

REVIEW ESSAY/ESSAI CRITIQUE

Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

Reviewed by Sol Cohen

I

American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980 concludes a project begun almost twenty-five years ago with *American Education: The Colonial Experience 1606-1783*, and continued with *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*.¹ Taken together, this trilogy represents the most imposing contribution to the historiography of American education of our time. *The Metropolitan Experience* by itself is a seminal work in American educational historiography.²

Like the previous volumes of *American Education*, *The Metropolitan Experience* is a huge book, almost 700 pages, excluding the 70-page bibliographical essay. It is divided into four parts: The Moral Commonwealth, The Progressive Nation, The Informed Society, and A Metropolitan Education. *The Metropolitan Experience* is not structured in a linear fashion as a consecutive narrative, but rather as a series of studies or snapshots of the American educational terrain, each of the four studies or snapshots virtually complete in itself, each moving chronologically from past to present, from 1876-1980.

The Metropolitan Experience is a rich and learned text; Cremin's breadth of knowledge is staggering. The book is almost impossible to summarize. An equally difficult task is to elucidate what it might mean. Here we rely for help on several intellectual historians who have been influenced by Structuralist or textualist reading strategies. We will assume with La Capra that reading is fundamentally an interpretive act, that there are a plurality of meanings in any strong or complex text, that different reading strategies will constitute a text in different ways, that read in different contexts a text takes on different meanings, and finally that it is the readers, that is, in this case, the reviewer's responsibility, to select the context(s) in which best to situate a text. We will assume with White that there is no single correct view of any object under study but many correct views, each requiring its own style of representation. And we will assume with Hollinger that a text, regardless of its author's intention, should be read as an event or act of participation in the discourse of its time; the text's function in the discourse is its meaning.³

This review will be structured, like *The Metropolitan Experience*, as a series of studies. Its purpose is to convey a sense of the book's structure, scope, and contents while elucidating what it might mean. How do we propose to "make sense" of *The Metropolitan Experience*? Cremin's focus is an wide-angled one; his definition of education, latitudinarian. We will narrow the focus to the public

school and the seemingly intractable historiographical problem of Progressive education. We intend to situate *The Metropolitan Experience* within the context of the present crisis in American education and the emergence in the early 1980s of the excellence movement, a neo-conservative, anti-or-counterprogressive school reform movement. *The Metropolitan Experience* is not overtly concerned with the present moment in American education, yet the whole book speaks to the present.

II

Cremin views "metropolitanization" as the *leit-motif* of American development in this century, when the United States became a nation of cities and at the same time an exporter of culture to the world. As in the previous volumes of *American Education*, Professor Cremin defines his subject broadly "as the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes and sensibilities, as well as any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended," no matter the site or by whom or through what agency. Cremin's latitudinarian or unconstrained view of education as a varied, complex, and omnipresent human activity allows him to call attention to the multifarious agencies—public and private, formal and informal, secular and religious—that have educated the American people over the years: family and household, churches, synagogues, libraries, museums, agricultural fairs, farms, settlement houses, Y's, boy and girl scouts, the Salvation Army, factories and shops, the armed forces, book publishing houses, radio and advertising, movies and television.

Cremin explores the interaction of ethno-religious configurations of education with public education and all public educative agencies, the role of progressive movements in education, the rise of the media of popular communication as critically important agencies of education, the metamorphosis of libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions from essentially custodial institutions with ancillary educational functions into primarily educational institutions, the conversion of informal, short-term educational endeavours in agriculture, business, industry, and the military into well-organized programmes of education that affected millions over extended periods of time, and the ways in which Americans transplanted American educative institutions around the globe.

Cremin casts his net so wide that *The Metropolitan Experience* almost becomes a history of American culture in the twentieth century. *The Metropolitan Experience* expands the familiar gallery of American educators to include people as diverse as Herbert Croly, Walter Lippmann, Gilbert Seldes, Lewis Mumford, Theodore Caplow, Fritz Machlup, Marshall McLuhan, Gunnar Myrdal, Reinhold Niebuhr, Joseph Pulitzer, Charlotte Gilman, William Randolph Hearst, Martin Luther King, Jr., James Harvey Robertson, Fred Friendly, Edward R. Murrow, W.E.B. DuBois, Benjamin Spock, Harvey Cox, Kenneth B. Clark, and Margaret Mead, and expands the canon of educational texts to include works

like Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, Croly's *The Promise of American Life*, Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine*, Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*, Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, Robinson's *The Humanizing of Knowledge*, and Mead's *The School in American Culture*. It also contains discussions of the Works Progress Administration, the U.S. Children's Bureau, the NAACP, the Southern Education Board, the Bell Laboratories, The Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial, *The World*, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Even this enumeration hardly does justice to the sweep of *The Metropolitan Experience*.

One highlight of *The Metropolitan Experience* is Part I, The Moral Commonwealth, in which Cremin discusses religion and ethno-religious "configurations of education." Cremin depicts the interest of religious groups in education with insight, thoughtfulness, and sensitivity. He demonstrates that the Protestant churches have always been interested in education: the education of their own flock in their own institutions, and, deriving from a sense of stewardship for the destiny of the Republic, the education offered the public in the public common school and other public educative agencies. Towards the turn of the century, the Protestant churches had to come to grips with the new metropolitan America coming into being. Cremin depicts the efforts of a "modern," the Rev. Washington Gladden, to create an education relevant for metropolitan America.⁴ Gladden's hopes lay in a configuration of education comprising family and household (where children would learn the rudiments of discipline, morality, and basic literacy); the public school (responsible for the child's education in social habits and aims, patriotism and citizenship, and the formation of character); and the church, Sunday School, and the religious press (which would inculcate Christian doctrine). The increasing secularization of the Protestant church as it tried to accommodate the social and welfare needs of the urban, largely immigrant population, as well as the increasing secularization of all educative agencies, galvanized Fundamentalists like Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey. Skirmishes between "fundamentalists" and "moderns" were fought out in churches, schools, and colleges, in a number of state legislatures, and culminated in the Scopes trial of 1925.

