

Education and Democracy in America

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

Global Research, September 25, 2012

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Democracy and an educated citizenry go hand in hand. Public education is the great equalizer. America's founders believed it was insurance against loss of liberty.

Jefferson said:

"Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves, therefore, are its only safe depositories. And to render them safe, their minds must be improved to a certain degree."

Neil Postman perhaps is best known for saying "Americans are the most entertained and least informed people in the world." Most know little or nothing about what matters most.

Ignorance isn't universal, but a significant majority is affected. Postman served as chairman of New York University's Department of Culture and Communication. He also said:

"Public education isn't important because it serves the public. (It's) important because it creates the public."

Benjamin Barber believed the same thing, saying:

"Public schools must be understood as public not simply because they serve the public, but because they establish us as a public."

They give meaning to "we the people."

They develop better citizens and improve achievement. Most people agree. A 2003 America Association of School Administrators ([AASA](#)) poll showed 95% of respondents agree with the statement:

"We need to stand up for public education to make sure that public schools continue to fill their role as a cornerstone of the common good, providing the foundation for the civic society that is critical to our democracy."

AASA believes public schools belong to the public. Its Executive Director Paul Houston said:

"We know that people see education in a broad way. They want to see kids do well on basic skills, but they also need to do well in areas that are basic to living — being good citizens, productive members of the community and able to find and hold down a job that allows them to live in America."

Father of American education Horace Mann called "(t)he common school....the greatest discovery ever made by man."

He meant public, not privatized, ones. He believed all students should be educated equally

and responsibly. More on Mann's philosophy below.

Public education in America today is targeted for destruction. Chicago's war on teachers, parents and kids reflects policy across the country.

Education is being commodified into another profit center. Bottom line priorities alone matter. Preparing kids for better futures doesn't count.

They're sacrificed on the alter of money power unless stopped. Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Obama's Race to the Top (RTTT) are Exhibits A and B. The former leaves behind most kids. The latter is a race to nowhere. Both reflect schemes to destroy a nearly four century tradition.

In cities across America, schools are closed, teachers fired, and students left out in the cold. Why bother educating kids when only profits matter and high-pay skilled jobs moved abroad.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report titled, "[A Nation at Risk](#): The Imperative for Educational Reform." It found academic performance poor at nearly all levels. It warned that America's educational system was "being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity."

It's much worse today. It's a national disaster by design. So-called education reform is a scam. It masks privatization schemes, a society of growing haves and have nots, and no desire to educate most kids for low pay, low skill jobs if they can find one.

For over 40 years, [Jonathan Kozol](#) courageously defended public education. He still does. He believes every child should have equal opportunity in public schools. The Chicago Sun Times once called him "today's most eloquent spokesman for America's disenfranchised."

He believes privatized schools "starve the public school system of the presence of well-educated, politically effective parents to fight for equity for all kids."

"I am opposed to the use of public funds for private education," he said.

"The greatest difference between now and (the 1960s) is that public policy has pretty much eradicated the dream of Martin Luther King."

Privatized education creates separate and unequal. It didn't work 100 years ago and doesn't now, he stresses.

Quasi-privatized charter schools institutionalize class and racial separation, he maintains. Mandated robotized learning through standardized tests is "segregative and divisive."

Culture is starved. "Aesthetics are gone. Joy in learning is regarded as a bothersome distraction." NCLB and RTTT institutionalize "apartheid of the intellect." Kids are "trained to spit up predigested answers." They learn nothing.

Horace Mann is called the "father of the common school." For him, it meant public ones. He believed universal public education was essential to ensure a nation of informed citizens. His six main educational principles included:

- (1) Citizens can't be ignorant and free.
- (2) Education should be publicly funded and controlled.
- (3) It should be provided equally for all children.
- (4) It must be nonsectarian.
- (5) It must emphasize the tenets of a free society.
- (6) It must be provided by well-educated, professional teachers.

Mann's main educational goal was to foster universal equality. Education helps lift people out of poverty. Knowledge is power, he believed. An educated person no longer is a "slave" to the status quo.

Knowledge also is essential to a true democracy. It differs vastly from rote learning. The latter, he said, "was neither effective nor desirable."

"Children must be led to discover principles and relationship." Learning is a means to an end. Its value is self-improvement. It separates humans from beasts. If "all mankind were well fed, well clothed, and well housed (alone), they still might be half civilized."

In his capacity as Massachusetts State Board of Education Secretary, he said:

"Surely nothing but universal education can counterwork this tendency to the domination of capital and servility of labor."

"If one class possesses all the wealth and the education, while the residue of society is ignorant and poor, it matters not by what name the relationship between them may be called: the latter, in fact and in truth, will be the servile dependents and subjects of the former."

