Education and Democracy: The United States of America as a Historical Case Study

Schools in democratic nations have multiple purposes, some of which conflict with one another. Moreover, not all purposes serve democratic ends equally well. In this chapter, noted historian Diane Ravitch looks at the historical evolution of educational aims in the United States. Ravitch contrasts educational aims that are primarily social in content and character with those that are primarily individual. In the case of the former, schools are viewed as places to ready the young for productive contributions to the society they will inherit, whether this be as laborers, managers, or professionals. In the latter case, the activities of school are designed to equip individual students to seek a life that advances their welfare (in some instances), the welfare of others (in some instances), or the nation’s or world’s welfare (in some instances).

As Ravitch makes clear, each of these overarching aims can lead to quite different programs and practices. For example, aims intended to benefit the individual might be manifested in the form of leading a well-adjusted, prototypical middle class life, or in the form of a questioning, analytical person incessantly searching for a better life. Aims that focus more on social goods might lead to simply “plugging” students into a nation’s needed job “slots,” or to nurturing strong communitarian interests that honor certain customs, traditions, and texts. As she concludes her chapter, Ravitch leaves little doubt about what she believes are proper educational aims for a democracy and where she believes the schools should be headed. Consider her a partner to your conversation, and ask how you would respond to her position.

Diane Ravitch is Research Professor of Education at the Steinhardt School of Education at New York University. She is a historian of education and author of many books, including The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn (2003) and Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform (2000). She is a graduate of Wellesley College, earned her Ph.D. at Columbia University, and is the recipient of eight honorary degrees. She has extensive experience in the realm of educational policy, having served as assistant secretary of education with the U.S. government and is holder of the Brown Chair in Education Studies at the Brookings Institution.
Over the course of American history, there has been no shortage of reflection about the purposes of education. In 1787, Noah Webster wrote that the subject of education had already been “exhausted by the ablest writers, both among the ancients and moderns.” He doubted that he had anything to add to the speculations of those who had preceded him, but add he did to that “exhausted” subject, and at great length. What attracted his attention and has continued to capture the attention of countless writers and thinkers since then was the idea that education could shape tender minds, and even more important, that education could be consciously employed to shape society.

Throughout U.S. history, educators, public officials, pressure groups, and concerned citizens have struggled for the power to decide what children in school should learn and how they should be taught. Sometimes they struggled because they were sincerely interested in improving education, but often the combatants in education politics have had an overarching political goal: they fought for their vision of schooling because it embodied their ideology and their goals for the future of society.

From the earliest days of the American nation, educational theorists have contended that their ideas were best suited for future citizens in a democracy. As befits a democracy, no one had a monopoly on wisdom or on the conversation itself. Nor is the discussion confined to the past. We continue to argue about what our schools should be teaching, who should be teaching, which methods are best, how schools should be controlled, and whether they should be public or private or some mixture thereof. These days, little time goes by without the release of a new report or study about the schools, each with its own remedies, each with its own assumptions about the purposes of education in a democracy.

Let me then trace at least the rudiments of this discussion over the past two centuries. This will not be an exhaustive survey, but it will suggest some of the main lines of dispute.
An Emerging Tension in the Purposes of Education

Noah Webster was the first educator who saw the potential in schooling and textbooks as instruments to create a new American society. Although there were no public schools in the post-Revolutionary era, Webster was most certainly a founding father of American public education; he clearly saw the value to the state in using schools and textbooks to promote a strong sense of national identity. The education of youth, he advised, was more consequential to the state than making laws or preaching the gospel. He believed that the new nation needed, above all, a common language; he advanced the cause of cultural nationalism by writing schoolbooks and a dictionary of the English language with its own distinctive American pronunciations. Webster’s famous blue-backed speller sold in the tens of millions (always keen about his royalties, Webster was the father of copyright law in America). Form the child, Webster urged, and you will ultimately form the nation, its government, and the character of its civil society. As a relentless booster of popular education, Webster contributed mightily to the American experiment in democracy, even though he became a bitter foe of democratic rule and universal suffrage as he grew older.

While Webster was writing textbooks for the nation’s rudimentary schools, his contemporary, Thomas Jefferson, submitted legislation in 1779 to create a public school system in Virginia; his proposals were not passed. By today’s standards, Jefferson’s proposals were timid indeed; his state system would not have included all children, certainly not black children, and its intent was meritocratic. Yet, for his time, he was far in advance of popular thinking because he saw the need for a government-funded system of schooling. Jefferson saw education as self-protection for individual citizens. He believed that those in power were likely to succumb to the temptation to become tyrants and that the best safeguard against tyranny was mass education. Jefferson wrote, “I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.” He was especially keen for young people to study history, because if they knew the experience of other ages, they would be “enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes . . .” The success of democratic government, he believed, depended on an informed public, which could protect its rights against those who might usurp them.
Clearly, Webster and Jefferson held quite different views about the role of education in a democratic society. Webster wanted to educate youth to determine the future character of the state; Jefferson wanted to educate youth so that the people could protect their freedoms against the potential intrusions of the state. Over time, both ideas became merged in the ideology of American public schooling. Theorists of education were drawn to Webster’s idea that the schools could be used as a tool for social planning, but at the same time, they never lost sight of the possibility that education would enhance the powers of individuals. Policymakers were drawn to Webster’s belief that they could shape society by shaping education policy. At the same time, parents, education leaders, religious groups, and other actors in civil society gravitated toward Jefferson’s pluralistic view, which recognized that education empowered individuals and groups in a democratic society to make choices and that a democratic society became more democratic as more people became empowered to determine their own fates.

