boat or make too much noise about unjust business practices (also not usually the *crème de la crème* in their field). Consequence: a substantial number of vacated teaching positions with those remaining being less likely the best in their field and classrooms filled, and later overfilled, with students of a certain income bracket with the prejudices and etiquette to match.

So, over two decades, our efforts to speedily build a more inclusive society, we instituted protocols that filled the public schools with: (a) Untrained and under-qualified teachers, many of whom would refuse to collaborate with one another because they were relegated to work in the same schools aside colleagues against whom they were prejudiced, (b) Large, diverse classrooms filled with a number of angered majority students with deep prejudices for many of their classmates fostered by their parents (many of whom were also highly displeased with the upset to the status quo and the transition to a new social order) and chronically stressed minority students trying to get a substantive education equal to that of their majority counterparts with no other options, and (c) Highly disgruntled administrators and districts who believed the federal courts robbed them of their rights to operate their own schools the way they saw fit. Then we placed all of these people under one roof and expected them to attain and maintain the same level of academic rigor before the shifts. Selah.

Forgotten by most, but at this same time our society was also caught up in the Deinstitutionalization Movement. This social movement was emptying mental hospitals and institutions en mass. This action,

coupled with the nascent but ironclad civil rights legislation, would eventually require public schools to fully include students with "handicaps" in the already disturbed school environment. It would also require schools to develop academic programs that appropriately met these students' needs. Noble and morally just? Of course. Should this have happened? Absolutely. The problem, again, was timing and implementation.

Chris Koyanagi prepared a report entitled "Learning From History: Deinstitutionalization of People with Mental Illness As Precursor to Long-Term Care Reform" for the Kaiser Foundation in 2007 where he explores the history of deinstitutionalization to explain how we can learn from our mistakes. (To reiterate: mistakes.) He notes that initially "the early focus was on moving individuals out of state public mental hospitals and from 1955 to 1980, the resident population in those facilities fell from 559,000 to 154,000." That means at least 405,000 known mental patients were suddenly on the streets; and that is just on paper. While that difference may seem trifling, being that many of these types of institutions are localized in densely populated urban areas, the impact was not. Koyanagi goes on to say that, "only later was there a focus on improving and expanding the range of services and supports for those now in the community, in recognition that medical treatment was insufficient to ensure community tenure" (p. 1). Without knowing the exact statistics on the number of patients released who were of school age, suffice it to say that the number was significant enough for Congress to enact the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, reauthorized in 2004).

Let it be said that the other social reform movements occurring concurrently were not the driving force for this movement. Koyanagi explains that "governors and state legislatures were strongly motivated by cost concerns..." Historically, when money management is a factor, reforms happen quickly, sloppily, and with little concern for future consequences. "Yet Deinstitutionalization initially progressed very slowly. ...It only accelerated into a full-scale, nationwide policy in the late 1960s and 1970s, when the federal government became involved" (p. 4). It got involved mostly in response to the report entitled *Action for Mental Health* commissioned by the Joint Commission on Mental Health. However, one could also argue that the feds became involved because they were already dealing with an existing public outcry over civil rights and wanted to avoid angering another sect of the population (and given the time that would not be a real stretch).

Logically, one can deduce that this sudden influx of students with emotional and intellectual disorders and disabilities put further pressure on the public schools. They had just been ordered to ensure that all students receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and this now included students with disabilities. Noble? Yes. But, we must consider that at the same time they were dealing with the social pressures of racism and sexism, teachers and students, already reeling with a severe case of culture shock, were yet again charged to deal with another extreme upset to the status quo absent desperately needed resources and training.

As these radical social movements, and consequent social tensions, raged on in the 1960s and 1970s, unforeseen obstacles to the effectual administration of public education emerged. Educationally focused sociological and psychological research took the country by storm as we began to realize that the quality of our public schools was quickly plummeting. As such, many schools began to implement

programs and practices with novel ideas and rhetoric like "multicultural," "whole language," and "constructivist." The damage of this type of rhetoric will be discussed later as the consequences of its adoption would not be realized until generations later.

