

Inside

Recommended Reading p. 5
Letters to the Editor p. 6

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Tot Sociology: What Happened to History in the Grade Schools

By *Diane Ravitch*

ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO, I began to re-search the condition of history instruction in the public schools. Initially, I wrongly assumed that each state devised its own sequence of courses. As I examined the curriculum in different states, I came to realize that, with limited variations, there is a national curriculum in the social studies. Regardless of the state or the school district, children in kindergarten and the first three grades (K-3) study home, family, neighbors, and the local community; children in fourth grade study state history; children in fifth, eighth, and eleventh grades study American history; high school seniors study American government, economics, and civics.



Diane Ravitch

The content of the social studies in the other grades varies, although the typical pattern is supposed to include world cultures in sixth grade; world geography in seventh grade; civics or world cultures in ninth grade; world history in tenth grade. The courses in the sixth, seventh, ninth, and tenth grades may or may not be offered, and they may be replaced by one of the social sciences or electives or eliminated altogether, depending on the requirements of the individual state or local district.

The more closely I examined the social studies curriculum, the more my attention was drawn to the curious nature of the early grades, which is virtually content-free. The social studies curriculum for the K-3 grades is organized around the study of the relationships within the home, school, neighborhood, and local community. Behind this curriculum is a welter of dubious assumptions. Immersion in the sociology and economics of the children's own world is supposed to build the children's self-esteem (because they study themselves and their own families), socialize them as members of the community, prepare them to participate

in political activities, and develop their awareness of economic interdependence (by learning that the farmer grows wheat for bread, which is processed by someone else, baked by someone else, and delivered to the neighborhood grocery store by someone else).

This curriculum of "me, my family, my school, my community" now dominates the early grades in American public education. The K-3 sequence issued by the California Department of Education in 1981 includes the following content: in kindergarten, children study "Myself and Others in My World"; in first grade, "People at Home and at School"; in second grade, "People as Members of Groups," emphasizing "norms, roles and responsibilities"; in third grade, "People as Members of Communities," emphasizing social interactions in group life. This "scope and sequence" defines the social studies of the first four grades. It contains no mythology, legends, biographies, hero tales, or great events in the life of this nation or any other. It is tot sociology.

The same pattern is evident in the draft "scope and sequence" published by the National Council of Social Studies (the national organization of social studies professionals) in 1984:

- Kindergarten—Awareness of Self in a Social Setting
- Grade I—The Individual in Primary Social Groups: Understanding School and Family Life
- Grade II—Meeting Basic Needs in Nearby Social Groups: The Neighborhood
- Grade III—Sharing Earth-Space with Others: The Community

Why This Curriculum?

So widespread is this pattern in American public schools that one might assume that this particular sequence represents the accumulated wisdom of generations of educational research. Teachers believe that this sequence is there because it has always been there. Those professionally responsible for developing curricula believe that this pattern rests on a foun-

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dation of cognitive and developmental research. In fact, these assumptions are not true.

The current pattern in the early primary grades has not always been there, and it is not derived from research into child development or cognitive psychology. As far as I can tell, it is there because no one has questioned why it is there. It persists today because it is the status quo, the traditional approach; it survives because of a circular assumption that it wouldn't be there unless there was a very

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good reason for it to be there. While other parts of the social studies curriculum have been debated and revised over the past generation, the early grades have escaped scrutiny.

The present K-3 curriculum was introduced in the 1930s, as part of a new approach to the teaching of social studies. At the same time, historical literature and imaginative historical activities were ousted from the curriculum of the early grades.

(continued on page 2)

Tot Sociology

(continued from page 1)

During the 1920s and 1930s, progressive educators led a national curriculum revision movement; at least 37 states and hundreds of cities revised their school curricula in accordance with progressive principles. Some progressive educators wanted to broaden the curriculum in response to the growing numbers of “non-academic” students in high school; the “social reconstructionist” wing of progressive education wanted the schools to play a leading role as an agency of social and political reform. The latter group (centered at Columbia Teachers College) agreed that the era of individualism was finished and a new collectivist age was struggling to be born; within the curriculum, the social studies portion was expected to prepare the citizens of the future for lives of interdependence and democratic collectivism.

The common goal of progressive educators, whatever their political orientation, was to make the curriculum less academic, more utilitarian, less “subject-centered,” and more closely related to students’ interests and experiences. The writings by progressive educators such as William Kilpatrick, Harold Rugg, and John Dewey encouraged school officials to make their curricula more dynamic, more realistically connected to the social, economic, and political problems of the nation.

Paul Hanna’s Role in the New Curriculum

One of the most ambitious curriculum revision efforts took place in Virginia, where an innovative social studies curriculum was launched. The state consultant on the social studies was Paul Hanna, who had received his doctorate at Columbia Teachers College in 1929 for a study of problem solving in arithmetic. (He later became a professor of education at Stanford University.) Hanna was the best-known advocate of the new social studies curriculum, and textbooks today credit him as its originator.

The new curriculum in Virginia sought to replace traditional subject matter with real-life problem solving. The purpose of the new curriculum, Hanna wrote, was twofold: “(1) To direct children in experiencing a realistic understanding and appreciation of human relations; (2) To permit children to participate in improving human relations.” It was organized around what Hanna called “unitary life experiences” rather than such traditional subject matter as history, civics, and geography.

The emphasis throughout the Virginia curriculum was on “major social functions,” such as production, distribution,

consumption, conservation, transportation and communication, exploration and settlement, education, recreation, extension of freedom, aesthetic expression, and religious expression. Grade one was devoted to “home and school life—individual adjustment to the immediate environment”; grade two was devoted to “community life—adaptations to neighborhood relationships”; grade three was “adaptations of life to environmental forces of nature—typical communities living under contrasting conditions of topography, climate, etc.”; and grade four was “adaptations of life to advancing physical frontiers—the story of man’s terrestrial exploration and settlement.” The new social studies curriculum eventually came to be known as “expanding environments,” or “expanding horizons,” or “expanding communities of men” (Hanna’s favored term).