The Founding of the Common, Public School

Horace Mann was an intermediate figure who tried to harmonize both individual purposes and social goals in his vision of education. Like Webster, Mann believed that the training of the schoolroom would eventually ripen into the “institutions and fortunes” of the state.4 Mann became secretary of the Massachusetts state board of education in 1837, where for twelve years he argued that popular education was integrally connected to freedom and democratic government. The schools, he maintained, must distribute intelligence broadly throughout the population. Mann understood the value of investing in human capital. As people gained knowledge, he argued, they would gain the power to develop their talents and to advance the frontiers of science, law, and the arts. As knowledge was more equably diffused, the entire society and economy would grow. Intellectual education, he said, would remove the causes of poverty and spread abundance. Mann had a powerful vision of public education as a lever that would uplift society, build a stronger economy, and develop individual creativity and intelligence.

Mann today is best known as the father of the American common school, that is, the idea that the state should maintain free public schools in every community, to which all children are sent to learn together, presumably obliterating differences of class and social condition. Less well known is Mann’s acknowledgment that parents who were
dissatisfied with the quality of their local public schools were “bound by the highest obligations, to provide surer and better means for the education of their children.”

Only recently has there been close attention to the anti-democratic aspects of some partisans of the common school movement, especially those who were passionately opposed to Catholicism. Mann’s nonsectarianism, we now recognize, was nondenominational Protestantism. He did not object to the Bible in the schools, nor to other religious practices, so long as they did not represent a specific religion. Those who did not wish to have the principles of nondenominational Protestantism inculcated in their children by the state objected to Mann’s common school. Other prominent leaders of the common school movement, some of them state superintendents in the Midwest and South, were outspoken in their bigotry towards Catholics. Critics of the common school movement claimed that it was not democratic to compel parents to send their children to schools that rejected their parents’ values; and that democracy implied not centralization, but a greater diversity of educational agencies.

Despite its critics, the common school movement was propelled forward by a great sense of moral and political purpose, and it scored victories in state after state in the mid-nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States had a popular public school system, with free, nearly universal elementary education and with high schools available to a steadily increasing percentage of young people. By 1900, public education was well established as a fundamental element in the American democratic tradition.

At the opening of the twentieth century, it was generally accepted that public education should be provided by the state at public expense, and that the purposes of democracy were served best by offering a common academic education to children for as long as they were willing and able to stay in school. Mann’s idea that intellectual education was the foundation of democratic education seemed firmly established; most youngsters, for example, studied a foreign language, even when they were not required to do so, and Latin was a staple of the high school curriculum in big cities, small towns, and even rural areas.

Schools as Instruments of Social Policy

The early years of the twentieth century, however, saw a redefinition of the relationship between education and democracy. A new class of educational experts, associated with the recently established schools of
pedagogy, advocated a sociological analysis of education. Working in tandem with social workers, progressive school reformers decreed that the highest goal for a democratic school system was social efficiency. This goal was aligned with Webster’s thought, rather than Jefferson’s or Mann’s. It seems to me that Jefferson would have been repelled by the tenets of social efficiency, of fitting people into their likely roles in society; and Mann would have adamantly insisted on the necessity of a common academic program for all, rather than the narrow programs of vocational and industrial education that began to appear in urban schools early in the century.

Although schooling in the nineteenth century had been characterized by a great deal of organizational diversity, the line between public and private education grew sharper in the early years of the twentieth century. Ellwood P. Cubberley, the profession’s leading historian of education for many years, taught generations of teachers and administrators that government control of schooling was a sure indicator of a nation’s democratic character. He treated disparagingly the various forms of non-public and quasi-public schooling that had characterized American education in the nineteenth century. In his histories of education, Cubberley asserted that a nation’s educational progress could be measured by the extent to which control of its schools had passed from church to state, from private to public, and from laymen to professionals. The most highly evolved nations, he suggested, were those in which there was “state control of the whole range of education, to enable the State to promote intellectual and moral and social progress along lines useful to the State . . . .” Like Noah Webster, Cubberley envisaged the school system as an engine of social control, an agency that could plan social progress and could assign children to their future roles. In Cubberley’s model, which was promoted in the textbooks of the new pedagogical profession, a democratic school system was one in which the state, acting through its expert professional staff, exercised complete control over the schools.