Now enter the deleterious effects of technology: In the 1970s and 1980s, there were many books and articles written decrying the effects of widespread access to recreational and time-saving popular technology--television, microwave, radio, walkman, etc.--on children (and, by extension, the classroom). The issues enumerated are almost verbatim what teachers complain about today. These decades developed the progenitors of the subsequent "popcorn" generations.

The progeny of these progenitors have become increasingly more loathsome and slothful with each decade as they become more and more accustomed to the fast food lifestyle--quick, cheap, and convenient. People who become accustomed to this type of lifestyle also tend to develop an extremely low tolerance for sacrifice and hard work and an increased dependence on instant gratification and learned helplessness. Now, imagine having thirty to forty of intellectually lethargic students in a classroom. Then imagine having to be accountable for the substance and quality of their work. Then imagine that if these students refuse to work or act out to avoid work (and they do so regularly) and you dare to even imply that the student is ill-equipped or just plain lazy reprimand, you, the teacher, are reprimanded. Why? Because the public has decided that personal accountability for one's own education is no longer a reasonable request of students because personal accountability requires sacrifice and hard work.

Astoundingly, as if the complete and utter degradation of the public K-12 classroom was not enough, we turn our attention to the publicly funded college. With the problems previously enumerated from the 1960s and 1970s, one can only assume that the quality of the general product of the public school system was greatly diminished. The natural consequence was a decrease in college admissions in the late 1970s and early 1980s, especially of students from inner-city high schools which were affected far worse than their suburban counterparts. To combat this "social crisis," many state funded colleges and universities increasingly relaxed admissions requirements and crafted oxymoronic remedial college courses designed to provide students with the skills and knowledge they should have acquired in secondary school.

Monetary incentives were also given to many students to attend these "colleges." The "greatest country in the world" could not retain or justify such a title if their college admission or graduation rates fell below those of other developed countries. According to eyewitness accounts, it appears that there was very little oversight, regulation, or vetting of the recipients of these incentives. Many did not matriculate or graduate on time, if at all. It was during this time that the average number of years it takes the average American student to complete a four-year degree increased from four to six; and it remains to this day. (If it has not risen.)

Public colleges were in a potentially perilous state. Low enrollment or graduation rates meant decreased income from tuition, decreased government funding, and inevitable closure. Coupled with having a limited pool of scholars truly qualified for higher scholarship and saddled with an alarming number of sub-standard students, there was only one intervention left: to lower the standards of the American college.

(A quick note about college education: Students get from their collegiate experience what they put into it. Higher scholarship is not like secondary education where the teacher is trying to engage students in the pursuit of skills and knowledge they will need to matriculate to college or a career. The college professor and environment is a haven where the student academic is encouraged to creatively and freely apply all that they learned in high school about the world and themselves and safely and securely challenge it. That being said: it is a black mark on the history of our public school system that our colleges were, and still are, relegated to accept and promote the gross mediocrity of the average American academic that we should be ashamed to call it "American.")

The “Neo-Modern” Era

We have now caught up to the present time period: the 1990s to the present. If the degradation of our college system was the final layer of the proverbial cake, then the last twenty years have been extremely rich and fattening icing. Ultraliberal social reformers used and influenced legislation of the early and mid 1990s to spark several movements financed and fueled almost entirely through fear-mongering and falsified data. They have inflicted what many could argue is irreparable damage to the public school system. The problem with such institutions at the forefront of these movements is non-profit organizations like Teach For America (TFA), The New Teacher Project (TNTP) who own and operate the Teaching Fellows Programs, Friendship-Edison, the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), and the frighteningly large amount of one-size-fit-all charter schools. It is that they consistently proffer theories and “best practices” that fall prey to the logical fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*.

Post hoc ergo propter hoc translates to mean "after this, therefore because of this." Using this fallacious reasoning, people conclude that correlation implies causality, which is just wrong. Many of our current premier educational “reformers” have noticed that many inner-city communities lack resources, thus resulting in a disproportionate ability for the citizens to access meaningful educational materials and experiences. From this, reformers and pundits have concluded that poor citizens must be uneducated because they are poor. Remember how the jejune adoption of rhetoric would be noticed in the future? Couple those consequences with the consequences of the "popcorn" generations and the fact that children and students will reflect what we expect of them (which, as was stated, is very little). As such, the more correct conclusion is that: citizens in poorer communities are uneducated because their parents, communities, and thus government have made it an acceptable state of being.

