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The Goddess, the School Book, and Compulsion

CHARLES BURGESS
University of Washington

Educational historians have increasingly turned their attention to the origins of compulsory schooling. In this essay, Professor Charles Burgess places the development of compulsory-school-attendance laws in a broad social context. Noting the social disorder brought about by the Civil War and by rapid technological growth, Burgess maintains that compulsion was used in many aspects of American life to secure stability and to forge a new sense of nationhood. Anxious to standardize American behavior, some citizens pressed for, among other things, compulsory voting, national rules on divorce and obscenity, and compulsory teetotaling. Compulsory schooling, while crucial to this search for national unity, was thus only part of the quest to redirect American citizens' loyalties from their local communities to state or nation.

In 1872 John Gast completed a painting that became for his contemporaries a popular symbol of American destiny. Magazines and textbooks featured prints of Gast's work, "The Spirit of the Frontier," and a century later it continued to accompany articles and books treating late nineteenth-century America.¹ The sweep of the North American continent filling its canvas, the "Spirit" de-

¹ For an easily accessible print of the Gast painting "The Spirit of the Frontier," see *American Heritage New Illustrated History of the United States* (New York: Dell, 1963), ix, 800-801. The original painting is in the collection of Harry T. Peters, Jr., of New York City.

picts the westward march of progress. In the left of the painting, buffalo are in frozen stampede toward the Pacific. Other wild animals and a cluster of Indians, with a mixture of awe and apprehension in their eastward glances, flee toward the west. Pressing close upon the tribal group are mountaineers, prospectors, wagon trains, a stage coach, and finally, the farmer carving the earth with ox-drawn plow. In stark contrast with the sense of confused flight and human dislocation in the West, the East coast is a model of technological and engineering order. City life on the Atlantic seaboard, alive with a procession of commercial shipping and crowned by a great modern bridge, sends out three westward-reaching railroads, the great hint of the pending conquest of the unruly frontier. And at stage-center, dominating the entire panorama, strides a giant goddess with one bare foot planted where Kansas might be and the other poised for a step in the vicinity of Utah Territory. Her star-bedecked head is framed by the clouds above the Canadian horizon. Her serene gaze reaches far beyond the Pacific shore. With the end-wraps of her Grecian dress trailing majestically behind her, she moves as a protector behind the wagon trains, trappers, and homesteaders, and as a vanguard for the west-bound trains.

Finally one's attention fixes on two items carried by the goddess. In the crook of one elbow she holds a coil of telegraph line that, to the East behind her, has already been attached to a file of poles spaced across half a continent. And clutched with one forearm to her ample breast is the central symbol of Gast's work: a volume of impressive size labeled simply "School Book." The telegraph line and the school book are keys to the orderly life of civilized America, agents of intelligent uniformity and progressive standards.

Its title notwithstanding, "The Spirit of the Frontier" was even more the herald of the triumph of order across the nation. Probably, few viewers of the painting, with the Civil War fresh in their memories, missed the grand symbols of antagonism toward diversity and sectionalism and the promise of a new nationalism on a transcontinental scale. Basic to that brighter tomorrow was the widespread use of the school book. Education had already enabled Americans to subdue half a continent; now it had only to reach the Pacific to fulfill their dreams of destiny.

I

Education changed, however, in the process of carrying out its grand role. Hopes for greater standardization and for a new nationalism stamped sharp contrasts between pre- and post-Civil War education in the United States. Until 1852, Amer-

ican public schools in the several states offered instruction to children who attended, if not on the strength of their own personal convictions, at least without formal state legislation to deprive their guardians of choice in the matter. Beginning with Massachusetts in 1852 and ending with Mississippi in 1918, however, every state in the Union decided to require children to attend school. No sign of the growing native enthusiasm for standardization in education was more significant than the acceptance of the idea that school attendance should be compulsory rather than voluntary. The development of complex bureaucratic forms in education, the important efforts of pedagogical reformers during the late decades of the nineteenth century, and even the final acceptance of the idea of a "single ladder" of public instruction reaching from the elementary school through the land-grant college owed an immense prior debt to the majoritarian rejection of voluntary attendance at school.

The grand-scale growth of nationalism and the adoption of compulsion as a general device by which to make that growth orderly and consistent with native ideals were not simple or one-dimensional. Compulsion sometimes placed sharp limits on free choice; at other times, it became the means for opening new avenues of free choice. While the nation's people became more standardized and in so becoming accepted limitations on certain forms of individual choice, they were also working to guarantee the expansion of other forms of individual choice.

The crucial event in the career of compulsion in America was the Civil War. During that era of blood and in the decades that followed grew the first effective consensus about nationhood—and the widespread use of compulsion to transform that consensus into operational reality.

