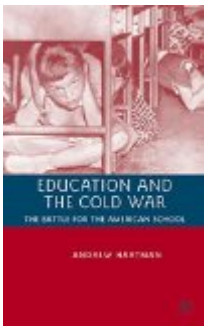
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Andrew Hartman. *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. x + 251 pp. $74.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-230-60010-2.

Reviewed by David Mitch

Published on H-Childhood (July, 2009)

Commissioned by Patrick J. Ryan (University of Western Ontario)

Although world affairs are inherently distant from the local activity of running a school, international events can often heighten a sense of threat from abroad and a related sense of national inferiority, thus spurring domestic debates on the adequacy of education. A perceived poor showing of British industrial exhibitors at the Crystal Palace International Exhibition of 1851 prompted concerns about the quality of British education. And perceived British technological deficiencies in the First World War prompted Correlli Barnett's subsequent examination of British education in his tellingly named *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (1986).

In the case of the United States, the Sputnik episode has long been recognized as pointing to deficiencies of U.S. education. Andrew Hartman undertakes to synthesize much of the previous historiography regarding debates on education throughout the twentieth century, viewing the early Cold War era as resulting in a culminating crisis. His thesis is that the progressive education movement started by John Dewey, and long under attack by conservative educational thinkers, was dealt a serious if not fatal setback by the further mobilization of conservative interests due to the impetus of Cold War politics. Hartman suggests that the progressive vision spawned by Dewey was too passive and insufficiently forward looking to effectively respond to the conservative challenge.

The first chapter surveys American theorizing about education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Dewey's work is not surprisingly front and center. However, Hartman also calls attention to the presence of conservative approaches as evidenced in such documents as the National Education Association's *Committee of Ten Report* (1893). He also notes how the progressive approach to education launched by Dewey and others split into what he terms order and justice variants or what Milton Gaither, in his review of Hartman's book on the U.S. Intellectual History Blog (August 5, 2008), has alternatively termed the social efficiency and social democracy wings. The

second chapter on the Great Depression considers the challenges that arose to progressive education during this period and, in particular, to controversies regarding the presence of Communists in America's schools and universities, especially in New York City teachers' unions. It also notes the emergence of conservative pedagogical approaches, including those of Irving Babbitt, Albert Jay Nock, and Paul Elmer More, which emphasized respect for authority in contrast with the progressive emphasis on child-centeredness. Chapter 3 examines the life adjustment movement that emerged after World War II in response to perceptions of a growing juvenile delinquency problem. Hartman concludes the chapter by noting controversy in existing historiography over the extent to which the life adjustment movement was a legacy of Dewey's progressive education. Chapter 4 continues discussion of the perceived threat of Communist teachers in schools and efforts to purge Communist Party members from teachers' unions and the schools more generally. It features a cameo appearance by Bella Dodd, turncoat informer to government investigating committees following a career as a Communist school teacher. Chapter 5 turns to conservative critics of American education including such cultural critics as Richard Weaver and Russell Kirk and the more libertarian perspective of Milton Friedman's advocacy of choice and educational vouchers. This chapter culminates with considering the vigilantism Hartman perceives in the Pasadena, California, School Board's dismissal of the superintendent, Willard Goslin, in part for his alleged subversive tendencies. Chapter 6 considers three influential educators who sought to reverse the tide of progressive liberalism, though who themselves could be considered more moderate liberals: Robert Maynard Hutchins, Arthur Bestor, and Richard Hofstadter. Chapter 7 takes up efforts to promote world government and a world vision in education as reflected in the work of Theodore Brameld. Hartman suggests that Brameld's "World-Mindedness" lost out to an increasingly pervasive "Cold War-Mindedness." Chapter 8 takes up the issue of race and the aftermath of ***Brown v. Board of Education*** (1954), arguing that international dimensions were important because both the image of the United States would be weakened in developing countries with awareness of the persistence of racial segregation in U.S. schools and a poorly educated black workforce would lower economic efficiency.