The facts of the Scopes trial are well known and usually caricatured: hapless William Jennings Bryan humiliated by the clever Clarence Darrow. Cremin will have none of this. He points out that the real issue at stake in Scopes was not Darrow's "preventing bigots and ignoramuses from controlling the education of the United States...and that is all."⁵ Rather, the issue had to do with parental rights and local control. Bryan believed that parents and local communities should be able to determine the character of the education given their children and that a minority of intellectuals had no right to use the courts to impose its views on parents and the community. Cremin quotes Bryan: "The (local) majority is not trying to establish a religion or teach it—it is trying to protect itself from the effort of an insolent minority to force irreligion upon the children under the guise of teaching science." What right, continued Bryan, "has a little

irresponsible oligarchy of self-styled 'intellectuals' to demand control of the schools of the United States."⁶ Cremin concludes his discussion of Scopes with a series of questions. Who should control our local public schools? What are the relative responsibilities of the education profession, the experts, the "intellectuals," parents, and lay people? What should be taught in a system of public education? Do public tax-supported schools have the right to teach children beliefs that controvert the beliefs of their parents? The issues, Cremin observes, were not resolved at Dayton and they continue to divide the American people.

Cremin depicts how the interest of the Protestant churches in education, the public's education and public education, as well as in religious education, was to continue from Gladden and Josiah Strong to George Albert Coe to Lankey to Moody to Reinhold Neibuhr to James D. Smart to Will Herberg to Harvey Cox, while eventually all the churches and religions in America organized or expanded their own educative agencies to meet the challenge of metropolitanized America. Cremin goes on to describe the Afro-American, Italian-American, Irish-American, German-American, Jewish-American, and Hispanic-American ethno-religious configurations of education, which included, besides the public schools and public institutions of higher education, churches and synagogues, religious full or part-time elementary schools, secondary schools and colleges and universities, Sabbath schools, Y's and youth clubs, Bible Institutes, as well as the prodigious output of the ethnic and religious press, radio, and television.

Part I of *The Metropolitan Experience* contains a number of startling implications. One, that it is time to abandon the "founding myth" of the common school.⁷ A multitude of private and religious educative agencies besides the common school have participated in advancing (or thwarting) America's hopes and aspirations. Two, that we cannot understand present-day American education without understanding the deep commitment that religious groups in America have always had and still have to education; that is, to their own network of religious educational institutions, the public education, and to all the institutions that educate the public. Three, that religious groups and ethno-religious groups have always been concerned that educative agencies, public or private, teach traditional values. And finally, that the constituency of the public school is narrower than many Americans had previously thought; the allegiance of ethno-religious groups to the public school, especially at times when traditional values seem to be in decline or threatened, cannot be taken for granted. That is, one can read Part I of *The Metropolitan Experience* as saying that the roots of the common public school in America are not so deep that they cannot be pulled up, and in any event the ethno-religious educative agencies, or ethno-religious "configurations of education," are so plentiful, so ubiquitous and extensive, that if the roots of the public school are pulled up, the consequences may not be so dire as partisans of the public school think.

Cremin's chapter on the rise of the media of mass communication in Part II of *The Metropolitan Experience*: the new journalism, book publishing, radio, advertising, motion pictures, and mass television, "perhaps the most revolution-

ary educational development” of this century, is an overview of a vast subject, but richly suggestive. The average weekly attendance at the cinema in the late 1940s was around 90,000,000. In the early 1970s there were 7,500 commercial radio stations broadcasting to a weekly audience of close to 100,000,000. The audience for television was even greater.⁸ Cremin emphasizes that the mass media is more than entertainment. All educate, all convey information, teach values, and nurture sensibilities. What these were or are, however, is only hinted at. Each of the media of popular communication, as educative agencies with their own curricula, their own teaching methods, their own texts, their own teachers, their own “vernaculars” and moral and cultural commitments, are worthy of book length treatment.

Cremin’s description of the educational life of New York City, which comprises almost the whole of Part IV, a Metropolitan Education, is another highlight of *The Metropolitan Experience*. Cremin eschews the tradition of anti-urbanism in the history of American thought.⁹ He is an unabashed urbanist, especially where it comes to New York City, that is, Manhattan, which he uses as the exemplar of metropolitanism, the “archetypical metropolis” with “archetypical configurations of education.”¹⁰ He brilliantly evokes a sense of the mind-boggling educational opportunities the city provides, free or nearly so and plentiful—museums, book stores, cinemas, concert halls, theatres, and art galleries, as well as every conceivable sort of academy, school, and college. Cremin evokes equally well the profound localism and parochialism of many New Yorkers brought up in the Bronx, Brownsville, or Harlem who rarely strayed far from their neighbourhood and its configurations of education, and for whom, like the youngster from Brooklyn in Woody Allen’s “Radio Days,” a trip to Times Square or Radio City Music Hall or Central Park was an adventure to a foreign world.

By now we know that educative agencies in America other than the public school were and are multitudinous. But an atavistic instinct in us still asks, “What about the public school and public education?” The relevant material is largely contained in Cremin’s discussion of Progressivism in American education in Parts II and III of *The Metropolitan Experience*.