John Gast's goddess, then, clutched to her breast the symbol of more than a sustained faith in education. Her school book also represented a willingness to accept a shift in the kinds of loyalties that ought to command Americans' attention, and a heightened belief in the centrality of schooling to the prospects for national reunion. Behind the goddess, in the orderly developments along the eastern seaboard, appeared hints of other and even more dramatic shifts in the expectations and loyalties Americans were coming to hold for themselves. Some changes were directly related to the exigencies of civil warfare, which caused Washington City and the several state governments to establish new relationships with American citizens. Other shifts merely formalized certain previously informal practices. Collectively, however, the new expectations and loyalties heralded an acceptance of "compulsion" to secure as much stability and predictability as could be found amid the social and technological ferment of post-Civil War growth in America.

It is especially this general shift in attitude toward what I am calling compulsion, in a nonpejorative sense, that holds my attention here.

By compulsion, I mean to suggest primarily, but not exclusively, the use of legislation to accomplish two related objectives. First, state or federal standards, having the force of law, supplanted local informal persuasion and local formal regulations of behavior. Such laws either denied to certain Americans what they had taken as a historically sanctioned collective right—the "right" to behave in a locally standardized manner, regardless of how idiosyncratic (in national and regional terms) local standards might be—or guaranteed (at least on paper) certain rights to minorities who had previously been forced to conform to unwelcome majoritarian rules. Such formal directives illustrate a major meaning of compulsion. The second objective, intimately related to the first, involved the use of legislation to redefine "loyalty" and "Americanism" according to the vision of an emergent American consensus. The term compulsion, then, is meant to remind us of certain implications of a majoritarian mood between the Civil War and World War I. Compulsion attended a major shift in notions of American loyalty; it accompanied a changed perception of the state and formed a response to a new, national apprehension of what commonly had been accepted, sometimes grumpily, as the richness and variety of lifestyles in America.²

II

John Gast fixed his artistic attention almost exclusively on the majesty of American modernization. He gave only the faintest hints of the misery that attended this triumphant process. Save in the faces of his fleeing Indians, Gast portrayed the settling of the nation into an industrial, urban-centered, unified whole as a panorama of inexorable inevitability. His work stands naively defenseless against the more discerning and often stern historical judgments that have since been made about the wonderful world he foresaw.

The ferment and reshaping of American life between the Civil War and the first decades of the twentieth century (when most of the forms of ordered life Americans now have took their present institutional shape) have inspired a wide array of labels. In 1873, Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner collaborated on a novel about American business and political leadership that provided a rousing

² The bureaucratic form was essential in this era of redefining loyalty. Its continuity and refinement are assumed but alluded to rarely in this discussion.

popular rubric. *The Gilded Age* they called their book. It caricatured a post-Civil War world of economic corruption, puerile optimism, and dubious ethical standards. Other critics, then and since, have fixed their attention on greedy and exploitative American businessmen and branded the period as an Age of Robber Barons.³

Pejorative phrases have been coined to reflect an even wider variety of moralizing tastes. To remind later Americans of the way the few began so breezily to expand control over the many, to conjure the aroma of the perfume of affluence clashing with the stench of squalor, Vernon L. Parrington termed the period a Great Barbecue to which only the wealthy few were invited. With an eye on the same historical horizon, Ray Ginger decided it might best be remembered as an Age of Excess. For color, one could look with Thomas Beer at Victorian pretentiousness and with Lewis Mumford at the autumnal and mourning hues of the arts in the era and see both Mauve and Brown decades.⁴

If bald reproach is the message of many of these characterizations, others have been less harsh. Pitted against the displays of drabness and aggressive social callousness were heartening illustrations of more benign, even constructive, attitudes and behaviors. With a blend of sympathetic and condescending hindsight, Henry Seidel Canby recalled an Age of Confidence, and Henry F. May depicted an Age of Innocence coming to an end.⁵

Other phrase-makers have been less intent upon moral judgment than upon explanation. Robert Wiebe saw the period as a vast Search for Order when small-town sway over American standards was yielding to widening spheres of metropolitan and government control. As John Garraty beheld the period, it was one in which Americans fashioned for themselves and their beneficiaries a New Commonwealth. Both inspirational dignity and shameful indignity accompanied widespread and basic social, economic, and political transformations in post-Civil War America.⁶

To call the period an Age of Energy, as Howard Mumford Jones has done, is to

³ John Tipple, "The Anatomy of Prejudice: Origins of the Robber Baron Legend," *Business History Review*, 33 (1959), 510-29.

⁴ See Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents of American Thought* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1930), III; Ray Ginger, *Age of Excess* (New York: Macmillan, 1963); Thomas Beer, *The Mauve Decade* (New York: Garden City, 1926); and Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931).

⁵ See Henry Seidel Canby, *The Age of Confidence* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934); and Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence* (New York: Quadrangle, 1959).

