

REVIEW ESSAY

Gutek, Gerald L. *Education in the United States: An Historical Perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1986, 367 pp., \$27.95 (cloth).

Spring, Joel. *The American School, 1642-1985: Varieties of Historical Interpretation of the Foundations and Development of American Education*. White Plains, New York: Longman, 1986, 347 pp., \$18.00 (paper).

I intentionally chose these two new and somewhat contrasting U.S. educational history textbooks for a class of advanced students. Gutek's book is a straightforward historical account, up-to-date and prudently traditional in its conservative interpretations of epochal periods and twists and turns of U.S. educational history. Spring's book is different because of its diverse interpretations of U.S. educational history, interpretations Spring deliberately selected from a wide range of historical writings. Gutek, a balanced, traditional interpreter of events, is Dean of Education at Chicago's Loyola University. Spring, a widely known revisionist and activist historian, is Education Professor at the University of Cincinnati. Each is a mature scholar with a substantial body of writings.

Revisionists serve a good purpose in challenging and sometimes correcting the traditional view of U.S. educational history, a view represented by educational historians Gerald Gutek, and more notably by Diane Ravitch, and most other textbook writers. Traditionalists' general view is that, historically, U.S. public schools have been an accepting and encouraging open door of opportunity and upward mobility to generations of Americans of all classes and ethnic origins. Revisionists vary somewhat in emphasis but may be grouped as liberal critics of the public schools. They say that schools serve corporate business and national defense interests, favor and serve better the bright and economically secure students, and do less to help the upward climb of average, below average, minority, and low-income children. Revisionists in general and Spring in particular see public schools as "sorters," siphoning off upper and middle class youth to college, the professions, and national leadership; while channeling the poor and ethnic mass to lesser and limited vocational education as preparation for more menial work necessary to the national economy.

There is, in fact, a zest in using Spring's book, which offers, in the preface, "unique windows through which to view the unfolding of events." (p. ix). These "windows" or interpretations, for example, include the context for presenting Merle Curti's argument that colonial New England education was begun to protect existing authority through a class system of education, Rush Welter's view that the Founding Fathers' writings stressed education's "conservative role . . . in overcoming an excess of popular liberty" (p. 43), Carl Kaestle's belief that nineteenth century "common schools" were meant to protect Protestant orthodoxy, and that Roman Catholics began parochial schools because they could not abide public schools which they saw as "Protestant" schools.

Each author more than adequately covers colonial and early Republic education, with Spring, as he intends, giving enough historical detail but also selected interpretations from insightful writers with critical views of these periods of educational history. Spring, for example, refers to Robert Molesworth's little known book, *Account of Denmark as it was in the year 1692*, which early opposed using education to serve religion because it led to submission to heavenly and earthly rulers. Spring presents Molesworth as arguing that education should be secular and separate from religion in order to promote liberty and freedom. Gutek, in contrast, presents clearly the more traditional theme; i.e., that post Revolution education for citizenship in the New Republic was a consequence of eighteenth century Enlightenment.

Both authors describe the influence of the 1819 Dartmouth College case, which separated private from state higher education. Spring, in addition, quotes the U.S. Supreme Court's particular wording, which said that a private college chartered by the state has the same freedom from state interference that an individual or a corporation has. Thus Spring shows that the Dartmouth College decision was extended to cover corporation rights.

Gutek does full justice to the 1800-30s charity schools: to Lancaster's monitorial schools in New York, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere; to the communal schools influenced by William Maclure in Philadelphia and by

Robert Owen in New Harmony, Ind., and to others. Spring sees these forms of charity schools as foreshadowing the "common schools" established by Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, and others. Spring calls the 1828 Yale Report the last defense of traditional liberal arts in higher education against pleas for practical studies and electives supported in the forthcoming Land-Grant College acts. He also sees the Land-Grant College acts as shifting higher education from producing liberal arts elites to enabling ordinary youths to serve the growing industrial and government needs of corporate America.

Spring cites and agrees with revisionist Michael Katz's evidence that compulsory high school attendance in two Massachusetts towns in the 1870s and '80s was imposed on unwilling poor youths. Although these poor youths preferred to go to work and their families needed and wanted their children's income, conservative professional and business school board members compelled them by law to go to school, less to improve their life chances than to limit their tendency to crime, to control unruly immigrants, to establish order and stability, and to teach ordinary high school students skills that would serve the industrial interests of corporate America.

Spring analyzes various interpretations of the mid-nineteenth century "common school" movement. He likes the movement's democratic thrust in aiming to give everyone a similar education, though it fell short of the ideal.

The big transition from the democratic "common schools" for all came when the National Education Association Committee of Ten report (1893), dominated by higher education interests (Harvard University President Charles Eliot was chairman), shaped the four-year high school curriculum and, by extension, the eight-year elementary curriculum into academic course units that favored middle class bright youths heading for college and the professions. The next big step in transforming the old democratic "common schools" to their later "sorting" function was the 1918 Cardinal Principles report which gave seven broad and mainly vocational purposes of secondary education. Academic emphasis was limited to the second principle, which was worded as "command of fundamental processes." This new, broad function of the high school further separated the academically able minority from the vocationally oriented majority.

The two-track "sorter" public school system, Spring says, has since been conservatively enforced and enhanced, despite *Brown*, the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case desegregating schools, and despite court-enforced busing to achieve integration. White middle class flight from court-ordered integrated inner-city schools served only to divide and further weaken public education: affluent suburban schools, on the one hand, and undersupported black and ethnic inner-city schools on the other hand. We have a white-favored meritocratic school system, says Spring, where the sorting is done by income-level neighborhood schools and by massive testing.

Given that the reader ought to balance Spring's revisionist views with traditionally accepted views, his leftist interpretation makes one think and sometimes become angry, angry at Spring for holding up his interpretive mirror and, if his interpretation seems true, angry at the direction conservatives skew our public school system. No doubt I am reading more into Spring's book than is recorded in its printed pages, and that is exactly what I think he intends — to provoke thought, stimulate discussion, and get the reader's dander up.

Spring points out that President Nixon (1969-74) disapproved of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society education programs and deplored the anti-Vietnam student protest excesses. Nixon, Spring says, helped enforce an increased basic education and encouraged the accountability movement in public education (accountability, i.e., that schools should show evidence of improved pupil achievement in return for money expended). Basic education and accountability were joined to teaching toward specific objectives, long advocated by behaviorists such as B.F. Skinner and favored by fiscal conservatives after the mid-1970s OPEC oil boycott, energy crisis, and economic stagflation. In the Spring scenario, President Reagan brought this conservative thrust to new heights by rolling back the federal effort in public education, by advocating school vouchers and tuition tax credit plans that favor private education, and by urging prayer in public schools.

Spring concludes with the anomaly that, despite the conservative direction of public schools during the 1970s and '80s, substantial gains were made toward equality of educational opportunity for women, the handicapped, and minorities. I wish he had explained and documented how this accomplishment was made. Still, if you balance Spring's book with a more traditional view as presented by Gutek, students will get a richer view. Both books are recommended.

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