On Progressivism in American education, Cremin travels familiar ground to those who know his *The Transformation of The School*. Even here, *The Metropolitan Experience* contains many surprises, even revelations. Cremin depicts Progressivism in education as “the prevailing philosophy of American education” during this century. He observes that John Dewey’s pedagogical ideas became increasingly influential in educational reform circles and a commonplace of intellectuals in the pre-World War I period and his “progressive philosophy of education was so successful as to have become pervasive” in the post-World War II years.¹¹ As to the contributions of Dewey and the progressives in education, Cremin is determinedly positive but provides enough material for a close reader to arrive at another, much more critical judgement.

Cremin praises Dewey's and the progressive school reformers' egalitarianism and their desire to popularize and extend public education to groups formerly excluded or neglected or discriminated against, as well as their humanitarian zeal to advance the public welfare through the public school. However, *The Metropolitan Experience* can also be read as making the point that Dewey and educational progressives bear the brunt of responsibility for the "politicization" of public education, that is, the deliberate attempt to use the public school as an agency to achieve particular social or political ends and for casting the public school as a surrogate or legatee institution responsible for the total welfare of children and youth as if it were some sort of omnipotent agency. It was Dewey who proclaimed that "education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform."¹² It was Dewey who cast the public school "as the pre-eminent lever of reform" for achieving "an intentionally progressive society."¹³ That is to say, as Cremin bluntly or indiscreetly puts it, later in the text, for achieving "a democratic socialist society."¹⁴ And it was Dewey who implicitly issued the challenge, later (in the 1930s) made explicit by George S. Counts and the Social Frontier clique: "Dare the School Build a New Social Order."

One unanticipated result of Dewey's and the Progressives' educational theorizing, Cremin concludes, was that it helped create the "consciously politicized school on which Americans of all persuasions...increasingly pinned their millennial hopes and expectations."¹⁵ Cremin drops the point here. But one might continue like this: now any and all interest groups, not just the religious, were given an opening to complain that the public schools were not teaching a consensual public philosophy or were in fact teaching some kind of particular political ideology or secular religion.

Cremin's discussion of the assumption of surrogate, especially familial or parental, responsibilities by the public school in America in this century in "Child Saving and Social Service Agencies," chapter six of *The Metropolitan Experience*, is provocative and valuable. He describes how various progressive groups and thinkers, especially those connected with the child study and social settlement movements, turned to the public school as the primary agency for solving the social ills of metropolitan America, especially those which victimized children and youth. Progressives were convinced that in the metropolis, the supervisory, custodial, and educational functions traditionally performed by church, neighbourhood, or shop were no longer being performed; somehow they must get done; therefore the public school would have to take them on.

What about the Progressives and parents and the family? Cremin observes that early twentieth-century Progressives were "deeply ambivalent" about the competence of parents in general and about immigrant parents in particular; "they never really trusted the mother."¹⁶ Cremin delineates, with Joseph Lee as the notable exception, the parent-blaming tendencies of Progressives. While proclaiming the primacy of familial education, Progressives dismissed parents, home, community, and social and health agencies and insisted that the public

elementary school would have to assume responsibility for every phase of the child's welfare. Compulsory education laws brought children into the school; the school would have to educate "the whole child". This, too, is a legacy of Dewey and of Progressivism in American education.¹⁷

Cremin goes on to describe the Progressives' concern for the plight of adolescents in metropolis and how they were led to a conception of the public high school in America as a legatee institution as well.¹⁸ The idea of the high school as legatee was articulated in 1918 in that "exemplary progressive document" (Cremin's phrase), the National Education Association's *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, in which the function of the high school becomes as broad as life itself, and which assumes that adolescents needed help in the areas of health, work, family living, citizenship, and leisure time, and that instruction in problems of living had to take priority over instruction in academic subjects.¹⁹ Cremin observes that the "Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education" foreshadowed much that was to come in American secondary education. One assumes that this includes the Progressive Education Association's agenda for reconstructing the high school in the 1930s (summed up in the slogan "meeting the needs of adolescence") as well as the "life adjustment education" (for all American youth) movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

III

Cremin does not draw any conclusions for the present situation in American education from his discussion of educational progressivism, but they are inescapable. *The Metropolitan Experience*, as we observed above, is not overtly concerned with the present situation in American education, but texts, regardless of their authors' stated intentions, may be read as events or acts of participation in the discourse of their time. Following this textualist strategy, one way to read *The Metropolitan Experience* is to ask how it functions in the current debate about educational reform in America.

Cremin's discussion of Progressivism in American education takes on added meaning if read in the context of the emergence of the excellence movement, which we can date from 1983 and the publication of The National Commission on Excellence in Education's much-heralded *A Nation At Risk*. With its sensational assertion that "the educational foundations of American society are being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity," and "our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them," *A Nation At Risk* tapped into a deep and wide reservoir of public concern over traditional values as well as the quality of public schooling in America.²⁰ *A Nation At Risk* called for a renewed emphasis in the public school on standards, character, discipline, a basic or core curriculum, the inculcation of a core set of ethical and moral values, and of a common national culture, and became the manifesto of the excellence

movement. *The Metropolitan Experience* provides an essential context in which to understand the emergence of that movement.²¹

For example, one enduring effect of the progressive movement in American education is the widely-held notion that the public school should assume ever-expanding responsibility for the care of children and youth as if it were omnicompetent. The public school gradually took on more and more responsibilities for the care of the young with a consequent diminution of parental rights and responsibilities and expansion of the responsibilities of the school and the teacher. With its reminder of the humanitarian, child-saving thrust of Progressivism in American education, *The Metropolitan Experience* helps explain the appeal of the idea of the school as legatee as well as the otherwise curious unwillingness of American educationists to set limits to the public school's field of operations. On the other hand, it helps explain how the excellence movement can justifiably claim that the mission and purpose of the public school is confused and unfocused.²² At the same time, by emphasizing the multitude of agencies which educate the American people, *The Metropolitan Experience* may lead its readers to conclude, with the excellence movement, that if the public school were relieved of its grandiose pretensions to educate "the whole child," it might be able to concentrate on those things it can do better or more efficiently than any other educative agency.