This curricular approach was not completely new. Since the late 19th century, American public schools had taught about the neighborhood and the local community in civics or “home geography.” Children also learned about occupations and industries, nature, the seasons, and the weather. In Indiana, third graders discussed how cities dispose of rubbish and sewage; the duties of local health officers; the importance of clean food, pure water, and fire protection. Civics and home geography in the early grades were taught as part of an overall curriculum that included history, taught at a level appropriate for small children, primarily through stories, biographies, mythology, folktales, and creative activities.

At the time the new curriculum was organized, the country was in the depths of the Depression. Hanna argued that children had an obligation to contribute to the solution of the great social and economic problems of the nation, not by merely understanding them, but through their social participation. In 1934, he wrote, “Children, with adults, need to attack the problem of raising the standard of living, of increasing the amount of food, shelter, clothing, recreation, and education of the members of their own families and their local communities; they need to have experiences in governing themselves in and out of school; and they need experiences in general improvement of the life of the social group.” The following year, Hanna urged that children be enlisted as active agents in the cooperative solution of community problems.

Hanna realized that other educators did not agree with his insistence on social experience as the fulcrum of the young child’s social studies curriculum. Indeed, not even all progressive educators agreed with this program to reconstruct the elementary social studies program. In a 1935 article titled “Romance or Reality:

A Curriculum Problem,” published in *Progressive Education*, Hanna criticized the pedagogical approach of other progressive educators as “romantic.” Hanna did not deny that young children loved what he called the romantic curriculum, which was grounded in history and literature. In this curriculum, Hanna wrote,

[children] spend many happy hours reliving the days of old when knights were bold and rode through the land in search of great adventure. They participate in many creative activities. They draw and paint the symbols of heraldry, dance the festivals of historic peasant folk, etc. These children in their imaginations become courageous, sea-faring men of the north countries, construct small models of picturesque boats and again sail unknown seas to find new lands. Or these pupils imagine themselves to be Athenians or Romans living in the Golden Age of art, architecture, or philosophy. And many of them become pantalooned Dutch children, clumping along in wooden shoes and raising beds of tulips.

But, Hanna said, these “happy and joyful” children were failing to “face the realities of this world in which we live—their escape, they retreat to a romantic realm of the yesterday.” Because the nation was in an economic crisis of vast proportions, there was no time for romantic escapism; these first, second, and third graders had to learn to contribute to the good of society.

Other Proponents

Although Hanna is regularly credited as the author of the expanding environments concept, he was not so much the creator of the concept as he was the best proponent of the ideas that were widely shared among progressive educators in the 1930s. His suggestions were readily adopted because they were located in the mainstream of progressive thought.

His proposals represented the culmination of curricular trends that had been expressed in the 1916 report by the Committee on the Social Studies, which has long been considered the birth certificate of the social studies field. That report sought to make social studies in secondary schools more lifelike, more responsive to the needs of society, and less academic. However, the authors of the 1916 report never contemplated the elimination of historical content from the early grades. In fact, the 1916 report specifically endorsed elementary curricula in Philadelphia and Indianapolis that included a rich array of hero stories from the ancient and modern world.

Nonetheless, the expanding environments approach was an idea whose time

had come, because it so well captured the social spirit of progressive education. In 1934, the American Historical Association's Commission on the Social Studies recommended that "instruction in the social sciences should begin in the earliest years of schooling, not with the life and institutions of some people remote in time, space, and cultural development, but with the life and institutions of the surrounding community—the simple social relationships of the family and the neighborhood and the modes of providing food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, recreation, cultural opportunities and security of person." However, these recommendations also proposed that the child "acquire a stock of ideas which would enable him to go beyond the immediate in time and space," and that the elementary school should "acquaint the child as fully as possible with the evolution of American culture—local and national—and to some extent with the origins of American culture in the Western world."

By the 1940s, the expanding environments approach to the early elementary grades had been adopted in almost every state and school district. Within the education profession, it was associated with modern thought and forward-looking professionalism. Perhaps educators believed that the introduction of a sociological approach in the early grades would demonstrate that educators were shouldering their part of the burden during the Depression. In the 1950s, the expanding environments approach was justified as a linchpin in the teaching of citizenship and community responsibility. By the 1960s and 1970s, the rationalization became psychological; it was asserted that children would build self-esteem by learning about themselves first.

It is important to recall that the expanding environments approach was established not as a result of the findings of cognitive or developmental psychology, but as a result of specific social and political values. In *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim challenges the psychological premises of the expanding environments approach. Bettelheim contends that classic folktales and fairy tales and hero stories help children live better with their existential anxieties and dilemmas; furthermore, they help children gain a surer and more confident sense of themselves by enabling them to identify with heroes who have struggled against life's difficulties and emerged victorious. The realism of most elementary readers, Bettelheim argues, is banal, and stories about everyday reality lack the power to address children's deepest emotional and psychological needs. He continues:

Today children no longer grow up within the security of an extended family, or of a well-integrated community. Therefore, even more than

at the times fairy tales were invented, it is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence.

From What Curriculum Have Children Been 'Liberated'?

The celebratory histories of progressive education would have us believe that children had been liberated by an innovative curriculum that permitted them to visit the supermarket and the post office. But from what had they been liberated? Before the advent of expanding environments, there was an elementary school curriculum for the early grades in history, geography, and civics. It differed from one school district to the next, but there was a common spirit in its essentials, an intention to introduce children to exciting stories of important events and significant individuals and to provide them with a basic historical and cultural vocabulary.

The curriculum of many school districts showed the influence of the 1909 report of the Committee of Eight of the American Historical Association, which proposed an elementary curriculum built around American history. "Our aim," wrote the committee, "is to explain the America of to-day, its civilization, its institutions and its traditions." The committee had no illusions about teaching formal history in the early grades; instead, children were expected to receive "definite impressions that may be conveyed to them by means of pictures, descriptions, and illustrative stories. . . ."