This is not an opinion. We the people have made it clear through our expression of impulsivity and apathy that we are so reconciled with the idea that our public education system is hopeless that we actually incentivize students' and parents' lack of vigor for rigor with monetary reward. One example is the use of capital gains tax revenues to compensate students for attendance, but not work. The best example of said incentives is the issuance of Social Security Insurance (SSI) checks to parents of children with "disabilities" (e.g. false positive ADHD diagnoses). There are too many children and adults with valid diagnoses who cannot receive proper care because the system is inundated with false cases “all from slothful parents trying to collect money without working that overwhelm the teachers and therapists” abilities to effectively teach and treat their clients, respectively. Essentially, we have demanded that our legislators devise and then defend a system that basically pays people to raise their

own children!

Where is the public outcry when a parent or guardian receives \$500 to \$1,300 *per child, per month* because they have a "disability" that causes them to do nothing more than Pact out in class? Rather, the public chooses to castigate teachers for being unable to control their students when the reality is that students are often told, by their parents, not to listen to the teacher. Almost anything that represents or represented reasonable discipline practice has been outlawed. In some states it is even considered corporal punishment to expect that a child clean up spilled milk if they deliberately pour it on the floor! What educational professional could endeavor to be successful, by any standard or measure, in this age where mediocrity is celebrated and sociopathy is encouraged? Who could effectually teach in these predominantly minority inner-city schools with their nominal resources, high incidents of mental illness, and high crime rates with their hands tied behind their backs? Of course: middle and upper middle-class ultraliberal men and women.

It is difficult not to say that we the people must be stupid or insane, but how would you qualify a citizenry that adopts and passionately defends the belief that nascent college graduates with (1) little to no classroom experience, (2) childhood and adolescent experiences in neighborhoods the antithesis of those they are serving, and (3) incomparable world experiences to those of the students they service, would make effective classroom educators simply because they are promising matriculates? How can we laud and applaud organizations that place inexperienced and nescient first-year teachers in the neediest American classrooms to teach subjects that are completely and utterly different than those they studied? How do we defend institutions that implement standards of practice that contribute to the greatest issue inner-city schools have faced since the 1960s teacher retention? To top it all off, how can we fund and applaud organizations that blatantly state that their mission is NOT to develop effective teachers who achieve effectual results that will *stay* in the neediest American classrooms and schools (one of the primary factors that research has purported time and time again leads to student achievement and thus school success) but rather to fill Americas classrooms with obscenely ideological antisestablishmentarians with political or administrative aspirations? Of the more than 600,000 words in the English lexicon, the only words that accurately describe any informed citizen or party that defends, justifies, and then has the audacity to promote and fund such a counterproductive approach to our public schools' dilemma are "stupid" and "insane."

In the 1990s, we realized that we had more problems than solutions. The level of the crisis probably accounts for our policy makers' reactionary "fund any idea that sounds good and see if it works" approach to school reform. E.D. Hirsch Jr. opens his text, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (1996), with the sobering admonition that American "K-12 education is among the least effective in the developed world" (a statement that holds even more truth today). He then goes on to further explain "why the slogans promulgated by this monolithic system of ideas have turned out to be positive barriers to school improvement, and why alternative ideas are not readily accepted even in the name of radical reform" (pp.1-2). He notes that this new age of progressivism and strict adherence to ideological rhetoric over sound empirical methodology could only herald further systemic degradation. He concludes that he:

...placed the progressive movement within the tradition of American Romanticism, which began in the early nineteenth century and has persisted powerfully in our culture ever since. It is this pervasive, deep-dyed Romanticism, not just its one-time expression in the progressive movement, which continues to thwart a balanced educational approach that would emphasize high standards book learning, and hard

work in school. Persistent educational Romanticism is the source of many assumptions about childhood and human nature that still pervade our minds and hearts. These deep lying assumptions need to be modified--no easy task (p. 215).