About what the priorities or particular tasks of the public school, as contrasted to any other educative agency, are, or should be, an issue he himself raises in *The Metropolitan Experience*, Cremin is vague. His vagueness or reticence about just what the public school can reasonably be expected to teach in the area of subject-matter or in the area of instructional outcomes may be said to be deliberate because for Cremin there are more fundamental questions about educational aims and purposes which have to be debated first. For Cremin, the American *paideia* is "still in the making."²³ Questions about what knowledge or what values, skills, or sensibilities the public school should transmit cannot be answered until the larger questions of the kind of society we want to live in and our children to live in are debated. Cremin believes that "we (in America) need a broad and encompassing debate" on education.²⁴ *The Metropolitan Experience* is in part an attempt to invigorate the debate. This it may and should accomplish, but probably not in ways intended by Professor Cremin. Regardless of his intentions—and his sympathies are clearly with Progressivism in education, his intention clearly to advance the cause—*The Metropolitan Experience* will give aid and comfort to the excellence movement; it speaks especially to the necessity for the contestation of progressive educational thought.

IV

In *The Metropolitan Experience* Cremin proposes to give "substantial attention to ideas about education, not as disembodied notions or as mere rationalizations of existential reality, but rather as moving forces that operate within a social

context, that compete for attention, that profoundly affect what people believe is possible and desirable in the realm of education." And in other works Cremin has also affirmed his belief that ideas made a difference, and that "the most meaningful intellectual histories are precisely those that come to grips with the processes by which ideas become moving forces in the social world."²⁵ However, his treatment of ideas is, on the one hand, the least satisfactory part of *The Metropolitan Experience*, and on the other hand, ultimately the most revealing.

At critical moments in *The Metropolitan Experience*, Cremin defers to the observable, quantifiable, and statistical, notably in his discussion of change in American education. *The Metropolitan Experience* depicts many "revolutions" and "transformations" in American education in this century. Some of these have to do with the multitudinousness of educative agencies, the changing nature of the American family and household, the civil rights movement, the rapid growth of the knowledge industries, and the emergence of the mass media of communication as pervasive educator of the American people. So far as the "transformations" and "revolutions" wrought in American schooling, as such, are concerned, *The Metropolitan Experience* cites data like the expansion in school and college and university enrolments, the diversification of the curriculum, the introduction of the junior high school and the kindergarten, the increased utilization of activity and small-group teaching methods, the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials in general, the modification of school architecture, and the introduction of health services and vocational and psychological counselling. The point is not whether one can or should call these educational developments "transformations" or "revolutions." Let us even grant that they are. But the positivistic lens through which Cremin perceives change in American education is unable to pick up the deeper processes of transformation and revolution which occurred in the language of American educational discourse.

Certainly, given his lengthy discussions of the language of education during the colonial period in *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783*, and of Republican "styles" or "vernaculars" of educational thought (by "vernaculars" Cremin means traditions or structures of language) in the national period in *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*, Cremin is well aware of the significance of language as an historical datum. But there are many ways to chart the territory of educational languages and traditions. In *The Metropolitan Experience*, Cremin emphasizes the development of Progressivism in American educational thought in the twentieth century in terms of continuity, as if Progressive education were a progress, a movement toward the present, the continuation and culmination of a tradition of educational thought going forward or up from the Founding Fathers to Margaret Mead, as if Progressivism were the only American educational tradition. This interpretive frame does not, cannot, allow Cremin to draw out the full potential of the study of educational language, "styles," or "vernaculars." Language has more explanatory power than Cremin realized; he could have transcribed much more of his account of transformations

and revolutions in American schooling into the terms of language. It is in this respect, that *The Metropolitan Experience* may be said to be incomplete.

How might *The Metropolitan Experience* be completed? As Robert Darnton correctly observes, intellectual history has no consensual agenda.²⁶ Nevertheless, with all diffidence, I would like to suggest how, with just one turn of the interpretive frame, *The Metropolitan Experience* might have been completed. While Professor Cremin was working out his own innovative approach to intellectual history in volumes I and II of *American Education* ("styles," "vernaculars"), a handful of intellectual historians like J.G.A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, among others, were at the same time moving language and discourse even more radically into the centre of the subject-matter and methodology of history of ideas.

The way to track a revolution, if we take Pocock's "Languages and Their Implications" as our guide, is through study of languages or language systems and their transformation.²⁷ Pocock views change in the history of ideas along the lines of Kuhn's model of scientific revolutions: not cumulative and linear, but discontinuous; not evolutionary but revolutionary. Pocock rejects the notion of progression or of continuity between past and present where history of ideas is concerned as having little heuristic value and urges historians to think in terms of opposition, rupture, and discontinuity. Pocock's underlying strategy is to pre-figure the field of ideas as comprised of alternative and competing language. Fundamental change in the history of ideas takes the form of a revolution in which one system of language replaces another. In turn, language is closely linked to power. Language is power or a mode of exerting power, the object of a struggle for power, and one of the decisive stakes of power. The challenge to the historian of ideas is to identify the critical changes in the language(s) of discourse, the critical shifts in language hegemony.

What if we were to transpose Pocock's conceptual methodology, worked out on the history of political thought, to the history of American educational thought? What if we were to define the focus of our study as the history of the language(s) or vernacular(s) of educational discourse and their transformations? What if we were to study educational transformations and revolutions solely in terms of language? What if we were to pre-figure the field of educational thought as comprised of opposing and competing languages vying for hegemony? What if we were to privilege or foreground discontinuity, displacements, and breaks in our study of the language(s) of educational discourse? I believe if Cremin had incorporated this perspective into *The Metropolitan Experience*, the consequences would have been far-reaching. He would have reinforced his contention that ideas make a difference, and most significantly, *The Metropolitan Experience* would have included one more revolution in American education, a revolution in the language of educational discourse, the displacement of one language or language system by another, the displacement of what we will call the "Classical" tradition in American educational thought by the Progressive.