⁶ See Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); and John Garraty, *The New Commonwealth* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

label more vaguely, yet more instructively.⁷ "Energy" reminds us most properly of the powerful, glamorous, yet terribly agonizing forces at loose in a nation. Late nineteenth-century America was in the throes of shedding its agrarian, nativist, and isolated homespuns and of donning the sometimes uncomfortable but, by wide agreement, essential uniforms of the urban, industrialized, bureaucratized lifestyle of the world power that it was becoming.⁸

Jones offered ample analyses of grand and encouraging changes that lend support to Gast's sanguine suggestions, but his *Age of Energy* focused special attention on the critical problems that cried for resolution. How were those tremendous energies to be contained and controlled? "Why, if technical skill could thus drive irresistibly forward, was there such social chaos? How reconcile the regular pulsing of the Corliss engine and the smooth purring of the dynamo with constant jars and breakdowns in the political and social order?"⁹ In short, Jones asked, "How rationalize a seething life of exploitation, manufacture, distribution, and consumption beyond anything the world had ever known?"¹⁰

Somewhat, despite the convulsions of exploitation in an emerging industrial culture, unity had to be found. The America of this age, Jones argued cogently, sought a new style and desperately needed a principle with unifying power. With a rapidly developing "mystique of nationhood,"¹¹ Americans hoped to create stability out of confusion and reduce the din of the dismayed to a point subliminal with the reassuring purr of the dynamo.

The amazing energy of the period, especially as it powered life into a bureaucratic form, regularly sacrificed forms of voluntarism, restricted privacy, and limited channels for individual behavior. Social energies fashioned novel mechanisms for standardizing not only products for human consumption but human consumers as well. The anxious efforts to reduce the great distance between technical order and social disarray led to the discovery of new ways to institutionalize human beings. Pleas and other forms of persuasion continued, but new powers of formal force were added to these timeless informal devices for social compliance. Majoritarian intolerance of idiosyncratic and deviant behaviors, although not

⁷ Howard Mumford Jones, *The Age of Energy: Portraits of American Experience, 1865-1915* (New York: Viking, 1971).

⁸ Jones's magisterial depiction of these forces provides one of the best contexts for David Tyack's *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974).

⁹ Jones, *Age of Energy*, p. 158.

¹⁰ Jones, p. 155.

¹¹ Jones, p. 46.

originating with the dislocations of the late nineteenth century, thus created a fresh urgency for novel forms of policing power to create assurances of orderly social life. Minorities in colonial and antebellum America had important options that their late nineteenth-century heirs were in the process of losing. No matter how pinched provincial and intolerant earlier community life might have been, its deviants, eccentrics, and minorities could either adjust to the tethers of majoritarian bonds or leave to build or join some more enlightened or tolerant company. From the founding of a community of dissenters in Rhode Island, to the ventures of joint-stock utopias and the Oneidas and Brook Farms in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and in the general westward expansion with its attendant spread of new communities and resident farming, Americans who "thought otherwise" had been able to capitalize on this option. But with the closing of the frontier, as Frederick Jackson Turner tellingly noted, and the rise of the cities, one could more likely find a personal anonymity than find a new communal home. Where, by the end of the 1800s, were the hopes for more enlightened social enclaves? By then the most popular utopian schemes envisioned the whole of America as one vast community.

To make matters more difficult for out-of-step Americans, the idea of conformity via compulsion was becoming fashionable on a national scale. No longer a central issue was the right of a church to direct local standards of conduct. No longer was the major question whether a community could enforce its peculiar prejudices locally, whatever another community might decide. More commonly in question were the methods of establishing and enforcing, on a wider geographical basis, appropriate social codes to serve the rallying mystique of nationhood. Informal but persistent persuasion lost many of its communicants to the lure of instant stability-by-stature. It was such shared social commitment that worked to combat real and fancied evils of the age of energy and that brought to each state in the Union, between the middle decades of the nineteenth century and World War I, greater order, greater control, and compulsory school attendance.

The world of schooling is but one arena in which compulsion won acceptance. Indeed, in at least one important sense, it is a minor arena. For while a new appreciation of order made compulsory school attendance seem essential, it was the several states, not the federal government, that assumed authority for the conduct of schooling. With control limited to the states, a great deal of local option and variety remained in education.

Still, certain contrasts between pre- and post-Civil War America were to become starkly exemplified in the field of education. The appearance early in the

nineteenth century of the bureaucratic form in education occurred largely as a common-sense response to the dilemmas of urban schooling, at a time when Americans remained unprepared to accept compulsion in schooling. As Merle Curti has noted, a legalistic concept of the nation still prevailed at the dawn of the nineteenth century. The Union was seen as a legal creation involving contractual rights and obligations. One's community of loyalty, meanwhile, remained local. Strong voices continued to defend decentralization and voluntarism and to rely on informal persuasion to achieve local ideological uniformity.¹² But as Carl Kaestle, Stanley Schultz, and David Rothman remind us, bureaucracy, usually under local management, became the popular and yet essentially conservative response to threats of social change.¹³ Locally, the organization of police forces, schools, and asylums seemed to promise that technical unity could promote local ideological unity. By mid-century, however, one need only look to the telegraph and railroads to gain a glimpse of post-Civil War shifts in the concept of the Union and the nature of individual and collective loyalty.