The committee's proposals organized what was already commonplace in most American schools into a regular pattern. In the first three grades, the committee recommended the teaching of Indian life and legends, stories about Columbus, George Washington and other heroes, heroes of other lands, the celebration of national, state, and local holidays, and the stories evoked by the holidays. Thanksgiving became a time to learn about the Pilgrims; Memorial Day was a time to learn about the Civil War.

The line between historical literature and general literature was virtually nonexistent. Teacher guides emphasized the importance of telling stories to the children in the teacher's own voice. Most children read (or listened to) the Greek and Roman myths, and in many districts children read myths and folklore from "the oriental nations," "the Teutonic peoples," and elsewhere. Third graders in the public schools of Philadelphia studied "he-

roses of legend and history," including "Joseph; Moses; David; Ulysses; Alexander; Horatius; Cincinnatus; Siegfried; Arthur; Roland; Alfred the Great; Richard the Lion Hearted; Robert Bruce; William Tell; Joan of Arc; Peter the Great; Florence Nightingale."

History as a good story is not a bad approach to take with children ages five, six, seven, and eight years. History as an opportunity to exercise the imagination and live in another era is also a good approach for very young children. The proof of the pudding, as advocates of the new approach recognized 50 years ago, is that children *enjoy* it; they learn painlessly when their lively minds and their sense of romance and adventure are engaged. What is more, the kind of curriculum that predated expanding environments prepared children for the study of history and literature in the later grades.

Today, children in most American public schools do not read fairy tales, myths, folklore, legends, sagas, historical adventure stories, or biographies of great men and women unless the teacher introduces them during reading period. Current reading methods depend almost entirely on basal readers, a species of textbook containing simple stories about ordinary children, families, and neighborhoods. With rare exceptions, the basal readers do not contain rich historical and literary content.

Who Is to Blame?

In the course of my research, I was told by many educators that the present K-3 curriculum is based on years of educational research. No one was able to point to any specific research, but they assumed that it was validated by the developmental studies of Jean Piaget. Piaget's work, however, was never cited when expanding environments was introduced or popularized. In fact, Piagetian theory permits teachers to teach virtually *any* content so long as they proceed from the concrete to the abstract. Following Piaget, teachers can (and do) teach young children about ancient Egypt or the life of cavemen or virtually anything else; Piagetian theory is about how children learn, not what they are taught.

In the face of persisting claims by curriculum developers and supervisors that the expanding environments curriculum is grounded in research, I asked a dozen leading scholars in the fields of cognitive psychology, child development, and curriculum theory about the matter. None knew of any research justifying the expanding environments approach; none defended it. All deplored the absence of historical and cultural content in the early grades.

(continued on page 4)

Tot Sociology

(continued from page 3)

Jerome Bruner, professor of psychology at the New School, wrote that “there is little beyond ideology to commend the [expanding environments] program and its endlessly bland versions. Whatever we know about memory, thought, passion, or any other worthy human process tells us that it is not the known and the settled but the unknown and the unsettled that provokes the use of mind, the awakening of consciousness.” The current approach, he observed, ignores the fact that “what most grips the child are tales of trickery, deceit, and cleverness—be it in Little Red Riding Hood or in folktales generally. . . . It is inconceivable to me that one could grow up and feel fully in the world without a sense of history . . . without the imagery of the great turning points that created the present.”

Joseph Adelson, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan and codirector of its psychological clinic, wrote to confirm my hunch that “there is nothing in cognitive science, or in developmental research, which supports the present way of doing things. In fact, I’m quite convinced you could turn the sequence on its head, going from the community to ‘myself,’ without its making much of a difference. Furthermore, the current curriculum is really quite vapid and seems to induce a considerable degree of boredom, at least among the children I have seen exposed to it.”

Philip Phenix, professor emeritus at Teachers College, a highly regarded philosopher of education, commented:

Although teaching must obviously take account of where the student is, the whole purpose of education is to enlarge experience by introducing new experiences far, far beyond where the child starts. The curious, cautious, timid presumption that the limits of expansion are defined in any one grade year by the spatial boundaries defining the expanding boundaries dogma is wholly without warrant. Young children are quite capable of, and deeply interested in, widening their horizons to the whole universe of space and time and even far beyond that into the world of the imaginary. And all this from Kindergarten years, or even before!

The responses I received included repeated references to the “vacuousness” and the “sterility” of the content offered to young children in their social studies classes. Imagine the plight of the typical first graders: They have seen television programs about space flight, wars, terrorism, foreign countries, and national elections, but their social studies textbook is about neighborhood helpers and family roles. No wonder surveys have re-

peatedly found that children consider social studies their least interesting subject and that the time allotted to social studies in the early grades has steadily diminished.

What the Private Schools Do

At most private schools, social studies are closely correlated with literature and, in some cases, with science instruction. At Milton Academy in Massachusetts, for example, the social studies course for the second grade is devoted to a study of “the ocean” in the first semester and to China in the second semester, with the children learning about China’s geography, folktales, drama, riddles, and calligraphy. In third grade, the theme for the year is “Explorers and Exploring,” which provides an opportunity to study the Vikings and Norse myths and to learn map skills in the first semester, and to study American Indians, their religion, mythology, and art in the second semester.

Other private schools introduce children in the K–3 grades to units on the cavemen, Eskimos, Australian aborigines, explorers and pioneers of early America, American colonial life, American heroes and legends, the prairie culture of 19th-century America, and the myths and legends of ancient civilizations (especially Sumerian, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman). It can probably be safely assumed that the children in these schools suffer no absence of self-esteem, do learn how to cooperate with others in group activities, and do eventually learn how to take an active part in civic and political affairs of their community. Very likely the main difference between them and their contemporaries in the typical public school program is that children in private school have a far more interesting immersion in history, literature, and art in the early grades and consequently develop a far broader knowledge of other cultures as well as their own.