In the mid 1990s, liberal ideologues, punch-drunk on the political capital gained by President Clinton's "successes" and the economic rebound (which economists had predicted would occur and then naturally be followed by recession), were given an incredible amount of latitude in their development and implementation of school policies and reforms. Two great evils arose from this unchecked exercise of liberality: the Accountability and Choice Movements.

The concept of holding professionals accountable for doing their prescribed duties (a novel ideal: expecting someone to do their job) shifted into a political ideology with the revision of the previous version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Again, like most policy, NCLB in and of itself is a debatably benign factor; if we consider its jargon independent of the movements to which it lends legal credence. Naturally, being a federal law, it is extremely vague and ambiguous in its description of what districts and schools should be doing. It mostly enumerates the processes by which funding and incentives will be granted if the policies and ideological rhetoric are unilaterally adopted and implemented. As usual, evil is perpetrated in the interpretation and implementation of the law, not the law itself. Suffice it to say, the major consequence of NCLB is the ease and facility with which it enables the Accountability and Choice movements.

Even one of the initial champions of NCLB, Diane Ravitch, has backpedaled. After reexamining the rationale and logic her and her colleagues' offered in support of the statute for reasons and concerns that she enumerates in her book *Death and Life of the Great American School System* (2010). She explains her reason for changing her views to be, simply:

I have a right to change my mind. ...When someone chastised John Maynard Keynes for reversing himself about a particular economic policy he had previously endorsed, he replied "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?" This comment may or may not be apocryphal, but I admire the thought behind it" (p. 2).

When a man or woman is a true academic, they draw conclusions based on the evidence before them even if they do not like or agree with what it represents or reflects.

Upon review and reflection of her former platform, Ravitch concedes:

I grew increasingly disaffected from both the choice movement and the accountability movement. I was beginning to see the downside of both and to understand that they were not solutions to our educational dilemmas. As I watched both movements gain momentum across the nation, I concluded that curriculum and instruction were far more important than choice and accountability. I feared that choice would let thousands of flowers bloom but would not strengthen American education. It might even harm public schools by removing the best students from schools in the poorest neighborhoods. I was also concerned that accountability, now a shibboleth that everyone applauds, had become mechanistic and even antithetical to good education [Are you listening, Ms. Rhee?]. Testing, I realized with dismay, had become a central preoccupation in the schools and was not just a measure but an end in itself. I came to believe that accountability, as written into federal law, was not raising standards but dumbing down the schools as states and districts strived to meet unrealistic targets (pp.12-13).

Although long, this is a fairly comprehensive list of valid reasons people have to proffer in criticism of NCLB as interpreted and implemented. Thankfully, a small cadre of true scholars, following in Ms. Ravitch's righteous footsteps, are reopening their eyes and breaking from the hypnotic but myopic rhetoric of the ignoble and ignorant bleeding-heart leftist. (As biased and prejudicial as this may sound, it is more a reflection of the disappointment with people who have perfectly functional brains and staunchly refuse to observe life without their ideological goggles and debunk or criticize any truth before them that does not vibrate with their personal sentiments.)

Ms. Ravitch lends voice to reason and offers her misguided colleagues a plan to reclaim their dignity and revise their current policies against the American classroom. She explains that, despite her initial support:

as NCLB was implemented, I became increasingly disillusioned. I came to realize that the law bypassed curriculum and standards. Although its supporters often claimed it was a natural outgrowth of the standards movement, it was not. It demanded that schools generate higher test scores in basic skills, but it required no curriculum at all, nor did it raise standards. ...Tests should follow the curriculum. They should be based on the curriculum. They should not follow it or precede it. Students need a coherent foundation of knowledge and skills that grows stronger each year. Knowledge and skills are both important, as is learning to think, debate, and question. A well-educated person has a well-furnished mind, shaped by reading and thinking about history, science, literature, the arts, [the arts, *the arts*,] and politics. The well-educated person has learned how to explain ideas and listen respectfully to others (pp. 15-16).

No argument here.

The major dysfunction with the interpretation of NCLB lies in its verbiage. It stokes the fire and provides political ammunition for the advocates and supporters of the Choice movement. These activists saturate our neediest school districts, urban and rural, with ineffectual charter schools owned and operated by community outsiders often with little connection to the community and negligible classroom experience. However, this is not a criticism of all charter schools, just the movement that has inspired the plundering of our public schools to build equally, if not more, ill-reputable edifices of intellectual lethargy and academic spoon-feeding.