"But, if education be equally diffused, it will draw property after it by the strongest of all attractions; for such a thing never did happen, as that an intelligent and practical body of men should be permanently poor."

He truly believed no child should be left behind. Education should be provided equally for all. He championed and campaigned for it. He established teacher training schools and district libraries. He won financial backing for public education. His influence extended way beyond Massachusetts.

He called free public education a morally mandated right. He said America "owes a vast economical debt to (ordinary people) whose labor (have) been mainly instrumental in rearing the great material structures of which we so often boast."

He argued that "every wise, humane measure adopted for their welfare, directly promotes our own security. For (their children) will soon possess the rights of men, whether they possess the characters of men or not."

In 1848, he resigned his post to serve in Congress. He replaced John Quincy Adams who died in office. Besides his passion for universal public education, he became an important anti-slavery spokesman.

In 1853, he became Antioch College president three years after its founding. In that capacity, he implemented his educational ideas in higher education.

Two months before his August 1859 death, he said:

“I beseech you to treasure up in your hearts these my parting words: Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.”

Ideas he fostered and championed are fast disappearing. Some final comments on that below.

John Dewey was an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer. He advocated progressive education and liberalism. He considered an educated public fundamental to democracy.

He believed education should be freely available to everyone from kindergarten to college. His progressive education ideas were later codified as follows:

(1) Student conduct “shall be governed by themselves, according to the social needs of” society.

(2) “Interest shall be the motive for all work.”

(3) Teachers should inspire a desire to learn. They should be guides in the educational process.

(4) “Scientific study of each pupil’s development, physical, mental, social, and spiritual is absolutely critical to the essential direction of his (her) development.”

(5) Attention should be paid to all childhood needs.

(6) Cooperation should be fostered between school and home.

(7) Progressive schools are laboratories to increase learning.

He equated learning with freedom. He warned against uneducated masses. He opposed dual track education.

“The world in which most of us live is a world in which everyone has a calling and occupation, something to do,” he said.

“Some are managers and others are subordinates. But the great thing for one as for the other is that each shall have had the education which enables him to see within his daily work all there is in it of large and human significance.”

Education should be more than creating “human capital.”

“The inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling.”

He believed both in liberal arts and real-world skills teaching. Everyone should have a chance for “large and human significance” in their lives and work.

In 1897, he published his “pedagogic creed.” Learning begins “unconsciously almost from birth.”

“I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals.”

“If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass.”

Schools are social institutions, he believed. They should be integrated into community life. “Education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform.”

He called the ideal school one that serves individual and institutional needs. He said “the community’s duty to education is (a) paramount moral duty.”

“I believe it is the business of every one interested in education to insist upon the school as the primary and most effective instrument of social progress and reform in order that society may be awakened to realize what the school stands for, and aroused to the necessity of endowing the educator with sufficient equipment properly to perform his task.”

Dewey and Mann would be horrified about what’s happening today. They’d denounce how education is being commodified. It’s mirror opposite of their vision. It’s being systematically destroyed.

Budgets are slashed. Teachers en masse are laid off or fired. Hundreds of schools are closed where they’re most needed. Inner city kids won’t have them in their communities.

Democrats and Republicans are in lockstep on policy at the federal, state and local levels. In the last two years alone, over 250,000 teachers lost jobs. From September 2011 through June 2012, 50,000 lost them.

How many hundreds of thousands more will be tolerated? How many more communities will put up with losing schools? How long will ordinary people accept commodified education replacing the real thing? How much more will families take before rebelling?

What about teacher rights? They’re pressured to work longer for less pay and benefits. They’re rated by robotized learning results. They’re fired and replaced at half pay.

They’re losing effective collective bargaining rights. Corrupt union bosses sell them out for their own self-interest. Public education in America is dying. A decade from now it may not exist.

Primary and secondary education today already are gravely compromised. Imagine what’s likely ahead. Abolitionist Frederick Douglas once said: “I have found that to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one.”

Globalization fosters inequality, instability, and unemployment. Wage slavery replaced its chattel antecedent. Teachers are affected like other workers. Hard won rights are compromised and lost.

The state of the nation overall is troubling. The targeting and destruction of public education alone reflects class warfare.

It reveals contempt for democratic principles. It's a dagger in the heart of equal opportunity and freedom. It shows why America no longer is fit to live in. People have three choices: accept loss of all rights, leave, or rebel.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

His new book is titled "How Wall Street Fleeces America: Privatized Banking, Government Collusion and Class War"

<http://www.claritypress.com/Lendman.html>

Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com and listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network Thursdays at 10AM US Central time and Saturdays and Sundays at noon. All programs are archived for easy listening.

<http://www.progressiveradionetwork.com/the-progressive-news-hour>

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Stephen Lendman](#), Global Research, 2012

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Stephen Lendman](#)

About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III." <http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance

a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca