

partial abandonment of traditional recitations. But Nelson himself notes that teachers do many things sight unseen when the schoolroom door closes. Many scholars have noted that teaching styles vary enormously in different neighbourhood schools, no matter what central administration wants. Moreover, the poorest children have often had the most restricted education, one emphasizing rote memorization, filling in workbooks, and the like. When conservative critics after World War I lambasted Cooper and pushed him out of office, they most interestingly accused him of encouraging polly-parrot teaching methods. That was a lie. Whether progressive practices were as common as reports and speeches calling for their implementation nevertheless remains unclear. Even Nelson recognizes that efforts to change traditional teaching methods led to "mixed results" (p. 149), even though Cooper sincerely wanted to make students active and not passive learners.

*Good Schools* is such an enjoyable book to read and ponder that one continually wants more information and examples. Some of the chapters are very short and remain suggestive rather than persuasive. The 1920s zip along too quickly, making it difficult to appraise which progressive reforms remained intact and which ones the new efficiency reformers devastated. Indeed, the last chapter, covering 1922 to 1930, also leaps to the 1960s and even serves as a conclusion: all in eight pages, including notes.

These caveats should not obscure the many strengths and value of this case study. *Good Schools* recaptures

some of the vision of the pedagogical progressives, honours their legacy, and reminds us that perhaps better forms of school organization and political control occasionally existed in our urban past. Seattle did not have a golden age of education in the progressive era, but Bryce E. Nelson admirably restores some of the vitality and excitement of the age.

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**Ronald D. Cohen.** *Children of the Mill: Schooling and Society in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1960.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. Pp. xiv, 280. \$35 U.S.

What makes one city's school system worthy of a case study and important reading for those other than local history buffs? It may be a remarkable system: well known, or beset by particularly acute crises, or at the vanguard of educational change. Or it may be more typical of other cities' systems, but remarkable in the wealth of resources available for its study, and therefore able to shed light on the experience of students and teachers in school, the dynamics of educational change, and the links between schooling and historical change in the society at large. Initially, the Gary school system in the hands of Ronald Cohen ap-

appears to offer promise in both ways. Ultimately, it falls short.

On the political spectrum of educational historiography, Cohen professes an "inclination...to veer leftward," locating his account of the Gary schools "within the rather narrow framework of developing corporate capitalism" (p. xii). Yet he sets out to "tell the story of the Gary schools during the first half of the twentieth century in all of its manifest complexity" (p. xii). He identifies two broad themes: educational expansion, and the multiplicity of influences which shaped the school system over time.

*Children of the Mill* is organized into a set of chronologically arranged chapters, each of which covers five or ten years, beginning with the establishment of the Gary schools and the hiring of William Wirt as their first superintendent in 1906. Wirt, who remained until his death in 1938, was largely responsible for shaping the school system, and for its fame as a showcase for Progressive educational theory. The "Gary plan" or the "work-study-play" system or the "platoon system," devised and implemented by Wirt, was the object of tremendous interest prior to World War I and into the 1920s.

The platoon system combined administrative efficiency with the promise of a broad curriculum by expanding the number of subject offerings while moving students from room to room and teacher to teacher, including the elementary grades. The length of the school-day and school year were expanded in order to provide the Gary school-age population, children of the

immigrant workers at U.S. Steel's new plant, with the maximum exposure to the beneficial influences of the institutions. Manual training, vocational education, an active playground programme, a Department of Civic and Moral Education, and an adult night-school programme (enrolling three-quarters as many students as the day programme) soon rounded out a broad mission of Americanizing education. By 1912 the Gary schools were receiving national and international exposure through Progressive information networks. John Dewey approved of the experiment; Randolph Bourne wrote articles for the *New Republic* and a full-length book on the schools. Publicity was heightened by Wirt's controversial consultancy to the New York public schools under the Progressive administration of John Purroy Mitchel, and by a Rockefeller Foundation survey. The latter, under the direction of Abraham Flexner, gave the Gary system mixed reviews in its 1918 report. Cohen summarizes: "the theory was sound, the practice (administration) somewhat faulty" (p.58).

Wirt largely dismissed the report's criticisms, and enjoyed heightened publicity in the 1920s, mainly as a consequence of the support of Alice Barrows of the U.S. Bureau of Education. National conferences on the platoon system were followed by an organization (the National Association for the Study of the Platoon or Work-Study-Play School Organization) in 1925, and a journal (*The Platoon School*) in 1927. The depression constricted the Gary schools, but Wirt managed to open Gary College in the

midst of the thirties. After Wirt's death in 1938, the innovative features of the city's system—no longer truly innovations after a quarter-century—were gradually dismantled by a succession of new superintendents, until the last of the work-study-play arrangements in the mid-1950s.

Lest it sound, from this account, that most of *Children of the Mill* deals directly with the work-study-play system and its reputation beyond the city, it should be said that this is only one of a number of themes. Each chapter also recounts the city's demographic changes, school population growth, political struggles over school control, administrative shifts, school building construction, teachers' organizing efforts, and race relations as they affected the schools. The latter forms one of the most interesting stories of the book. At the outset, black students were segregated in rented facilities, and segregated, inferior facilities for blacks generally characterized the system through the years under study, though these conditions sparked considerable controversy and protest on a number of occasions. In 1927, a student strike in response to new enrolments of black students in the white Emerson school led to a system of almost 100 percent segregation. Twenty years later, in response to a mildly integrationist school board initiative which would have allowed blacks to attend all-white schools in their neighbourhoods, white Emerson students again went on strike. Although the strikers lost to a school board supported by a wide range of community groups, the schools remained highly segregated, and be-

came more so: in 1951 85 percent of the schools were segregated; in 1961 90 percent (p. 229). By 1988, due to "white flight," in a school population of about 26,000, there remained fewer than 500 white students (p. 241).

Cohen's major problem in presenting this story is his choice of chronological organization. Each chapter, dealing with five or ten years, contains one short episode in the story of race relations, one in the story of teacher organization, one in the struggles over school board control, one in demographic change, school construction, fiscal constraints, curriculum change, and so on. Each chapter is introduced by an abbreviated anecdote from one of the themes, and strung together with transparent and sometimes awkward transitions. Cohen follows his sources closely, and what emerges is a highly empirical account, an awkward weaving of themes whose relationship to each other is generally not manifest. Devoting only several paragraphs to each theme in each chapter, Cohen's analysis is spread thin. Aside from the occasionally dramatic moments—as in the student strikes—the reader feels dragged through an empirically dense but analytically impoverished set of chronologically arranged details. Even the chronology is stretched by this mode of organizing the work: we learn, with little comment, of the "sudden death" of the central character, William Wirt, on page 144. On page 147, he is back in action dealing with the struggles of two black administrators to cope with the pressures from an integrationist/segregationist split in the black community through

the 1930s. He dies suddenly, again, on page 153.

The organization leaves even central questions with insufficient analysis. On the question of the meaning of the Gary plan for students, in relation to the "developing corporate capitalism" in whose shadow the school system, according to Cohen, developed, we get very little: it was "controversial" (p. 54) but we do not get a sense of the issues: who was against it? Wirt's successor, Herbert S. Jones, "would doggedly cling to the platoon plan" (p. 154) but we do not know why, nor why it was opposed. Again, when Superintendent Blankenship ended the system in the 1950s, some parents protested, arguing that "the Wirt system was 'tailored more to the individual,' while the present system is 'tailored more for the mass.'" (p. 233). We have no idea why they felt this way or whether Cohen agrees with them. The last sentence of the afterword offers only this frustrating note: "Perhaps a return to the old work-study-play plan would make the elementary schools at least more interesting, if not actually increasing the students' academic, cultural, and social skills. Perhaps." (p. 244).

There are two important stories embedded in this account of the Gary schools. One, prominent in the first three decades, involves Progressive educational innovation in a city developed and planned by a large corporation for an immigrant worker population. Because the corporation was Elbert Gary's U.S. Steel, at the very centre of U.S. corporate capitalism, because the city and the school system were built from scratch,

because the innovations were so closely tied to Progressive educational networks, and because the system was so closely scrutinized and studied in its early years, Gary is fertile ground for the educational historian. But why, after a 1942 Purdue University study of the district advised the Gary schools to "settle down and be just yourselves" (quoted on p. 160) should we continue to be interested? Because—and this is the second story—the progressive Gary school system was assembled on a racist foundation, and the segregated system survived a series of liberal initiatives to integrate (including the first NAACP suit against a Northern school district for school segregation).

Unfortunately, filling in these two stories with the details of the ongoing development of the school system does little to deepen their analytical power or broaden the kinds of questions they would help us to answer. In fact, by pulling these stories over a chronological rack, Cohen stretches them thin rather than concentrating them.

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**J.R. Miller.** *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Pp. 330. \$35.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

When E. Palmer Patterson completed his survey, *The Canadian In-*