The disappearance of historical and cultural content in the early grades in American public education bears on the issue that E. D. Hirsch, Jr., has raised in his writings on “cultural literacy”—the background knowledge that literate people have available to them as they go through daily life. Cultural literacy is a fluid concept, dependent on time and place. As Hirsch explains it, people can be quite capable of reading a language, yet so ignorant of common references and allusions that they cannot understand stories in the daily press. Much of the background knowledge that most adults take for granted—knowledge of myths, legends, fairy tales, folktales, historical events and persons, folktales and stories, heroes and villains—was once learned in the early grades.

Except in elite private schools and the

homes of highly motivated parents, children are no longer reading or hearing the stories that are deeply woven into Western literature and history. They are more likely to read about Mr. T than about Martin Luther King, Jr., more likely to hear about Madonna than about Madame Curie, more likely to celebrate the exploits of Rambo than those of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

The Consequences of Vacuous Curricula—and a Solution

The consequences of years of neglect of “content” in the curriculum are apparent in the results of the first national assessment of history and literature, which Chester Finn, Jr., and I describe in *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* Substantial numbers of students professed ignorance of major historical figures and events, as well as of significant mythological and biblical allusions. Some critics of the study argue that it was ever thus. Thus it will surely remain unless the curriculum consciously strives to teach significant knowledge about the people, events, and ideas of the past.

There is nothing inevitable or irreversible about the present state of affairs. The state board of education in California adopted a new history curriculum in the summer of 1987, which substantially enriches the historical content of the early grades with myths, folktales, stories, and biographies. (I participated in drafting the new curriculum.) As one of the major textbook-buying states in the nation, California has the market power to inspire a new generation of social studies textbooks or, in their absence, to encourage teachers to use well-written historical literature instead of vapid textbooks.

It ought to be the rule, rather than the exception, that young children listen to, read, act out, and discuss fairy tales, myths, legends, folklore, heroic adventures, legends, biographies, and stories from history. The teachers who bring “real books” into the classrooms should be typical, not mavericks. But attention must be paid by an intelligent, informed, and persistent public, or the democratic culture that we claim to prize will be beyond our reach.

Diane Ravitch, adjunct professor of history and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, is the author of The Schools We Deserve; The Troubled Crusade: American Education, 1945–1980; and, with Chester Finn, Jr., What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? (1987). This article originally appeared in a somewhat longer version in the Summer 1987 issue of The American Scholar. In 1984–85 Diane Ravitch was a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar.

reading *recommended by the book committee*

humanities

social sciences

natural sciences

FREDERICK J. CROSSON, ROBERT B. HELLMAN,
ROBERT P. SONKOWSKY, LAWRENCE WILLSON
EARL W. COUNT, RICHARD N. CURRENT, LEONARD W. DOOB,
ANDREW GYORGY, MADELINE R. ROBINSON,
VICTORIA SCHUCK, ANNA J. SCHWARTZ
RONALD GEBALLE, RUSSELL B. STEVENS

FREDERICK J. CROSSON

The Closing of the American Mind. Allan Bloom. Simon & Schuster, 1987. \$18.95.

A penetrating examination of the soul our students bring to college, of the all-too-dispiriting culture they encounter there, and of the institution that arranges the encounter. Bloom knows the student psyche closely, as a concerned and observant teacher does. He exhibits the confined nature of our culture by tracing how the doors of the mind have been closed to larger views, and he reflects on how it could come about that the universities should have lost sight of their essential task. Even if you demur at parts of the diagnosis, reading it will make you rethink things seemingly settled. Highly recommended.

Varieties of Realism. Rom Harré. Basil Blackwell, 1986. \$34.95.

The centuries-long traditional view that science yielded, little by little (sometimes in leaps), truths about the world—think of Galileo, Newton, Einstein—has come under trenchant criticism in this century. Indeed the supporters of a straightforward correspondence theory of the truth of scientific claims—even as an asymptotic ideal—are a small minority among philosophers of science. Harré concedes the validity of the critique and in this important work develops a theory of “referential realism,” which bases a defense of scientific realism on the (logically) weaker claim of its reasonableness rather than its truth or falsity. The claim is worked out by embedding a conception of referring in the material and cognitive practices of the scientific community, viewed as an exemplary moral community. Some parts of the discussion presuppose a knowledge of the contemporary problematic, but the work as a whole is accessible to the interested reader and well worth the attention it requires.

Michael Polanyi: A Critical Exposition. Harry Prosch. SUNY, 1986. \$44.50; paper, \$14.95.

Harré’s book (above) acknowledges the pioneering work of this distinguished physical chemist and philosopher in drawing attention to the essential role of the scientific community in rightly conceiving the nature of science. Prosch attempts here the first systematic presentation and critique of Polanyi’s thought, both in its epistemological dimension (the rejection of unrestricted “objectivity”) and its practical program (the rejection of unrestricted moral demands). He presents a careful and fair defense of Polanyi against a number of critical assessments (including that of Harré) and a conclusion that raises some questions of its own. Polanyi’s analysis deserves to be better known, and this clear and balanced presentation should help to win a hearing.

The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley. Ed. by Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood. Basil Blackwell, 1985. \$45.

Beryl Smalley did more than anyone else to awaken scholars of the Middle Ages to the importance of the exegesis of the Bible in understanding not only scholastic thought but the political, social, and constitutional history of the period. That this may sound odd is a tribute to the success of her work. This Festschrift exhibits some of the effects of her pioneering research in the study of, among other topics, the *Logic* of John Wycliffe, the Franciscan disputes over poverty, and the political use of scripture by Clement VI.

Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century. Sidney Hook. Harper & Row, 1987. \$29.95.

No one who lived through or has read about the past half-century in this country can have missed the figure of Sidney Hook at the center of our continuing controversies about democracy, academic and political freedom, and communism. Friend and defender of John Dewey and Bertrand Russell (most of the time, at least), adviser to *Partisan Review*, professor at Columbia, he was on the inside of many of the events and movements that most of us saw from afar, and in this extensive (600 pp.) memoir we learn in remarkable detail how they unfolded from within. He remains, admirably, what he had become by the 1930s—an anti-Communist who never surrendered his liberal democratic ideals. Nor has he learned to mince words, which makes for interesting reading.