Charter schools existed before the Choice movement. The first on record opened in Minnesota in 1991 when a group of reasonably concerned parents convinced their local government to issue a charter for a privately owned and operated public K-12 institution. This event, while generally unknown by the average citizen, must have received some press because the inaugural KIPP charter school opened in Austin (arguably the most liberal city in the great state of Texas) in 1995. KIPP, along with many other national charter school organizations, have received copious press lauding their "successes and gains" with their poor inner-city clients. However, honest research is finally being published by qualified empiricists, as opposed to idealistic doctrinaires, who are drawing differing conclusions as they properly analyze appropriately collected and disaggregated data.

Based on their conclusions, it seems we have allowed the Choice movement to take us backward in time. It appears, based on the statistics, that segregation is, once again, rearing its ugly head. Hence, this period in time can be aptly qualified as "Neo-Modernism." Vasquez, Williams, McNeil, and Lee (2011) state in their peer reviewed article, *Is Choice a Panacea? An Analysis of Black Secondary Student*

Attrition from KIPP, Other Private Charters, and Urban Districts, that "extant literature has demonstrated that charter schools are increasing segregation" (p. 158). They cite that:

Garcia (2008) noted the national overrepresentation of Black and Latina/o students in charter networks such as KIPP, many of who come from low-SES, urban backgrounds. In fact, recent studies have found that charter schools across the nation are more segregated than comparable local districts (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011; Miron, Urschel, Mathis, & Tornquist, 2010) (p.158).

So, we are rewarding and applauding the current social movements for essentially returning the public education system to the status quo of the 1950s and 60s while they hypocritically exhort that all students, regardless of race, class, gender, and ability, are entitled to a "free, appropriate public education." (I cannot speak for all. However, I am positive that many would agree that segregation of any kind is in direct contradiction to the messages of inclusion preached and averred by Choice supporters all over the political landscape.) These are the facts. But here we the people, supposedly in support of freedom and justice, stand silent.

In keeping with the themes of exclusion and results "by any means necessary," Vasquez et al. (2011) also point out that, despite the lack of honest data and evidence "some have praised charter schools as open-access and an extension of democracy, while others have argued that charter schools often serve fewer students with special education needs or English Language Learners (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, & Henig, 2002)." Again, school statistics highlight that charter schools' standards of practice yield further evidence that the Choice movement is diametrically opposed to its predecessors: the Labor, Civil Rights, and Deinstitutionalization movements.

Unbelievable? Well, "nationally, Miron et al. (2011) found that KIPP schools enrolled fewer students with disabilities than their local school districts" (p.158). This does not mean that they do not serve lower performing students (mostly because there is a lot of federal funding provided for the education of students with disabilities despite the fact that a larger population of them negatively impacts desperately important standardized achievement scores). However, "critics have argued that KIPP 'backfills' their grades with high-achieving students as low-achieving students leave--thus producing illusory achievement success noted in the SRI study (Kahlenberg, 2011)" (p. 159). As a successful teacher with experience in non-profit educational organizations and public, private, and charter schools from the Hawaiian Islands to Washington, DC, this author can state from first-hand experience that these unethical practices are not only widespread but emphatically supported by politicians, pundits, reformers, and administrators at every level of influence in the public educational sector.

When challenged, these "reformers'" ace-in-the-whole defense of their policies is yet another piece of intriguing, but fallacious, rhetoric--the infamous "achievement gap." This phrase describes the phenomenon where, after standardized achievement test data is disaggregated and compared within regions, it is apparent that minority students achieve lower scores than their majority counterparts. Once again: *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Have we forgotten the major issues with standardized testing in public schools?