Following the Civil War, a dramatically different concept of Union gained popularity, primarily among intellectuals. The nation became to them a living organism, a personality with moral principle and will. The nation, they reasoned, was older than the states, superior to them in purpose, and indeed, was the creator of the states.¹⁴ The old notion of ideological unity was shorn of its emphasis on institutional decentralization and voluntarism. The richness and variety of American lifestyles, according to devotees of this organic concept of Union, deserved only historic praise. Henceforth, in the interests of developing a loyalty to nation that transcended and shaped provincial loyalties, the imperatives of Union required the Americanization of all citizens. Sectarian disputes softened and denominational differences lost their former bite. Superior loyalty shifted from de-nominationalism to Protestantism. All Protestant communicants, the new ideology decreed, shared "basic truths." In the post-Civil War era, as John Higham reminds us, American leadership exalted a single creed and enshrined a sacred place.¹⁵ Protestant Nationalism became for many the clear statement of the or-

ganic concept of the Union, and majoritarians thus grew confident that this concept justified legal compulsion. Laws to control the behavior of the unorthodox in religion and the unwashed in ethnic and racial background poured from the majoritarian pen between the Civil War and World War I. Compulsion became fashionable on a national scale.

Fashionable though it might have been in terms of legal results, the press for compulsion was no unchecked fad. The old live-and-let-live sentiment still dampened many an American's enthusiasm for total conformity. As the editor of the *Overland Monthly* observed shortly after the Civil War, "We have but one national characteristic, and that is freedom. The tendency of our institutions is not to make men alike. Our future glory and safety lie in this: that we do not undertake to harmonize all classes, and assimilate races, but to educate man."¹⁶ But during the same period James Russell Lowell spoke for thousands of Americans in noting:

The whole people have acquired a certain metropolitan temper; they feel everything at once and in common; a single pulse sends anger, grief, or triumph through the whole country. . . . This simultaneity, this unanimity, deepens national consciousness and intensifies popular emotion. Every man feels himself a part, sensitive and sympathetic, of this vast organism, a partner in its life or death. The sentiment of patriotism is etherealized and ennobled by it; it is kindled by the more or less conscious presence of an ideal element; and the instinctive love of a few familiar hills and fields widens, till country is no longer an abstraction, but a living presence, felt in the heart and operative in the conscience, like that of an absent mother. It is no trifling matter that thirty millions of men should be thinking the same thought and feeling the same pang at a single moment of time, and that these vast parallels of latitude should become a neighborhood more intimate than many a country village.¹⁷

Compulsion, even as tempered by preference for individual freedom, made the purposes of the state formally superior to those of the local community. One's community of loyalty underwent change, either shifting from hometown to state or federal centers or becoming divided. The Civil War itself contributed much to this shift. Emancipation of the slaves—and the instant elevation of four-and-one-half million persons to the level of American citizenship—was among the more visible results of the struggle that dramatically altered state-federal relationships. State

¹² Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 65-172.

¹³ Carl F. Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973); Stanley K. Schultz, *The Culture Factory* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973); and David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

¹⁴ Curti, *Roots of American Loyalty*, pp. 173-99. Notable among these intellectuals were Wait Whiteman, Henry George, and Edward Bellamy.

¹⁵ John Higham, "Hanging Together: Divergent Unities in American History," *Journal of American History*, 61 (1974), 5-28.

¹⁶ Quoted in Curti, *Roots of American Loyalty*, p. 86.

¹⁷ James Russell Lowell, *Writings* (Boston and New York: n.p., 1890), v, 243. Quoted in Curti, *Roots of American Loyalty*, p. 120.

militias learned an unexpected and abrupt lesson in the Civil War: their tasks could be assigned and directed by the federal government. The various state guards learned new meanings of the word *allegiance*. Could a state militia legally be ordered to carry on war beyond its own state boundary? The surprising answer was yes. Could a surgeon from one state militia legally be ordered to treat wounded men from other state militias? The surprising answer again, yes. (Today it is the questions that cause surprise.) Such answers signalled the transformation of the State Guard into the National Guard, first in the North, then throughout the reunited nation.¹⁸

The Civil War raised a related question: could the federal government legally enact a system of military conscription? Andrew Jackson had been reprimanded by the courts for pressing men into the military during the War of 1812. In the Civil War the governments of both the North and South attempted to draft men into military service. Resistance was swift and occasionally violent. For one long week in 1863, New York City was ruled by a terrorizing mob that opposed this presumably unconstitutional encroachment on citizenship. But the draft and selective service had been born.