ANNA J. SCHWARTZ

Unemployment: Economic Theory and Evidence. Peter Sinclair. Basil Blackwell, 1987. \$34.95; paper, \$14.95.

Unemployment: Cause and Cure. Patrick Minford with Paul Ashton, Michael Peel, David Davies, and Alison Sprague. 2nd ed., Basil Blackwell, 1986. \$50.

A host of books published in the 1980s deal with the phenomenon of unemployment, of which the two listed here are representative. Sinclair explores the subject in a comprehensive way, reviewing a variety of approaches found in the literature. He begins with historical data as far back as 1851 continuing until 1985; the main focus is on the United States and United Kingdom, but Australia, Canada, and much of the rest of Western Europe also are covered. He examines one theoretical explanation after another: Does insufficient demand, in part because of wage and price inflexibility, explain unemployment? Is unemployment a result of monetary or real shocks or of implicit contracts between firms and workers? Are search theories of unemployment convincing? How do unions affect unemployment? What is the link between inflation and unemployment? Does the unemployment rate get stuck for prolonged periods at either a high or low level? What difference for unemployment would a share rather than a wage

system produce? Would steadier employment mean more employment? In his final chapter he presents recommendations to lower the unemployment rate, including the reduction of marginal tax rates on low-paid workers and the provision of employment subsidies.

Minford et al. are concerned with current U.K. unemployment under the Thatcher government, focusing on the two fundamental causes they identify as the fixed unemployment benefit system that limits wage flexibility and the power of unions to raise wages relative to nonunion wages. Minford and his coauthors would cap unemployment benefits so they never exceed 70 percent of net income at work, and would eliminate labor monopoly power.

Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't. Ed. by Sheldon H. Danziger and Daniel H. Weinberg. Harvard, 1986. \$27.50.

In the two decades since President Johnson declared war on poverty, what has been accomplished? Transfer programs directed at different groups—elderly and disabled people, single mothers, and poor married couples with children—accounted for most of the rise in social spending; the increase in spending on medical care is also significant, whereas expenditure on education and employment and training programs is less so. Some recent studies have contended that spending growth was a major cause of adverse trends in poverty or family structure—a view the papers in this conference volume reject. Disincentive effects of income transfers were found to be modest; the real value of welfare payments declined after the 1970s, but family dissolution continued to rise, and variations in benefit levels across states did not lead to corresponding variations in divorce rates, illegitimacy rates, or percentage of children in single-parent families. The authors of one paper concluded that the rise in black unemployment depends on undetermined causes other than the growth of welfare benefits. Reforms the authors advocate include the achievement of high employment rates, tax changes to reduce the burden of taxation on the working poor, expanded coverage of health insurance for those who lack it, and experimentation with programs that emphasize welfare and work.

Offshore Lands: Oil and Gas Leasing and Conservation on the Outer Continental Shelf. Walter J. Mead, Asbjorn Moseidjord, Dennis D. Muraoka, and Philip E. Sorensen. Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research, 1985. \$34.95; paper, \$12.95.

This study examines resource conservation issues and the process by which firms bid for leases entitling them to develop oil and natural gas that may be found on the billion acres of land in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) the federal government owns. The authors propose scrapping the 1978 OCS Lands Acts Amendments and instituting an auction system in which firms bid for leases in the form of cash bonuses paid in a lump sum before exploratory drilling begins. They advocate eliminating the primary lease term in OCS leases—the time period during which lessees are allowed to explore a lease tract—and shifting management of resources from the public sector to the private sector. The role of government would be to enforce contract, property, and liability law to hold individuals and firms responsible for all the effects of their actions on the status of wildlife in OCS areas, the aesthetics of oil plat-

(continued on page 6)



Letters to the Editor

My old friend Saul Levin has, I think, half a point in recommending that we change κυβερνήτης to κυβερνήτης [in Phi Beta Kappa's motto, see *The Key Reporter*, Spring 1987]. True, his Greek is every bit as accurate as mine, but it's not clear that grammatical gender ever seriously meant the same thing as sex (Aristophanes parodied it in *Clouds*, so one must assume, even ca. 425 B.C. people realized the difference between a feminine *noun* and a *real* female). *Philosophia* is feminine by virtue of the traffic rules of Indo-European languages. Being a compound, *philosophia* is no doubt two steps away from serious discussion for its gender. Of course, *phi beta kappa* was invented in Williamsburg, Virginia, on December 5, 1776, and very few Greeks, if any, were in attendance. Plato would clearly not have applauded the caption, but he wasn't there. Given the enlightenment background of the period, *philosophia* probably meant more in the 18th century of our era than it meant in the 4th century B.C. Greece. In Italian, your license plate is grammatically feminine while your headlights are grammatically masculine. It is beyond me what this says about you, your license plate(s), or your headlights. (What it does say is that a lot of failed Pindaric poets got to name the working parts of an Italian car and, my, didn't they have fun?! Who in the world but an unhappy imitator of Horace would call brakes *freni* or headlights *fari*?)

κυβερνήτης or κυβερνήτης, neither matters very much, and, after all, we were spared the Latin translation *Scientia, vitae gubernator*, which sounds like a grim Roman judge imposing a life-sentence at hard labor.

Douglas J. Stewart
Professor of Classics
Brandeis University

Dr. Levin states that the error he has researched "pinpoints the risk of composing in a foreign language." Amusingly enough, three paragraphs later he himself succumbs to almost the very danger that he warns about.

Nautical terminology is evidently "a foreign language" to Dr. Levin. . . . The International Yacht Racing Rules happen to be written in English, and the 1984-1988 version (like all its predecessors) uses the word [*helmsman*] freely without troubling to define it, although many terms are defined. The word is virtually essential to the sport of sailing.

