

<http://www.thememoryhole.org/edu/school-mission.htm>

The Educational System Was Designed to Keep Us Uneducated and Docile

It's no secret that the US educational system doesn't do a very good job. Like clockwork, studies show that America's schoolkids lag behind their peers in pretty much every industrialized nation. We hear shocking statistics about the percentage of high-school seniors who can't find the US on an unmarked map of the world or who don't know who Abraham Lincoln was. Fingers are pointed at various aspects of the schooling system—overcrowded classrooms, lack of funding, teachers who can't pass competency exams in their fields, etc. But these are just secondary problems. Even if they were cleared up, schools would still suck. Why? Because they were designed to.

How can I make such a bold statement? How do I know why America's public school system was designed the way it was (age-segregated, six to eight 50-minute classes in a row announced by Pavlovian bells, emphasis on rote memorization, lorded over by unquestionable authority figures, etc.)? Because the men who designed, funded, and implemented America's formal educational system in the late 1800s and early 1900s wrote about what they were doing.

Almost all of these books, articles, and reports are out of print and hard to obtain. Luckily for us, John Taylor Gatto tracked them down. Gatto was voted the New York City Teacher of the Year three times and the New York State Teacher of the Year in 1991. But he became disillusioned with schools—the way they enforce conformity, the way they kill the natural creativity, inquisitiveness, and love of learning that every little child has at the beginning. So he began to dig into terra incognita, the roots of America's educational system.

In 1888, the Senate Committee on Education was getting jittery about the localized, non-standardized, non-mandatory form of education that was actually teaching children to read at advanced levels, to comprehend history, and, egads, to think for

themselves. The committee's report stated, "We believe that education is one of the principal causes of discontent of late years manifesting itself among the laboring classes."

By the turn of the century, America's new educators were pushing a new form of schooling with a new mission (and it wasn't to teach). The famous philosopher and educator John Dewey wrote in 1897:

Every teacher should realize he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of the proper social order and the securing of the right social growth.

In his 1905 dissertation for Columbia Teachers College, Elwood Cubberly—the future Dean of Education at Stanford—wrote that schools should be factories "in which raw products, children, are to be shaped and formed into finished products...manufactured like nails, and the specifications for manufacturing will come from government and industry."

The next year, the Rockefeller Education Board—which funded the creation of numerous public schools—issued a statement which read in part:

In our dreams...people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present educational conventions [intellectual and character education] fade from our minds, and unhampered by tradition we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, educators, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians, nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have ample supply. The task we set before ourselves is very simple...we will organize children...and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way.

At the same time, William Torrey Harris, US Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906, wrote:

Ninety-nine [students] out of a hundred are automata, careful to walk in prescribed paths, careful to follow the prescribed custom. This is not an accident but the result of substantial education, which, scientifically defined, is the subsumption of the individual.

In that same book, *The Philosophy of Education*, Harris also revealed:

The great purpose of school can be realized better in dark, airless, ugly places.... It is to master the physical self, to transcend the beauty of nature. School should develop the power to withdraw from the external world.

Several years later, President Woodrow Wilson would echo these sentiments in a speech to businessmen:

We want one class to have a liberal education. We want another class, a very much larger class of necessity, to forego the privilege of a liberal education and fit themselves to perform specific difficult manual tasks.

Writes Gatto: "Another major architect of standardized testing, H.H. Goddard, said in his book *Human Efficiency* (1920) that government schooling was about 'the perfect organization of the hive.'"

While President of Harvard from 1933 to 1953, James Bryant Conant wrote that the change to a forced, rigid, potential-destroying educational system had been demanded by "certain industrialists and the innovative who were altering the nature of the industrial process."

In other words, the captains of industry and government explicitly wanted an educational system that would maintain social order by teaching us just enough to get by but not enough so that we could think for ourselves, question the sociopolitical order, or communicate articulately. We were to become good worker-drones, with a razor-thin slice of the population—mainly the children of the captains of industry and government—to rise to the level where they could continue running things.

This was the openly admitted blueprint for the public schooling system, a blueprint which remains unchanged to this day. Although the true reasons behind it aren't often publicly expressed, they're apparently still known within education circles. Clinical psychologist Bruce E. Levine wrote in 2001:

I once consulted with a teacher of an extremely bright eight-year-old boy labeled with oppositional defiant disorder. I suggested that perhaps the boy didn't have a disease, but was just bored. His teacher, a pleasant woman, agreed with me. However, she added, "They told us at the state conference that our job is to get them ready for the work world...that the children have to get used to not being stimulated all the time or they will lose their jobs in the real world."

John Taylor Gatto's book, *The Underground History of American Education: An Intimate Investigation into the Problem of Modern Schooling* (New York: Oxford Village Press, 2001), is the source for all of the above historical quotes. It is a profoundly important, unnerving book, which I recommend most highly. You can order it from Gatto's Website, which also contains the first half of the book online for free.

The final quote above is from page 74 of Bruce E. Levine's excellent book *Commonsense Rebellion: Debunking Psychiatry, Confronting Society* (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 2001).