In the half-century between Lincoln and the *Lusitania*, the idea of compulsion expanded to include many heretofore privileged arenas of local and private choice. Herbert Spencer had called it an American penchant for "moral trespassing" as he watched national leaders of various stripes work to establish new codes of standardized behavior across the land.¹⁹ The transcontinental railroad was a metaphor of technical and ideological oneness; so too were interstate business and commerce, labor unions, and currency reform. Social control and social order, moral trespassing, conformity to a new set of national and state purposes—these varied but related developments described an animated energy at work, here enforcing, there carving a new sense of national identity after the divisiveness of the Civil War. Various novel forms of compulsion consolidated that energy into an effective force.

The three-decade struggle for statehood in Utah, beginning in the 1860s, illustrated a massive extension of the Reconstructionist temper into non-southern areas. The nation took a formal and firm position on two great questions. First, if the legitimacy of territorial government had been based on the declaration that the federal government would leave to the territorial inhabitants "all the powers

of self-government consistent with the supremacy and supervision of National authority" did this contract require the nation to tolerate the prospect of Utah joining the Union as a theocratic state?²⁰ The answer was no. Second, did the First Amendment to the Constitution require the nation to tolerate the church-supported practice of polygamy among the Mormons? Again, no.²¹ Until 1896, statehood for Utah was withheld. The nation first demanded and then obtained "conformity with American standards" on these and related questions.²²

Agents of the federal government first worked to destroy the theocracy within the Utah Territory. In judicial procedures, wives were required to testify against their husbands; as a device to reduce Mormon political power, women's suffrage in the territory was abolished; and to combat polygamy, the remaining male voters had to declare their allegiance to monogamy before they could mark ballots. Gentile agents in the territory took over the schools and worked to establish national norms for public and secular education. Congress made bigamy and polygamy illegal in United States territories, and the Supreme Court ruled that laws against plural marriage had constitutional validity, the First Amendment notwithstanding. Congress withdrew the corporate status of the Mormon Church and confiscated its properties. Through these and related impositions, "the nation decreed that survival of the Mormon Church [and statehood for Utah, in effect] depended upon its yielding the practice of plural marriage, which was condemned by popular clamor and legal pronouncement as being immoral and un-American."²³

Compulsory monogamy became in effect a national law. And marriage itself became an increasingly secular, publicly administered contract, open to the negotiation and termination agreements common to other forms of contractual affairs. Playing upon a national fear of polygamy, Theodore Roosevelt endeared himself to those who pressed for a constitutional amendment on divorce by arguing that the central government should police marriage and divorce arrangements. Although the constitutional amendment failed to qualify for ratification, state-legislated divorce reforms prospered. It might have been slight solace to the defeated Mormon kingdom, but with relaxed divorce restrictions, compulsory monogamy did become generous enough to admit polygamy on the installment plan.

The constitutional amendment route failed to compel all states to conform to a

²⁰ Gustave O. Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1971), p. 299.

²¹ See *U.S. v. Reynolds*, 98 U.S. 148 (1878).

²² Larson, "Americanization" of Utah, p. 301.

²³ Larson, p. 303.

¹⁸ See Jones, pp. 100-104.
¹⁹ Herbert Spencer on *the Americans, and the Americans on Herbert Spencer* (New York: D. Appleton, 1882), pp. 17-18.

national standard on divorce. But that single failure did not sidetrack enthusiasm for national uniformity among the states on other matters. Amendments to require all states to admit women to the polls (1920) and to require all persons to remain or become teetotalers (1919) moved to ratification. The disastrous triumph of the Prohibition amendment became such a singular embarrassment that the temptation was to classify it as a sport. It was, rather, a remarkable misjudgment of the will of upwardly mobile and well-established classes to abide by their own prescriptions. In more important respects, it was but another illustration of an impatient quest for national uniformity via compulsory legislation.

Still other signals of an Age of Compulsion might bear remembering. Some social reformers thought compulsory arbitration a sensible idea. Compulsory voting as a moral crusade engrossed the particular attention of others. National standards on obscene expression became a widely supported goal of Anthony Comstock's devotees. The desire to establish constitutional regulation of child labor repeatedly arose but failed to enlist the required support.²⁴

But it is to bedrock that our attention now turns. If, as some would have it, a protean civil religion in America was born out of the ashes of the Civil War, then the perpetuation of that religion depended heavily on its temples, that is, the schools.²⁵ For those who find this national religious symbolism less than persuasive, let it be enough for the moment to note that in the half-century following the Civil War, federal and state governments created a far-reaching and elaborate system of custody for all youth in America. Custodial judgments, although individually pragmatic and nonideological, combined to form a coherent pattern deserving identity as a system. This system took form as the child underwent an exchange of masters, partial in most instances, total in others. In the face of a growing penchant for order and control, the old master (the parent or guardian) relinquished private rights to the state.