Cremin asserts that by the late 1940s progressive education “was surely the prevailing philosophy of American education,” and that “in the end, the congeries of reform efforts wrought major transformations in the nature and character of American schooling.” By the late 1940s and 1950s “progressive education had become the conventional wisdom in the United States, espoused by lay people as well as professionals and embodied in the very language used to debate educational policy and practice.” Precisely. But there is something missing in *The Metropolitan Experience*. What educational philosophy did Progressivism in American education prevail over? And what was the educational tradition in place which Progressivism in American education transformed? And what was the language used to debate educational policy in times past in the United States before progressive education became the conventional wisdom? When the questions are posed like this, the answer is obvious: the “styles” of educational thought and language and the “vernaculars” of education which Cremin depicted in the previous two volumes of *American Education*. Here *The Metropolitan Experience* is silent. Again, the problem is that Cremin’s interpretive frame emphasizes continuity in educational thought—it is all Progressivism—and cannot accommodate discontinuity or the idea of education as a field comprised of competing and alternative “vernaculars” or language systems vying for hegemony. But movements of thought have to be defined with reference not only to what they contain or advocate but to what they leave out, repudiate, or oppose.

Progressive education has to be defined with reference not only to what it stands for but to what it opposed. We cannot fully understand progressive education unless we see it in opposition to its predecessor, the Classical tradition. And that is what is missing in *The Metropolitan Experience*—a discussion of the classical “style,” or “vernaculars,” or languages of education which educational progressivism opposed and which by the 1950s it displaced—and that is why it may be called incomplete.²⁸

There is not enough space here to sketch the discursive landscape of American education from the colonial period to the present (which Cremin has in effect almost done for us in the three volumes of *American Education*). But let us set down a few specimens of educational language taken from different moments of American educational history. The succession from John Adams to Thomas Jefferson to Noah Webster to Horace Mann to William Torrey Harris is linear, a continuity, a progression. But once past Harris we see something different, a rupture or break, a displacement, a radical discontinuity, a revolution. Since it is essential that we play close attention to the specific language or rhetoric, we must quote extensively.

From America’s colonial period (*American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783*), take the language of John Adams on the education of his children: “Train them to virtue. Habituate them to industry, activity and spirit.” Or Caldwellader Colden on education: “I think the power of a nation consists in the knowledge and virtue of its inhabitants.” Or from Jefferson: “Illuminate so far as practicable the minds of the people at large, more especially to give them

knowledge of those facts, which history exhibits, that, if possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes." Or from Noah Webster: "It is the business of Americans to select the wisdom of all nations as the basis of her constitutions, to avoid their errors,...to promote virtue and patriotism,...to embellish and improve the sciences,...to diffuse a uniformity and purity of language, to add superior dignity to this infant empire and to human nature." Cremin concludes that in the colonial period among the Founding Fathers there was widespread agreement on the goal of creating a republican form of government "that would be free but also virtuous," and that "to ensure both freedom and virtue, the citizenry would require education."²⁹ Note the key words: freedom, virtue, knowledge, enlightenment, wisdom, patriotism.

What about the "republican style" of educational language and thought which emerged during the first century of America's national existence? Take Horace Mann who, according to Cremin (in *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*), "accepted the propositions of the Republican style of educational thought, and recast them in the forms of nineteenth-century non-denominational Protestantism," and who "articulated a characteristic American theory of education":

Never will wisdom preside in the halls of legislature and its profound utterances be recorded on the pages of the statute book until common schools...create a more far-seeing intelligence and purer morality than has ever existed among communities of men.

Cremin cites the key terms used by Mann to describe the ends of republican education: "self-government"; "self-control"; and "a voluntary compliance with the laws of reason and duty."³⁰ Cremin summarizes the "republican style" in American education. Its aim was the creation of "a new republican individual, of virtuous character, abiding patriotism and prudent wisdom, fashioned into an independent yet loyal citizen." A proper republican education "consisted of the diffusion of knowledge, the nurturance of virtue (including patriotic civility) and the cultivation of learning."³¹ Note the continuity in the language of educational discourse from the colonial period.

Still in *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876*, Cremin begins and ends his Epilogue with quotes from William Torrey Harris, the "commanding figure of his era," and "far and away the leading educator of his time" (1859-1909), the educator who, in the late nineteenth century, best articulated the consensus of the public school movement in America. Here we must cite in its entirety the long quote with which Cremin concludes the Epilogue (from Harris, *The Theory of Education*, 1898):

It will be readily granted that textbook education begins earlier and forms a more important feature in this country than elsewhere.

The justification for this I find in the development of our national idea and is founded on no new principle, but fundamentally it is the same as that agreed upon all the world over. Education should excite in the most ready way the powers of the pupil to self-activity. Not what the teacher does for him, but what he is made to do for himself, is of value. Although this lies at the bottom of other national ideas it is not so explicitly recognized as in our own. It is in an embryonic state in those; in ours it has unfolded and realized itself so that we are everywhere and always impelled by it to throw responsibility on the individual. Hence, our theory is: The sooner we can make the youth able to pursue his course of culture for himself, the sooner may we graduate him from the school. To give him the tools of thought is our province. When we have initiated him into the technique of learning, he may be trusted to pursue his course for himself.

It is the faith of Americans that they will be able to accomplish all that any other civilization can do, besides adding thereto a culture in free individuality to an extent hitherto unattained. A civilization wherein all can partake in the subjugation of the elements, and possess a competence at such easy terms as to leave the greater part of life for higher culture, is the goal to which every American confidently looks.