Dennis Conner was the helmsman of the yacht that won the America's Cup this year, a position very different from that of his tactician and from that of his navigator. *Skipper* is not the same thing; some skippers seldom touch the helm. In a book on racing I devoted two chapters to helmsmanship, the art of steering the

Recommended Reading

(continued from page 5)

forms, and the provision of safeguards against oil spills. Because state and local governments provide services that benefit OCS developers, the authors endorse the sharing of OCS revenues among the different branches of government.

LAWRENCE WILLSON

The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales. Michael J. Colacurcio. Harvard, 1984. \$30.

In Hawthorne's Shadow: American Romance from Melville to Mailer. Samuel Chase Coale. Univ. Kentucky, 1985. \$24.

Despite the occasional hard going entailed in keeping up with Colacurcio, it is worth the effort, partly to see how a knowledge of the period of Hawthorne's stories and a close attention to the text reveal their profounder meanings, and partly to discover that Hawthorne, himself learned in Puritan history and the circumambient theology, became in such early tales as "The Minister's Black Veil" (the discussion of which falls just short of being five times the length of the tale) more historian than romancer.

Coale concerns himself with Hawthorne's dark Manichean vision of "the fund of evil in every human heart" and those other American writers who have also been "attracted to cemeteries, crypts, caverns, and dark forests," from Melville through Harold Frederic, such southerners as Faulkner and McCullers, to others more contemporaneous: Updike, Didion, and Oates. He concludes that "the long shadow cast" by Hawthorne's vision "haunts us still and will continue to do so as long as American fiction lasts."

Literary Criticism. Henry James. Ed. by Leon Edel and Mark Wilson. 2 vols. Vol. I: **Essays on Literature. American Writers. English Writers.** Vol. II: **French Writers. Other European Writers. The Prefaces to the**

boat. Granted that that book is now out of print, it was not written "a few generations ago," thank you.

C. Stanley Ogilvy
Mamaroneck, New York

. . . I applaud Professor Levin's suggestion that "pilot" would be a good, non-sexist alternative to "helmsman." . . . Nevertheless, I cannot help thinking that as an academic, he has lost sight of the significance of our motto for those of us who have not pursued the scholarly life.

For Professor Levin, love of wisdom may truly be the guide of his life. For my part, since I abandoned Liddell and Scott for Bittker and Eustice (having decided that few minds, and certainly not mine, could retain both the mysteries of Greek grammar and the complexities of corporate tax), *philosophia* is not so much a guide for my life as it is a facilitator. It does not lead, but it makes the journey more pleasant. *Philosophia*, I submit, is not the pilot of our lives, but you might say that it is the flight attendant (also a gender-neutral term, but difficult to translate to ancient Greek). . . .

New York Edition. Library of America, 1984. \$27.50 each.

The Complete Notebooks of Henry James. Ed. by Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers. Oxford Univ., 1987. \$30.

Younger readers may be startled, and surely ought to be, to discover through these expansive (2,892 pp.) and handsome volumes that once upon a time the literary critic, himself an artist even in his critical writing, believed and declared that a book had something intelligible to say and was more than "a volatile mixture of linguistics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and reception esthetics."

Time was also when a critic like James kept a voluminous record of the sources of inspiration for his imaginative work; and in another 633 pages we have it spread before us, along with such unimaginative details as the entries in his address book.

John Greenleaf Whittier: A Biography. Roland H. Woodwell. Trustees of the Whittier Homestead, 1986. \$20.

Woodwell announces at the outset, with the firm self-assurance of his 86 years, many of them spent in the study of his subject, that he has written "an old-fashioned biography, without 'interpretation' or 'theme.'" He has done exactly that, and the result is marvelously refreshing. The chapters have no such poetic titles as "The Nostalgic Cup" (Edel's *James*) or "A Pluming of Wings" (Wilkinson's *Saint Gaudens*); they are simply and straightforwardly titled "1807-28," "1829-31," and so on down to the final chapter, "1891-92." One knows where one is in reading this book. Woodwell is not a "fine" writer; he provides us with a fact in every line, and the facts (503 pages of them) create a solid portrait of Whittier, his associates, the places where he lived, and the times in which he lived. No great claims are made for Whittier as an artist of the first rank—he wrote poetry by the yard upon request (and was especially happy to do so if the subject was the death of a young girl)—but the

Martha Altschuller Zaritsky
Fairfax, Virginia

Saul Levin responds

The many readers who have responded to my piece on gender in the Phi Beta Kappa motto pay more attention to me than a prudent grammarian would expect. Some of them disagree with my essential point, but I need not take issue with Doug Stewart, who goes along with me half-way, or of course with Martha Altschuller Zaritsky. Doug must realize that if the motto were in Latin, it would also require the feminine form *gubernatrix*, as in the personification of *fortuna* by Terence (*Eunuchus* 1046) and of *eloquentia* by Cicero (*De Oratore* 1.[9].38).

I am grateful to the sailing fans, including C. Stanley Ogilvy, for setting me straight on the continuing use of *helmsman*. I ought to have said that from the practical feminists' point of view *helmsman* does not designate a certain category of paid employment, like *draftsman* and *fireman*, where the suffix *-man* might be prejudicial to female aspirants or applicants.

reader, turning to the verses, finds a reasonable trove of poetry there: "Snowbound," for example, "Ichabod," and "Telling the Bees."

LEONARD W. DOOB

A Phylogenetic Fantasy: Overview of the Transference Neuroses. Sigmund Freud. Harvard, 1987. \$17.50.

A hitherto unpublished brief draft of a 1915 essay by Freud which was discovered in 1983 and which classifies many Freudian categories and assumptions while maintaining in effect that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. This edition contains the German fascimile and transcription as well as an essay by the editor on Freud's "Metapsychology and Metabiology." Each reader will have to have the patience to judge whether this is only a bit of careful but not necessarily productive scholarship, or new insights into the manner in which Freud kept striving to fashion a systematic theory of behavior that, in his own words, will "save our scientific fantasies from being criticized as absurd."