Although Hartman features the Cold War, he seems to be arguing that it ultimately brought further to the surface tensions long inherent in American education. And it is really the final chapter of the book, chapter 9 on the aftermath of Sputnik, in which the Cold War figures front and center, while the previous eight chapters trace various conflicts leading up to the Cold War tensions. Many of the episodes in earlier chapters preceded the end of World War II, thus leading to ambiguity over whether concerns about the threat of Communism predated the Cold War or whether alternatively, the start of the Cold War should really be traced back to American concerns about Communism dating at least as far as the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

Hartman's subtitle is ***The Battle for the American School***. Yet what is striking about the conflicts that Hartman describes is the diversity of sources and stakeholders involved. The conservative opponents he describes were by no means monolithic. The one constant seems to be the legacy of Dewey and his epigone progressive educators as wimps. The conservative opponents included not only rabid anti-Communists and Southern segregationists but also elite liberal upholders of universal intellectual standards, such as Hutchins and Hofstadter. Thus, it is not evident from Hartman's account that there was a set battle between two clearly defined opposing camps but rather it appears that there were ongoing skirmishes and struggles between diverse factions. Indeed, one of the strengths of Hartman's account is the way in which it underscores this diversity. And I found it

informative to learn of figures in these debates previously unfamiliar to me, such as Bestor and Brameld.

In his acknowledgments, Hartman explicitly mentions his "unreconstructed 'pinko-ism'" and the book at points strikes a provocative tone (p. ix). His introduction concludes by asserting that "as Americans variously experienced the crisis of the Cold War as a crisis in education, both consciously and subconsciously, the schools, in turn, facilitated the construction of 'cold warriors' conditioned to fear and loathe Communism, the Soviet Union, and more nebulously, leftist ideas in general" (p. 6). The concluding sentences of the book state: "In their avoidance of grand narratives, liberals and progressives were hailed by a more powerful structure. American liberalism and progressive education could only serve one master: U.S. imperialism" (p. 202).

Hartman's overall account does not fully support his claim, as suggested by the book's title, that the Cold War was a decisive turning point in American education. Although the Cold War features as the centerpiece of the book, as I have already noted above, a good deal and perhaps even the majority of the developments he describes took place prior to the end of the Second World War, many of them even prior to the Great Depression. Moreover, if one places the end of the Cold War at the demise of the Soviet Union in 1989, there is roughly a quarter of a century that receives no treatment since the book ends its coverage in the mid-1960s. And Gaither notes in his review of Hartman's book on the U.S. Intellectual History Blog that Hartman's account does not consider how the dour, buttoned-down 1950s segued into the radicalism and ferment of the 1960s. If conservative forces in education so decisively squelched progressive and liberal forces in education by the early 1960s, how did we get the flower children of the later 1960s? Hartman's reply to Gaither on the same blog (August 5, 2008) is that the triumph of conservatism was by no means total and that pockets of progressive influence continued to persist. Hartman also suggested that the remnants of progressive education that survived easily morphed into the radicalism of the sixties. He justifies his end point in the early 1960s on the grounds that this was when Cold War issues dominated educational discussion compared with what happened subsequently as the counterculture came to the fore. While these points are not implausible, the issue remains that Hartman's account ending in the mid-1960s really does not provide much direct insight into subsequent developments, especially since it ends by pointing to the triumph of conservative influences. Although Cold War issues surely featured prominently in educational debates throughout the long 1950s, were they quite as dominant as Hartman makes them out to be? One aspect to which he gives little consideration is the role of religion in shaping educational discussion; Hartman acknowledges this in the U.S. Intellectual History Blog forum on his book and recognizes, in particular, the role of Catholic anti-Communism in shaping support for Catholic schools independent of public schools. One also wonders about international issues other than those involving direct conflict between Cold War powers. For example, there was growing American interest in the developing world, such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America, not to mention Western Europe. While the Cold War was surely a major presence in these other international aspects, they may well have had influences of their own in shaping the teaching of social studies and anthropology in schools.