The common man shall be rich in conquests over the material world of time and space, and not only this but over the world of mind, the heritage of culture, the realized intelligence of all mankind.³²

The key words in Harris' educational discourse are virtue, character, discipline, self-restraint, self-activity, knowledge, rationality, the free individual, culture, the tools of learning. Harris stands for "a general, cultural, humanistic education for all," an education that would nurture "character and intellect."³³ There is a continuity from the Founding Fathers to Harris in terms of language, style of thought, vernacular. In *The Metropolitan Experience*, Professor Cremin locates Harris in his chapter on "Modes of Progressivism." But to define Harris as a "progressive" lacks heuristic value. Harris represents the culmination of the classical epoch in the history of American educational "style," "vernacular," or language of educational discourse, and the end of an era. To repeat, what follows after Harris is not a succession or a progression, but a rupture, a break, a radical discontinuity; a revolution.

Whatever else they may be, as La Capra puts it, texts are events in the history of language. The new era, the Progressive era, begins with Dewey's *School and Society* (1899):

Make each one of our schools an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society and permeated throughout with the spirit of government, history and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the

spirit of service and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious.

Listen to Dewey's language from *Democracy and Education* (1916), which Cremin considers Dewey's greatest educational work: American democracy required an education that would nurture

a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure changes without introducing disorder.

Or, still from *Democracy and Education*:

The idea of perfecting an "inner" personality is a sure sign of social divisions. What is called inner is simply that which does not connect with others....What is termed spiritual culture has usually been futile, with something rotten about it, just because it has been conceived as a thing which a man might have internally—and therefore exclusively. What one is as a person is what one is as associated with others in a free give and take of intercourse.

Now, we turn to the language of *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (1918)—that, as Cremin puts it, "exemplary progressive document" which foreshadowed so much that was to come in American secondary education:

It is the firm belief of this commission [The NEA's Commission on the Re-organization of Secondary Education], that secondary education in the United States should aim at nothing less than complete and worthy living for all youth.

Or, from the same document:

The purpose of democracy is so to organize society that each member may develop his potential primarily through activities designed for the well-being of his fellow members and society as a whole.

Finally, in the interest of space, skipping over the pronouncements of the Progressive Education Association in the 1930s or the Educational Policies Commission in the 1940s, let us move on to Margaret Mead, whom Cremin regards as a significant modern, progressive theorist of education, to whom he accords primacy as an educational theorist in *The Metropolitan Experience* second only to John Dewey, and of whom he concludes that she "quite literally changed the ways in which people (in America in the post World War II period) conceived of education itself."³⁴ Mead calls for a new kind of education for

"Island Earth," and education for a "trans-national" or "world-wide shared culture," a culture "ever in the making," a culture to be created by "the inclusion of diverse people at every stage in the development of every significant activity."³⁵ Mead calls for "the 'lateral' transmission of knowledge"; that is, "a sharing of knowledge by the informed with the uninformed, whatever their ages." Mead calls for an education in which people would be "taught how to think, not what to think" and teachers would be trained "for a totally new kind of teaching—a teaching of a readiness to use unknown ways to solve unknown problems."³⁶

Cremin, seemingly unaware of how transparently "politicized" Mead's educational agenda is or that anyone could find it appalling, ends *The Metropolitan Experience* with these cryptic, quasi-mystical utterances. It will come as no revelation to readers of previous volumes of *American Education* that public education is involved with "politics." But we have come a long way from John Adams and Caldwell Colden or Thomas Jefferson or Horace Mann and their conception of an education necessary for the survival and prosperity of the Republic, to Dewey's education for a democratic socialist society or Mead's education for "Island Earth." Here, Ricouer makes a salient point. At the level of interpretation, he observes, the reader comes not so much into an understanding of the mind of an author but into the understanding of the language of the world or worlds that the text displays. The reader comes to the understanding of a world of discourse and not the recognition of another person, the author.³⁷ Mead's is the language of the world of discourse, of the world view and the repository of the value system of late Progressivism in American education.

To summarize. What has been depicted above, just to travel from William Torrey Harris to Dewey and Mead, is a revolution in the language of American educational discourse; the displacement of one language system or system of verbal culture by another. The distance travelled can be measured in words. If we add this revolution in the language of education to those revolutions cited by Cremin, we perceive with special clarity the full meaning of Progressivism in American education. To the achievements of Progressivism in education emphasized by Cremin in *The Metropolitan Experience*, we can now add (or subtract) the loss of a vital, viable, and intellectually serious language of educational discourse.³⁸

Now we can also perceive with special clarity, though this was not Cremin's intention either, why Progressivism in American education is being contested, why the excellence movement in American education can be described as a neo-conservative, anti-progressive, or counterprogressive school reform movement, and the source of its appeal. As we observed above, the excellence movement has tapped into a deep and wide reservoir of public concern not only about the quality of American schooling but traditional personal and societal values. The excellence movement is a revolt against Progressivism in American education. What is at stake are essentially expressions of fundamental differences in moral and cultural values or conceptions of *paideia*. The excellence

movement is an attempt at the restoration of the Classic, pre-Deweyan, pre-progressive educational "style of thought," "vernacular," or language; the language of character, virtue, discipline, culture, the "fundamentals of the intellectual arts," and "the keys that...unlock the treasure chests of knowledge," hallmark phrases of the Classical tradition, to the educational discourse of our time.³⁹

Here, we would like to remind readers that there is no single correct way to read a text. *The Metropolitan Experience* can be read in many ways; it will repay multiple readings. What has been presented above is one way of reading; different reading strategies will constitute *The Metropolitan Experience* in other ways. I believe, however, that if we focus on languages and their implications in the way suggested above, and situate *The Metropolitan Experience* within the present moment in American education, it can be made to yield more levels of meaning than it would seem overtly to convey and more even than Professor Cremin intended to convey.