With encouraging sanctions and guidance of the United States Children's Bureau (1912), the federal government and the several states became the new masters. Almshouses, orphanages, foster homes, reform, industrial and military schools, institutions for the handicapped, parochial and private schools—and the impressive machinery of public education—became the network of agencies through which the state exercised its role as primary custodian of all youth. The public day

²⁴ See, for example, Stephen B. Wood, *Constitutional Politics in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), and William D. P. Bliss, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908).

²⁵ See, for example, Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus*, 96 (1967), 1-21.

school, the most visible form of state guardianship, represented only a partial change of masters. But when day school and informal constraints failed to produce desired social results, the state possessed a full garrison of alternative custodial arrangements, most of them requiring around-the-clock treatment.

Compulsory-education laws and enforced compulsory school attendance became for most Americans only the visible portion of a complex network of state custody of American children in an urban and industrial age. Unlike compulsory teetotaling, however, compulsory attendance rankled few in the upper and middle classes. On the contrary, they embraced it as another of the many recent laws of uplift that controlled an otherwise destructive lot of religious and ethnic minorities and lacemakers to America.

III

The content and purpose of education were also undergoing transformation. Even by the 1870s, outlines of a standard pattern of institutional learning had been shaped in many parts of the northern United States, especially in the larger urban areas. As Daniel Calhoun noted, "the outcome of the Civil War fixed the organizational forms of Northern culture as a guiding standard for the nation."²⁶

Supporters of technical instruction wedged more utilitarian studies into the curriculum. Matters of morals, health, and hygiene drew new attention. Curricular standardization and uniformity in teacher preparation and instructional styles followed as logical expectations. The shaky marriage of basic and practical studies in American schools entered a new phase, and education became linked to social mobility in novel ways. The shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy sapped vitality from the notion that children would best prepare for careers through apprenticeship. New occupations and the skills they required prompted further erosion of the apprenticeship system. Schools came to be seen by many as the proper agents for assigning youth to their appropriate stations in life. "The Jeffersonian view of education as an instrument for defining the aristocracy of talent to lead the nation thus broadened into a vision of a mechanism for assigning all places in society."²⁷ The search for merit and ability became a new ideal born of democratic antagonism to the reality of inherited privilege and status. This ideal was central to new hopes for the realization of equality of opportunity through schooling.

²⁶ Daniel Calhoun, *The Intelligence of a People* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 67.

²⁷ Oscar Handlin, "Education and the American Society," *American Education*, 10 (1974), 11.

The school book borne by Gast's goddess thus came to signify notions of schooling that differed vastly from those of antebellum America. Never before on such a scale did American education gain so much appreciation as a promising instrument of social engineering.²⁸

If education was to become responsible for uplift and engineering, it had as well to become more efficient. The bureaucratic organizational form and the coded expectations for each of the graded years of public instruction became commonplace. In Gast's childhood years, educational procedures had varied widely across the settled parts of the nation. To its critics American schooling was a hit-or-miss proposition; and to any observer it was a form of education subject to local—and often familial—constraints and expectations. Late nineteenth-century imperatives for schooling, however, slowly transformed respect for local autonomy into disdain, embarrassment, and even alarm over the evils of discordant local variations on the theme of learning.²⁹ Local autonomy had to be abridged to accommodate the need for standards established and policed at the state level.

Crucial to these late nineteenth-century calls for increasing the public responsibilities of the schools were the enactment and enforcement of state compulsory-attendance laws. Of all the changes in American education between Gast's schooling years and the end of the nineteenth century, none was more momentous than the state-by-state endorsement of the arguments that the state could compel children to attend schools, could punish parents and guardians who did not abide by the attendance laws, and, as a final measure, could confine truants along with other delinquent children in appropriate boarding institutions.

In the estimation of the majority of Americans, such laws seemed reasonable and even urgently needed to ensure that the schools be given the best opportunity to fulfill their new mission. But to the extent that they confirmed majoritarian practices and preferences, such laws amounted to class legislation directed at the poor and at ethnic and racial minorities. Upon these groups, in particular, reformers turned the light of paternal and at times frightened concern. If such laws brought immediate hardships to minority peoples, reformers reasoned, they nonetheless promised them gains in the long run. Even so staunch a defender of individual freedom as John Stuart Mill maintained, "Despotism is a legitimate

mode of government in dealing with barbarians provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually affecting that end."³⁰ As seen by many reformers, minorities were "notorious loafers and idlers." Among them were to be found "vagrant and criminal classes"; their children comprised the bulk of "vicious and depraved" youth. When they moved at all, it was through "sheer selfishness," for they were liberally represented among the "unclean," "impure," "morally diseased," "knavish," "lying," and "profane" of American society.³¹