Hartman's account of the twentieth century prior to the end of the Second World War is shaped by his perspective on this earlier period as culminating in developments during the Cold War era of the 1950s. And this material on the earlier period is admittedly important for providing context and an understanding of Cold War discussions. However, does he provide a balanced account of this earlier period on its own terms? In contrast to Hartman, Herbert Kliebard's standard

history of early and mid-twentieth-century U.S. curricular debates, ***The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958*** (3rd ed., 2004), views the late 1950s as ending an era of primarily local development of curriculum. Hartman does not provide a rich enough account of his own of this earlier period to counter Kliebard's perspective. Viewing the Cold War as key impetus and turning point does bring out some suggestive insights; I found this was the case with setting the implications of debates about racial integration and the aftermath of ***Brown v. Board of Education*** in international perspective. Yet I am not sure it does justice to such educators as Hutchins or Hofstadter to see their contributions primarily in the context of Cold War politics.

Hartman's account is primarily an intellectual history from above, focusing on the ideas of a wide array of writers and thinkers on educational issues, some mainstream and others more obscure. He does consider some episodes in the trenches, such as the controversy over the firing of Goslin as school superintendent by the Pasadena, California, School Board. The focus on intellectual writing about education results in shifting perspectives and a degree of reification about education and schooling in the coverage. The word "schools" in the title might suggest a focus on primary and secondary schooling. But a number of the writers he considers, such as William F. Buckley, Hutchins, Kirk, and Weaver, would probably be seen by most as concerned with either higher education or with culture in general rather than with the primary and secondary school. Jonathan Zimmerman's ***Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools*** (2002), cited by Hartman, is much clearer on the extent to which the movements considered addressed primary and secondary education as well as higher education. Moreover, Hartman gives more attention to secondary education than to primary schools. On net, it is hard to get much sense of what was influencing the actual day-to-day work of school superintendents and principals, not to mention teachers at the chalk face, as they went about their business. Unlike Kliebard's classic work, one does not come away with an integrated overview of factors affecting U.S. curricular development. Some general developments in education do get consideration, such as the rise of high school attendance and the black migration out of the South, while others, such as the shifting role of gender or the emergence of junior high schools and middle schools, get little attention.

This book is largely synthetic drawn quite heavily (with due acknowledgment) from the previous historiography. Hartman does make some use of archival material from the papers and publications of key educators involved. Intellectual history need not be primarily archival based, and indeed sometimes heavy use of personal papers and letters can preclude seeing the forest for the trees. Focusing on published work by key figures in debates and exchanges surely has its value. However, much of Hartman's account is drawn from previous histories of the events and thinkers in question without much in the way of added historiographic perspective. The chapters on twentieth-century curricular debates draw heavily on Kliebard; the chapter on the international significance of race and the aftermath of ***Brown v. Board of Education*** draws heavily from Mary Dudziak's ***Cold War Civil Rights*** (2000); and the chapter on Sputnik draws heavily from Barbara Barksdale Clowse's ***Brainpower for the Cold War: The Sputnik Crisis and the National Defense Education Act of 1958*** (1981) for an account of the National Defense Education Act, to give just a few examples of the heavy reliance on previous histories. The resulting text is lacking in detail and cogency of exposition. It lacks the specificity of insight into Dewey and his followers and critics that Kliebard's curricular survey provides. It does not provide much sense of evolving views of thinkers, such as Hutchins or Paul Goodman. The four pages of text on Goodman cite three different works by him but just take them up as one continuous text without going into much detail into dis-

tinctions, nuances, or evolution of thought between these works. Nor does it give a very concrete sense of the controversies stemming from *Brown v. Board of Education* or the deliberations leading to the National Defense Education Act.

In sum, Hartman's history points to some of the difficulties of a book entitled "Education and XXX." Education encompasses and is influenced by so many dimensions of society and generally has such deep historical roots that an effort to look at just one aspect or focus on a relatively short historical episode risks the mess and awkwardness of trying to pull one strand from a soup with very long noodles in it. Although the Cold War chronological boundaries employed are probably overly procrustean, Hartman's book does survey an important and engaging range of issues.