The first issue is that the public does not really understand standardized tests. Ms. Ravitch (2010) explains the issues using standardized test data to guide instructional practice:

The problem with using tests to make important decisions [or draw conclusions] about people's lives is that standardized tests are not precise instruments. Unfortunately, most elected officials do not realize this, nor does the general public. The public thinks the tests have scientific validity, like that of a thermometer or a barometer, and that they are objective, not tainted by fallible human judgment. But test scores are not comparable to standard weights and measures; they do not have the precision of a doctor's scale or a yardstick. Tests vary in their quality, and even the best tests may sometimes be error-prone, because of human mistakes or technical foul-ups. Hardly a testing season passes without a news story about a goof made by a major testing company. Sometimes questions are poorly worded. Sometimes the answers are wrongly scored. Sometimes the supposedly "right" answer to a question is wrong or ambiguous. Sometimes two of four answers on a multiple-choice question are equally correct (p. 152).

Nonetheless, movement supporters want us to accept their theory of an "achievement gap" based on the results and conclusions of unreliable and invalid measurements that yield data that is also (duh) unreliable and invalid.

It has also never been declared, in public forum, that despite the fact that while historically minorities have scored lower on tests designed for them to score low in the first place, they have managed to make major achievements and continue to do so every day. For example: Hundreds of HBCUs arose from the dust of slavery and segregation and matriculated scholar after scholar who challenged and changed the status quo of this nation every generation since. Likewise, over the last two decades the number of new Black and minority millionaires has risen to record highs. But we have an achievement gap? We do not have an achievement gap, we have an "acknowledgement gap." Perhaps we should acknowledge the achievements minorities make in this country every day, and have made from the meager beginnings of America. For many inner-city youth, it is an achievement if they make it to school and back home safely because statistics imply that they should have been dead years ago. Maybe we should truly accept and study our *complete* American history and not relegate Slavery, the Suffragettes, and the Civil Rights and Deinstitutionalization Movements to nothing more than footnotes in social studies textbooks. Perhaps we should fully acknowledge the social and political ramifications that have prevented our public education system from *ever* living up to or meeting its potential.

We are taking the wrong approach. We cannot make public education great by focusing on past glory that does not exist. We need to look forward.

Conclusion

Down the timeline, we the people have consistently elected and re-elected legislators and policymakers who adopted and supported a radically liberal social agenda. This agenda has undermined every element that composes effectual public education and sold American scholarship for a healthy serving of plenary indulgences and empty rhetoric. The guiding rhetoric of the educational policies enacted in the last five decades has bartered away instruction for ideology, product for presentation, aptitude for ambition, ethics for entitlements, standards for symbols, order for option, and knowledge for nothing.

Our government established a public education system by the people, for the people, and we the people, through our intellectual lethargy, have allowed it to descend into ill-repute. We holler for reform, but ignore or transform the facts and propagate fallacies to shift blame, spare egos, vilify heroes, and exalt mediocrity to assuage our desire to get as much as we can with the smallest possible amount of mental or financial expenditure. People cry foul when they feel their civil liberties are in jeopardy, but profusely refuse to perform their civic duties (e.g. voting and paying taxes) in staggeringly

high numbers. We accept every proffered excuse for disinterested and ill-mannered students and staff. Discipline is all but outlawed because almost every strategy we could use to establish and maintain order is practically criminal. Consequently, while other countries that impress in their citizens from birth the value of pure and thoughtful scholarly pursuits blitz forward and trail-blaze exciting and innovative academic avenues, America has made so few gains in the last few decades that we have unofficially renamed ourselves the United *Stagnates* of America.

We the people have elected and re-elected policymakers, with no teaching or practical educational experience aside from their own personal K-12 and/or college experiences, and actually tasked them to legislate the act of thinking out of public school policy and regulations. Teachers who dare require that their students use their own minds to solve their own problems in their efforts to reach their own social and academic goals are reprimanded and subjugated. They could also be subjected to political tactics that disenchant them and cause them to deign to do the work they love to teach and educate America's children and prepare them to be competitive on the world stage. We have revised the American intelligentsia's internalization of the Latin moral *cogito ergo sum*, posited by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau meaning "I think, therefore I am," to *Nos Censuimus Igitur Essemus*, meaning "We thought, therefore we were." When we began to legislate against the exercise of critical thought and self-reliance, through excessive and poorly thought out entitlement and incentive programs, we inadvertently created generations of non-thinkers and non-starters with the disease we refer to as learned helplessness. As such, they have spent generations proliferating and degrading the quality of the American scholar, and thus, American scholarship.