The Obedience Experiments: A Case Study of Controversy in Social Science. Arthur G. Miller. Praeger, 1986. \$35.

A spirited, thoroughly gripping dissection of the negative and positive methodological, substantive, and especially ethical issues that continue to be raised 25 years later by the "unmatched," "extraordinary," "notorious" experiments of Stanley Milgram. Unsuspecting American subjects were led to believe that they were administering painful, perhaps almost lethal, electric shocks to a protesting confederate who was role-playing his agony. Many but not all of the subjects obeyed the command of the authoritarian "experimenter." Other Americans who were not subjects but to whom the experimental setup was explained imagined that the experimenter would be disobeyed. None of us, including humanists, scientists, and physicians, may dare avoid the skillful challenge in this lucid portrayal of the ensuing controversies, however much or little we are concerned with our own research and writing or the chilling explanation of Hitler's Holocaust. On the whole, the author somewhat reluctantly vindicates Milgram who, alas, died right before this volume's publication.

Blessed Assurance: At Home with the Bomb in Amarillo, Texas. A. G. Mojtabai. Houghton Mifflin, 1986. \$16.95.

A sprightly, journalistic, interview-packed, balanced account of this Texas city which has since 1942 contained the Pantex plant where all American nuclear weapons are assembled. The plant attracts thousands of antinuclear demonstrators each year. The flavor of the Texans' views on the nuclear, political, and metaphysical issues of our era is best conveyed by the author's direct quotations of them: "Amarillo is a great place, great place to live." "We present the news so that it can be understood in this part of Texas." "It kind of slipped up on us that they were actually making nuclear bombs out there." "Pantex is good for the community." "The Bomb . . . fantastic! Because nobody is gonna jump on us." "If the earth is to be destroyed, it will be at our hands, not God's."

Pacifism and the Just War. Jenny Teichman. Basil Blackwell, 1986. \$29.95.

A brilliant, blunt, incisive, philosophical analysis of statements and views which, as with the Mojtabai book above, can be sampled

through quotations: "St. Augustine justifies war by justifying punishment." "The doctrine of the just war is the most important philosophical rejoinder to pacifism." "We need to rely on more than one kind of difference in order to draw a satisfactory line between legitimate and non-legitimate targets." For scholars and especially for politicians, these problems remain unavoidable.

Forbidden Partners: The Incest Taboo in Modern Culture. James B. Twitchell. Columbia, 1987. \$24.95.

A compelling, readable survey of incest portrayed in European and American literature during the past two centuries, with a brief but adequate account of biological, Freudian, and sociological theories that seek to explain the incest taboo and its violations. Impressive is the constant interaction between that taboo and the persistence of imaginary and real incest, especially between siblings. The oxymoronic range is suggested by Shelley ("I love/ The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,/ When this shall be another's, and that mine"), Edgar Allan Poe's tales, pornography, Frankenstein, child abuse, and the author's passing comment on Lolita: "Incest is un-American." Like it or not, we acquire another insight into living creatures both human and animal.

ROBERT B. HEILMAN

A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms. Rev. and enlarged. Ed. by Roger Fowler. Methuen, 1987. \$29.95; paper, \$11.95.

Some 30 contributors provide 156 brief articles (109 between one and two pages in length) on current critical terms. Most terms are traditional; a dozen more recent ones include *absurd*, *deconstruction*, *semiotics*. The goal is not final definition but a survey of meanings in past and present usage. Lucidity is fairly dependable.

The English Language. Robert Burchfield. Oxford Univ., 1987. \$8.95.

The State of the Language: English Observed. Philip Howard. Oxford Univ., 1985. \$14.95.

Burchfield, a laconic scholar, and Howard, a chatty and often slangy journalist, write complementary works. Mainly historic in method, Burchfield records changes in alphabets, printing, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, dictionary principles, syntax, and style. Howard regularly introduces historical background in his jolly survey of such matters as slang, dialect, clichés, euphemism, and grammar. He gives numerous entertaining examples, while remaining tolerant and hopeful.

The Poet-Physician: Keats and Medical Science. Donald C. Goellnicht. Univ. Pittsburgh, 1984. \$26.95.

Goellnicht fully describes the medical training of Keats's day, the actual scientific knowledge that Keats had and gladly used in his

Correction

In the article on the U.S. Constitution in the Summer 1987 issue of *The Key Reporter*, the second sentence in the paragraph beginning "Delaware ratified first" (page 5, mid-column 2) should read: "In Virginia, Madison, Governor Randolph, and the young John Marshall took on and defeated Patrick Henry. . . ."

thought, letters, and many poems. Correcting many prior readings of Keats's poems, Goellnicht is careful not to claim too much.

Shakespeare: Contrasts and Controversies. Kenneth Muir. Univ. Oklahoma, 1985. \$18.95.

Twelve essays represent modern Shakespeare criticism at its best. Dealing with a wide range of problems, from textual to theatrical, Muir shows great learning, good sense, and magisterial inclusiveness and ease. He is free of special pleading and obfuscation.

The Portable Twentieth-Century Russian Reader. Ed. by Clarence Brown. Viking Penguin, 1985. \$18.95.

Russian Drama from Its Beginning to the Age of Pushkin. Simon Karlinsky. Univ. California, 1985. \$38.50.

Brown writes knowledgeable and urbane introductions to the works of 26 authors ranging from Chekhov and Gorky to Solzhenitsyn, Vladimov, and Voinovich. Averaging about 15 pages, the selections extend from several pages for poets to Olesha's 130-page novella *Envy*. The imaginative range of the writings is remarkable. Karlinsky records fully the two centuries (roughly 1630 to 1830) in which Rus-

(continued on back cover)

Bringing back summer— a special offer . . .