V

There are some problems in *The Metropolitan Experience* created by the text's form or structure, others created by Cremin's uniquely latitudinarian definition of education, educators, and educative agencies. As we observed above, *The Metropolitan Experience* does not follow the traditional linear narrative format of history telling, but rather is structured as a series of studies of the American educational terrain, each virtually complete in itself. Thus, there is considerable redundancy in *The Metropolitan Experience*: the themes of popularization, multitudinousness, and politicization are repeated frequently, but in effect provide some centering for the book. It is not clear why Chapter 7, "The Media of Popular Communications," is in Part II, The Progressive Nation, rather than in Part III, The Informed Society. The discussions of Herbert Spencer, Albion Small, Edward R. Ross, William James, and Dewey in Chapter 8, "The Nature and Uses of Knowledge," would seem to belong in The Progressive Nation rather than in The Informed Society. Chapters 9 and 10 of The Informed Society, "Places of Work," and "Places of Culture," could easily or could better, or just as logically, have been incorporated into The Progressive Nation or into Part IV, A Metropolitan Education. Dewey is discussed in at least four different chapters.

Cremin's latitudinarian definition of education is not without its risks. As we remarked above, he casts his net so wide as to include almost the whole of American culture. For Cremin, the discipline of education no longer exists as a distinct, bounded field or object of knowledge. (No more, say, than the discipline of literature, which now includes Bob Dylan as well as John Milton, Superman as well as Shakespeare.) Thus, there are long discussions in *The Metropolitan Experience* of Walter Lippman and Marshall McLuhan, while Edward L. Thorndike is only discussed briefly, and Arnold Gesell and Freud mentioned only

in passing; Charles Eames gets as much or as little space as Gesell and Freud. There are long discussions of Theodore Caplow and Fritz Machlup, but there is no Leonard P. Ayres. Or, why so much space to Mead and none to Ruth Benedict? Or so much space to McLuhan and none to Buckminster Fuller? Charlotte Gilman is here, but not Paul Goodman; Gilbert Seldes, but not I.A. Richards or Lionel Trilling; Dutch Schultz but not Samuel Goldwyn or Irving Berlin (or Kate Smith). Kenneth Clark is here, but not Joe Louis or Jackie Robinson (or Branch Rickey). The Arthur Murray School of Dance is here but not Ebbets Field or the Yankee Stadium. There is no discussion of the 1939 New York World's Fair, outside the Wars, surely one of the great educational events in American in this century, even surpassing in import the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 of which Cremin makes so much in several texts.

In the end, however, these problems in *The Metropolitan Experience* are quibbles and largely a function of its ambitions, and do not diminish the book's originality or significance. Given the moribund state of American educational historiography today; stereotyped or esoteric, repetitious or outdated, frozen in the attitudes, topics, and texts of the late 1960s, *The Metropolitan Experience* comes as a breath of fresh air.

The Metropolitan Experience is a brilliant, boldly imaginative, and fascinating work. And it is a seminal text in the historiography of American education. One reason it may be called seminal is precisely because of its latitudinarian definition of education. In *The Metropolitan Experience*, Cremin re-emplots or re-configures the field of American education so that the public school is moved from its central place in the educational universe. The result is a massive shift of focus and a radical enlargement of the educational historian's terrain. What had been marginal or out of the frame entirely, the vast panoply of educative agencies, becomes central, what had been central, the public school, becomes marginal. What is thereby revealed by Cremin is a certain way of perceiving the domain of American education and a certain way of perceiving the role and function of the school in the domain of American education that has hitherto remained unnoticed. The implications and ramifications for educational policy-makers, concerned parents, and anyone wishing to understand the present moment in American education as well as for American educational historiography are profound.

The seminal quality of *The Metropolitan Experience* resides not so much in its revision of the American educational past or its implications for the American educational present but in its vision of the flow of future work in American educational history. Now the problems connected with Cremin's unconstrained definition of education, educators, and educative agencies turn into strengths. *The Metropolitan Experience* opens up a prospect on American education that is inexhaustibly suggestive of fruitful avenues of research.⁴⁰ For example, Cremin's discussions of the history of newspapers and magazines, of radio and television, of advertising and motion pictures, as we noted earlier, are all worthy of book-length treatments in themselves. What "vernaculars" and what versions

of *paideia*, and what ideals of the polity, culture, morality and ethics, family life, parenting, childhood and adolescence, of schooling, of the curriculum, students, teachers, and administrators have been taught, say, in the past half-century by radio, television, advertising and the movies, and what changes have occurred in their “curricula” over time? One finishes *The Metropolitan Experience* with the feeling that there are more “transformations” of American education that Cremin will yet write about.

Finally, if, as Eugene Weber states, historiographical progress is made not in depth—toward some essence or some basic cause—but in breadth—a widening of vision—Professor Cremin has made a seminal contribution to historiographical progress. Historians of American education can read the *Metropolitan Experience* to learn what the field of education might include in its broadest sense, historians of American culture can read it to learn about the history of American education in either its more expansive or more restricted sense, and all historians can read it for sheer intellectual fun.