But the majoritarian mood had not always been supportive of such thorough means to ensure an education for all of school age. One major ideal had to undergo dramatic transformation over the middle decades of the nineteenth century to make such laws possible. Stated negatively, the ideal held that compulsory attendance was undemocratic. As peculiar as it might sound to institutionally bred twentieth-century Americans, their predecessors once generally agreed that compulsory-attendance laws would be "undemocratic and out of harmony with American principles of government."³² In presenting his elaborate plan for educating the youth of Virginia, no less a devotee of learning than Thomas Jefferson stopped short of requesting mandatory school attendance.³³ That note of restraint prevailed over much of the nineteenth century. Even as late as 1893, the governor of Pennsylvania vetoed a compulsory-attendance bill on the grounds that it was un-American.³⁴ Stated positively, the antebellum ideal held that the true masters of the child were the natural parents or guardians. Referring to the period during which this ideal prevailed more strongly, Forest Ensign exaggerated only slightly in observing that "no one questioned the father's right to the time and labor of his child" nor challenged the notion that the privileges of parenthood were "natural and holy" and beyond interference.³⁵ But not completely beyond interference.

²⁸ Quoted by I. B. Berkson in *The Ideal and the Community* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1988), p. 129.

²⁹ See, for example, the pamphlet, prepared for the Public Education Association of Philadelphia, and the Department of Education of the Civic Club of Philadelphia, *Compulsory Education*, (n.p.), p. 5, 28; "Mixed Schools," *The National Teachers' Monthly*, 3 (July 1877), 275-76; *Fifth Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Territory of Washington* (Olympia: C. B. Bagley, 1883), p. 17; and "Evil Communications," *The National Teachers' Monthly*, 2 (January 1876), 86-87.

³⁰ Forest Chester Ensign, *Compulsory School Attendance and Child Labor* (Iowa City: Athens, 1921), p. 234.

³¹ Jefferson also lowered the odds against nonattendance, however, with the formal recommendation that a literacy test be given to all prospective voters. See Roy J. Honeywell, *The Educational Work of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), pp. 234-35.

³² Jack Culbertson, "Attendance," *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, 3rd ed., ed. Chester W. Harris (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 94.

³³ Ensign, *Compulsory School Attendance*, p. 233.

²⁸ Weibe, *Search for Order*, pp. 149-50.

²⁹ The loss of respect, stated positively, was a clear wish to maintain social order in the face of social change. It occurred long before the late nineteenth century in such urban centers as Boston and New York City. See, for example, Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System*, and Schultz, *The Culture Factory*.

pace Ensign. For example, in an 1838 legal case involving a father's request to regain custody of his daughter, who had been institutionalized in Philadelphia's House of Refuge, the judge resorted to *parens patriae* in rejecting the father's petition. The doctrine of *parens patriae* held that the state could intervene *in loco parentis* when the property or person of the child was jeopardized. In such cases, the state was held to be the ultimate "common guardian of the community."

It is to be remembered, that the public has a paramount interest in the virtue and knowledge of its members, and that, of strict right, the business of education belongs to it. That parents are ordinarily entrusted with it, is because it can seldom be put into better hands; but when they are incompetent or corrupt, what is there to prevent the public from withdrawing their faculties, held, as they obviously are, at its sufferance? The right of parental control is a natural, but not an unalienable one.³⁶

The state did hold final right to guard the community. It could take a child into custody to guarantee him or her a proper education. Because parents were deemed generally more competent, however, *parens patriae* was rarely invoked. At any rate, before the state could act, it had to gain satisfaction in each individual case that the parents were either incompetent or corrupt. The burden of proof of parental inadequacy commonly fell on the state. After 1852, however, each of enactment of compulsory-attendance laws carried the implicit understanding that the state had the full right to share child custody with the natural parents. Where, as *parens patriae* had once been limited to questions of the child's person or property up to the age of seven, it had by the late nineteenth century moved into the field of criminal jurisprudence. This doctrine lent support to the idea that, with respect to youth as well as to children, the state could do what it judged reasonable and proper in order to perpetuate itself.