Consequently, the systemic failures of American public education can only be attributed to the gross negligence of the American public. We the people have failed to respond to, adopt, or adapt: (1) a realistic philosophy and (2) a respect for wisdom. Administrators impose "modern" empirical trends to treat the symptoms not fix the sources of the problems that have taken generations to develop and will take generations to resolve. School reformers are endeavoring to revolutionize and "reform" an imaginary national system. They focus their attention on procuring and retaining professionals who are (usually) knowledgeable of pedagogy and content. However, most severely lack the social and emotional intelligence to develop and maintain the relationships and therapeutic milieus necessary to effectuate student academic and personal achievement beyond general knowledge of assessment content and criteria.

Adopting or adapting a realistic philosophy is not a neoteric idea or concept. It is yet another inconvenient truth that Americans have been unwilling to accept and politicians and protagonists are, thus, less likely to explicate or even exploit. There are only a few pure academicians who have attempted to contribute to an honest dialogue, rooted in realistic and logical thinking, who are concerned with honestly and carefully raising the educational expectations of our children. Thankfully, there are a few dissentient, often disparaged, theorists and practitioners who will not be quieted by popular opinion or fallacious obloquy. Charles Murray, author of *The Bell Curve* and other honest conversation starters, bluntly states in his book *Real Education* (2008) that:

The [American] educational system is living a lie--that every child can be anything he or she wants to be. No one believes it, but we approach education's problems as if we did. We are phobic about saying out loud that children differ in their ability to learn the things that schools teach. Not only do we hate to say it, we get angry with people who do. We have idealized images of the potential that children bring to the

classroom and of our ability to realize that potential. When the facts get in the way, we ignore them (pp. 11 & 13).

For years, the public has often, mistakenly, beseeched the Federal Government for solutions (most often in the form of monetary funding). However, we should be reaching out to the bureaucracy that has the most lasting impact on, and greatest investment in, the education of America's children--the local citizenry. The local community is the American child's first line of contact and communication with American social, economic, political, and cultural schema. To further the American students' potential, parents, teachers, businessmen, neighbors, etc. need to fully participate in and contribute to, in accordance with their respective roles and responsibilities, the complete education of all children and not look to one group or entity to do the whole job with lip service and moral support.

Ironically, the very quality that makes America great is the very one ignored when we implement educational reform policies and agendas: America is diverse--a "melting pot," if you will. Each geographic region, state, county, and district is only mildly relatable to another. Nevertheless, politicians, non-profit organizations, and well-intentioned but naive philanthropists continuously attempt to collect, disaggregate, and compare invalid and unreliable standardized test data across regions with unlike demographics. Then they use the "results" to draw fallacious conclusions, inaccurate inferences, and make misguided decisions about teaching and learning in the American classroom. No consideration is given to the effects of the periods of time spent outside the classroom. There is no federal legislation regarding the accountability of the parent, student, or community for the education of their own children. Most legislative policies and rhetoric imply that the public school system (and not the public) is unilaterally responsible for our children's lack of achievement.

The purpose of this diatribe is to get the American people to "wake up and listen to and heed history and wisdom." Dissent, appropriately and necessarily, to ensure that qualified educators employ apodictic strategies that have stood the greatest test of time to effectively reach and teach our children. Eschew the pompous histrionics of the jejune doctrinaires allowed to run amok and wreak havoc in America's classrooms and thus on America's future. Let teachers teach. Use books for more than paperweights and minds and mouths for more than myopic regurgitation of quotidian rhetoric. Let teachers teach. Exemplify the meaning of philosophy and seek the love of wisdom. Rousseau wisely declared that the teacher's art consists in this: To turn the child's attention from trivial details and to guide his thoughts continually towards relations of importance which he will one day need to know, that he may judge rightly of good and evil in society. Real teaching is art. Real learning is science. America: expect the teachers to teach and the students to learn. Wake up and revive the spirit that believed that all are entitled to the ideals of freedom and equality and rejuvenate and reengineer the greatness that was, and could be again, the American scholar.