NOTES

1. Cremin's project was first laid out in *The Wonderful World of Ellwood Patterson Cubberley: An Essay On the Historiography of American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965). See esp. 1-2 and 42 ff.
2. *The Metropolitan Experience* is also the capstone of an oeuvre which includes, to mention only texts, *The Transformation of The School*, *The Genius of American Education*, *Public Education*, and *Traditions of American Education*.
3. Dominick La Capra, “Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts,” in *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Languages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), ch. 1; David A. Hollinger, “Historians and the Discourse of Intellectuals,” and Hayden White, “Method and Ideology in Intellectual History,” in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, ed. Dominick La Capra and Steven L. Kaplan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); and John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1979), 42 ff. La Capra's essay is reprinted in *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*, an indispensable collection.
4. *The Metropolitan Experience*, 19-25.
5. *Ibid.*, 47.
6. *Ibid.*, 49.
7. Cremin himself captured and helped disseminate the “founding myth” or legend of the common school as bulwark of the Republic and the repository of all democratic hopes and aspirations in *The American Common School: An Historic Conception* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1951).
8. *The Metropolitan Experience*, 365-66.
9. For example, Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual Versus the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).
10. *The Metropolitan Experience*, 575.
11. *Ibid.*, 1, 71, 174.
12. *Ibid.*, 1.

13. Ibid., 173.
14. Ibid., 650.
15. Ibid., 242, 650-51.
16. Ibid., 294.
17. *The Metropolitan Experience* is silent about the connection between Dewey's pedagogical theory and the emergence of the school as legatee. But as Cremin stated elsewhere, "it remained for Dewey (in *School and Society*, 1899) to give classic statement to this notion of the school as a legatee institution." *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Random House, 1961), 117.
18. *The Metropolitan Experience*, 304 ff.
19. Ibid., 309, 232-33. Cremin's discussion of "The Cardinal Principles" here should be supplemented by his "The Revolution in American Secondary Education, 1893-1918," *Teachers College Record* 56 (1954-55): 295-308.
20. The National Commission On Excellence In Education, *A Nation At Risk* (Washington, D.C.: The Commission, 1983), 5-6.
21. This context is, so to speak, already in the text. "I think history should be a lamp to light the present." Lawrence A. Cremin, Interview, *Education Week*, March 16, 1988, 5.
22. For example, "Our schools are confused about their educational mission and have no shared sense of what their major goals should be or how they can achieve them." John H. Bunzel, ed., *Challenge to American Schools: The Case for Standards and Values* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.
23. *The Metropolitan Experience*, 12-14, 376-77.
24. Interview, *Education Week*, March 16, 1988, 5.
25. *The Metropolitan Experience*, x. In the previous two volumes of *American Education* and in other places Cremin has affirmed his belief that ideas count, e.g.: "Ideas, ideals and values are always involved in education. They suggest certain images of human nature, of what is possible and desirable....They alert both teacher and student to particular human potentialities and at the same time blind them to others." Interview, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 29, 1981, 18.
26. Intellectual history "has no governing *problematique*. Its practitioners share no sense of common subjects, methods, and conceptual strategies." Robert Darnton, "Intellectual and Cultural History," in *The Past Before United States: Contemporary Historical Writing In The United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 337.
27. Pocock's position has been refined in a series of essays. The seminal essay is "Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought" in his *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (London: Atheneum, 1971), 3-41. Some American intellectual historians have attempted to bring the ideas of Pocock and Skinner to the attention of their colleagues. See especially the essay by Hollinger, Gordon S. Wood, and Thomas Bender in *New Directions In American Intellectual History*, ed. Higham and Conkin. See also the brief but provocative discussions by Pocock, Skinner, and Hollinger in "What is Intellectual History?" in *What is History Today?*, ed. Juliet Gardiner (London: Macmillan, 1988), 109-16. The historian who wishes to make language central in his/her work or to incorporate linguistic insights into his/her work need not rely solely on Pocock or Skinner to do so. See Martin Jay's "Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn? Reflections on the Habermas—Gadamer Debate," in *Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. La Capra and Kaplan.
28. Those educators in America in this century who tried to keep alive the Classical tradition and language of education, the dissenters from the hegemonic progressive

- tradition, e.g., Robert Hutchins, James B. Conant, Jacques Barzun, Arthur E. Bestor, and W.C. Bagley, are mentioned only in passing as part of a periodic "conservative resurgence" in education, as if their ideas were obsolete or inert: *The Metropolitan Experience*, 241.
29. *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Random House, 1970), 568-69.
30. *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Random House, 1980), 137.
31. *Ibid.*, 5, 124-25, 148, 498.
32. *Ibid.*, 520-21.
33. *The Metropolitan Experience*, 160 ff. See also Cremin's discussion of Harris in *The Transformation of the School*, 14 ff.
34. *The Metropolitan Experience*, 211.
35. *Ibid.*, 376-77.
36. *Ibid.*, 204-11, 683-84. Cremin adds that Dewey also believed that American culture would have to be made "transnational" and compatible with a "world paideia": 683.
37. "Structure, Word, Event," in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Charles E. Regan and David Steward (Boston 1978), 143-5.
38. The discussion of the loss or debasement of the language of "virtue" in Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 1-5 is pertinent here. In this context more revealing than Cremin realizes perhaps is the juxtaposition in *The Metropolitan Experience* of Part I, "The Moral Commonwealth" and Part II, "The Progressive Nation."
39. Chester E. Finn, Jr., Diane Ravitch, and Robert T. Fancher, eds., *Against Mediocrity: The Humanities in America's High Schools* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984), 243. *A Nation At Risk* speaks of developing "individual powers of mind and spirit," and of work, self-discipline, character, and the achievement ethic. TheodoreSizer talks about "essential" schools rather than "excellent" schools but also employs the language of virtue, will, and discipline, of morality, the "self-propelled learner," and the need for an "education of the intellect" and an "education in character." *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 84 and *passim*.
40. *The Metropolitan Experience* fits Hayden White's definition of a classic of historiography: it does not wrap up a historical problem once and for all, but rather opens up a prospect on the past that inspires more study. "Figuring the Nature of the Times Deceased: Literary Theory and Historical Writing," in *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. Ralph Cohen (New York: Routledge, 1989), 25.