Educational leaders, meanwhile, remained divided about the implications of this shift. In referring to the 1879 compulsory-attendance law in Wisconsin, for example, State Superintendent William C. Whitford spoke for many in pointing out that state compulsion, although theoretically sound, should not be enforced. Presumably, parental privilege, as well as the selective judgments of teachers and administrators, still carried weight. Rather, the law had as its limited intent to "direct the attention of the people" to the problems of nonattendance.³⁷ On the

³⁶ *Ex Parte Crouse*, 4 Whart. (Pa.) 9 (1838), quoted in *Childhood and Youth in America: A Documentary History*, ed. Robert H. Bremner (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), I, 692-93. See also *The People v. Turner*, 55 Ill. 280 (1870), quoted in *Childhood and Youth in America*, II, p. 486.
³⁷ Quoted in Ensign, *Compulsory School Attendance*, p. 208. For a historical overview and stern

other hand, County Superintendent C. J. Greer, of the Washington Territory, offered wholehearted acceptance of the most extreme (and more prophetic) view of the matter. "The children belong to the state," Greer insisted, "and the state should see that they are educated."³⁸ John Gast's goddess carried an old and familiar school book, but its pages were becoming filled with messages and instructions foreign to him and his old classmates.

IV

Compulsion in the Age of Energy left a mixed record. In some instances compulsion did bring a wider arena of liberty for certain individuals and groups; the record is not without distinctive service to democratic aspirations. But other acts of compulsion illustrate power roughshod, power that not only ignored legitimate arguments for pluralism and local option, but indeed demeaned democratic purposes, lent strength to paternal elitism, and undercut loyalty either to one's provincial community or to internationalism.

In retrospect, the era of compulsion can be seen as patterned and premediated. But such a vision of compulsion is not persuasive. One suspects, with Rush Welter, that many of us who today so magisterially decry certain legacies from the era of compulsion might well have lent support to those measures had we been members of that earlier generation. The so-called pattern was formed with hardly more forethought than restraint, and what emerged rather more resembled a statutory collage. Its diverse creators usually operated by what Carl Becker called the traditional American procedure—by fighting for good bargains by means of bait and economic pressure, by unlimited indulgence in the blare and blarney and pandemonium of free propaganda, all compact of truth and falsehood, by impugning bad faith to opponents and invoking the American way of life on behalf of every special interest. . . .

[This] is the normal American way of life, and whatever comes of it, supposing it to be something less than disaster, we will still call it democracy. . . . The danger is that, always trusting to luck and hoping for the best, the physical barriers may

critique of *parens patriae*, see in *re* Gault, 387 U.S. 1 (1967), 1428-72. By the 1960s, the voices calling for curtailment of the power of *parens patriae* had reached, through Gault, the highest courts. Since that time the rules of criminal jurisprudence have widely reappeared in juvenile courts. See also Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 46-100; and Gustav L. Schramm, "The Juvenile Court Idea," *Federal Probation*, 13 (1947), 19-23.
³⁸ *Fifth Biennial Report of the Superintendent*, p. 59.

be up before we realize what it is all about—before we are prepared even to understand the fundamental issues which history has so long been preparing for us.³⁹

In one mood, we might lament that the bureaucratic—and compulsory—mode of contemporary education has not contributed more to our provincial and international loyalties. And yet, with one eye on the record of state-administered compulsion and the other on the dubious contemporary drives to create the equivalent of a national ministry of education in America, one might also marvel that history has thus far been so protective of a native esteem for local initiative and of a responsiveness to calls for membership in that wide and diverse human family beyond our flag. And all the while, one still hears the echoes of the footfalls of Gaspar's goddess.

Correspondence

School Desegregation in Large Cities: A Critique of the Coleman "White Flight" Thesis

RESPONSE TO PROFESSORS PETTIGREW AND GREEN:

Pettigrew and Green, in a paper that appeared in the last issue of this journal [Thomas F. Pettigrew and Robert L. Green, "School Desegregation in Large Cities: A Critique of the Coleman 'White Flight' Thesis," *HER*, February 1976, pp. 1-53], carried out a detailed critique of my recent statements and writing on school desegregation and disputed the results of my research, which showed an accelerated loss of Whites when school desegregation occurred in large central cities. Their paper is only the latest in an enormous barrage of material designed to counter statements I have made and to undermine the results of my recent research. This barrage ranges from press conferences (two last June, others since) and symposia with the press in attendance, to papers in academic and semiacademic journals. One might ask why all the frantic activity, and I will ask that later. But first I would like to reply to points raised in the Pettigrew-Green paper.

The most important question is the substantive question: does desegregation in large central cities accelerate the loss of Whites from those cities, or not? My colleagues and I find that it does, while some others, including Reynolds Farley, Christine Rossell, and in their own analysis, Pettigrew and Green, do not. There are two basic reasons for the difference, along with some special reasons in the case of Rossell. One is that the three studies which find no effect confound metropolitan-area or county-wide desegregation with central-city desegregation. The other is that we examined losses in the year of desegregation itself, while Farley and Pettigrew-Green consider losses over a five-year period (although about half of the desegregation took place in the latter part of that period).

The confounding of central-city and metropolitan desegregation arises because Pettigrew-

³⁹ Carl Becker, *New Liberties for Old* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 117-19.