Diane Ravitch's article on "Tot Sociology," reprinted in this issue of the *Key Reporter*, is just one of a fine selection of articles from the Summer 1987 issue of *The American Scholar*. Others include: Hilton Kramer's inquiry into the tradition of modernism in contemporary visual art; Wallace Fowlie's memoir of Jacques Maritain; and Stanley Kauffmann's critical portrait of the Knopfs, publishing's most famous couple.

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Reading (continued from page 7)

sian drama, starting late, recapitulated the main developments of Western drama from the Middle Ages to Romanticism. The volume has considerable reference value.

John Ruskin: The Early Years. 1819–1859. Tim Hilton. Yale, 1985. \$22.50.

Working from long study in primary sources, Hilton is able to correct other biographies and even Ruskin's own *Praeterita*. Rich in facts and written in a plain style, this study of an unusual scion of an unusual sherry dealer is highly readable.

Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters 1911–1925 (Vol. III). Ed. by Dan H. Laurence. Viking, 1985. \$45.

Shaw writes to many prominent people about world events, theater and the arts, personal affairs, cycling, and motorcycling. He is wonderfully flamboyant in his flirtation with Mrs. Patrick Campbell, wonderfully matter-of-fact in letters to his wife. He is consistently witty and ironic, often paradoxical and provocative, dogmatic and ruthless. Excellent editing.

The Blue Flowers. Raymond Queneau. Tr. by Barbara Wright. New Directions, 1985. \$8.95.
Demon in Lithuania. Henri Guignonat. Tr. by Barbara Wright and Erica Weihs. New Directions, 1985. \$7.95.

Queneau's fantastic fiction makes us share alternately in the worlds of two interrelated, perhaps identical, characters, a contemporary barge dweller and a 13th-century duke who appears in later ages and finally in the present. Teasing ideas lurk behind the comic detail. Numerous verbal and stylistic games remind one of *Finnegan's Wake*. There is less suggestion of depth in Guignonat's fanciful tale about an odd castle-dwelling family that includes a vampirish uncle, a cat that grows to human size, and a nurse with a tail.

Plays. Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Tr. by Denis Calandra. Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1985. \$8.95.

Lively translations of six plays (1968–74) reveal the inventive stagecraft by which Fassbinder presents confused, violent, obsessed, nonmoral characters. He dramatizes disorder in a highly schematized way. The introduction could be fuller and better organized.

RUSSELL B. STEVENS

Listening in the Dark: The Acoustic Orientation of Bats and Men. Donald R. Griffin. Comstock (Cornell Univ.), 1986. \$17.50.

Donald Griffin's name has, over the past few decades, become virtually synonymous with research into the remarkable phenomena associated with echolocation in various species, especially in bats. The newest edition of his book is a lucid account of many years of research in this aspect of biology, including a telling indictment of the extent to which key discoveries at the close of the 18th century were virtually ignored because they seemed to be at odds with "common sense."

The Enchanted Canopy: A Journey of Discovery to the Last Unexplored Frontier, the Roof of the World's Rainforests. Andrew W. Mitchell. Macmillan, 1986. \$29.95.

Color photography has now reached so high a technical level that beautifully illustrated books of this kind are, however appealing, no longer uncommon. But Mitchell's subject is quite remarkable—a firsthand account of a biologically complex and almost bizarre environment, the rainforest canopy. One can but marvel at the determination and sheer physical courage of those willing to establish observational posts far above the tropical forest floor.

Controlling Life: Jacques Loeb and the Engineering Ideal in Biology. Philip J. Pauly. Oxford Univ., 1987. \$24.95.

It is, of course, widely recognized that trends in biological research are influenced by the personalities and enthusiasms of those who do it. Jacques Loeb is one such key figure, as his biographer recounts in this comparatively brief account. If indeed anyone remains to be convinced that scientific research is carried out by real people, with their strengths and weaknesses, Pauly's study will serve to advance the cause.

The Origins of Agriculture: An Evolutionary Perspective. David Rindos. Academic Press, 1984. \$29.50.

Gene Banks and the World's Food. Donald L. Plucknett, Nigel J. H. Smith, J. T. Williams, and N. Murthi Anishetty. Princeton, 1987. \$35.

American Green Power. Alain Revel and Christophe Riboud. Tr. by Edward W. Tanner. Johns Hopkins, 1981, \$30; 1987, paper, \$12.95.

As the titles suggest, these books address very different aspects of a general topic—agriculture—that is crucial to human society but, at least in the Western industrialized nations, is the immediate concern of a strikingly small fraction of the population. Rindos, in examining the origins of agriculture in human culture, goes far beyond the oft-cited generalization that agriculture suddenly appeared about 10,000 years ago. Some of his material is highly technical, but the work as a whole is well within the grasp of nonspecialists. Plucknett and his colleagues describe efforts, in many nations and with many crops, to stem the rapid erosion of genetic diversity and thereby guard against serious difficulties in the years ahead. Revel and Riboud take a French point of view toward the power—overwhelming, as they analyze it—of American agriculture in determining the flow and future of international trade in food and fiber.

Radiant Science, Dark Politics: A Memoir of the Nuclear Age. Martin D. Kamen. Univ. California, 1986. \$8.95.

In the first place, this is an autobiography of one of the key figures in radiation biology of the past few decades. In the second, it is an account of the discoveries made by the author and others in this burgeoning field. In the third, it is a reminder of the extent to which politics and prejudice became entangled with science during and just after World War II and the extent to which science and scientists suffered from this entanglement.

The Fates of Nations: A Biological Theory of History. Paul Colinvaux. Simon and Schuster, 1980. \$12.95.

I must defer to others in evaluating the accuracy of Colinvaux's historical data, but as a professional ecologist he is clearly in line with current thinking as to the significance of niche theory and breeding strategy as they apply to the ecology of all species. What is especially provocative about his exposition here is the detailed effort to explain human history in terms of these two phenomena. At the very least, his arguments introduce a novel and imaginative view of the forces that shape the destinies of human societies and deserve thoughtful consideration.

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