Progressive reformers in the early decades of the twentieth century supported industrial education as the best means to achieve social efficiency and economic development. The industrial education movement achieved an important victory with the report of the Massachusetts Commission on Industrial and Technical Education in 1906. This report recommended industrial and vocational education in the public schools, as well as industrial schools that were completely separate from the regular school system. The experts said that industrial education would benefit children, who would be ready for work; employers, who
would have a ready supply of trained labor; and the nation, which would enjoy prosperity. The commission concluded that the vast majority of children did not need a liberal education, but training for jobs.

In that same year, 1906, the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education was formed to lobby for the cause. So popular was industrial education that one educator likened its spread to a “mental epidemic,” not unlike religious revivals or Klondike gold fever. A historian wrote later of this period that “Bankers, businessmen, industrialists, philanthropists, social workers, educators, all jumped on the bandwagon. Few movements in the history of American education have taken so sudden and so powerful a hold on the minds of school reformers.”8

Advocates of industrial education insisted that it was wasteful to expose most children to an academic education. They believed that schools should train students for the work that they would eventually do as adults. Since most children would grow up to become farmers, laborers, industrial workers, and housewives, schools should train them for these roles. In the first two decades of the century, the industrial education movement lobbied successfully at the state and federal levels to get vocational programs into the curriculum and to assure that students were “guided” into practical programs as early as the seventh or eighth grade. The industrial education movement persuaded the U.S. Congress to pass the first major piece of federal legislation for the schools, the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 for vocational and industrial education.

The most important triumph for the industrial education movement was the general acceptance of curricular differentiation, beginning in junior high schools. Indeed, the junior high school was established to facilitate differentiation of children into distinct tracks, based on predictions about their future prospects for higher education or careers. School reformers insisted that the academic curriculum was not appropriate for all children, because most children—especially the children of immigrants and of African Americans—lacked the intellectual capacity or the need to study subjects like algebra and chemistry. Some of the efficiency experts, like John Franklin Bobbitt, argued that girls should not study such subjects because, as future housewives, they had no need or use for them.

In a democracy, the school reformers said, students should get the curriculum that was suited to the needs of society, in line with their own individual capacities. To meet this goal, many districts offered several different curricula, intended to train workers for agriculture, business, clerical jobs, domestic service, industrial work, and household
management. The standard academic curriculum, once considered appropriate for anyone who advanced to high school, was redefined as the college-preparatory curriculum, suitable only for the small minority of students who intended to go to college.

This was an important and dramatic change of goals in American education. Reformers rejected the once traditional idea that all students should get an intellectual education to prepare them for citizenship in a democratic society, claiming that this notion was not only antiquated but anti-democratic. They insisted that a democratic society needed men and women who were equipped to perform their vocational roles; the mission of the public schools in a democratic society, they said, was to train students to perform their expected roles. In that way, society would function efficiently, and the schools would not waste resources by overeducating young people who were likely to be barbers, clerks, factory workers, manual laborers, laundresses, housewives, or farmers.

Dewey’s Attempt to Harmonize Competing Purposes

It was just about the time that the industrial education movement was reaching its apogee that the eminent philosopher John Dewey published his landmark book, *Democracy and Education*, in 1916. Dewey was quite critical of the zeal for industrial education that was then popular. He pointed out that any effort to train youngsters for a specific occupation was bound to be self-defeating, because as new industries emerged and old ones disappeared, individuals who had been trained for a specific trade would be left behind with obsolete skills. He saw too that industrial and vocational education was likely to represent an acceptance of the status quo, merely perpetuating existing inequities in society.

Dewey’s warnings about the likely negative consequences of industrial and vocational education had little effect. The movement had so much momentum that it could not be stopped or even slowed. For most reformers, industrial and vocational education seemed like natural alternatives to the academic curriculum, which they viewed as arid, bookish, elitist, and sterile.

While reformers ignored Dewey’s views about industrial and vocational education, they nonetheless paid lip service to his ideas about democracy and education. Presumably they did not understand that their willingness to sort children into early career paths was antithetical to Dewey’s ideas about democracy. Dewey wrote that “A
democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode
of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” 9 As he
defined it, the more individuals participate in shared interests, the
more that they must refer their actions to that of others, the more
numerous and more varied are their contacts with others who are
different from themselves, the more democratic is society. The wid-
ening of interests, Dewey said, was the result of the development of
travel, commerce, manufacture, and new means of communication.
These changes produced exchanges that inevitably must break down
the barriers of class, race, and nationality. In Dewey’s conception of
democracy, then, the particularities of neighborhood, region, religion,
etnicity, race, and other distinctive features of communal life are iso-
lating factors, all of which may be expected to dissolve as individuals
interact and share their concerns.

Dewey’s conception of democracy was at odds with those of
philosopher Horace Kallen. 10 Kallen reacted against the coercive
assimilationist policies of his era, preferring instead that public policy
encourage distinctive cultural groups; he called for “a democracy of
nationalities.” He wanted America to become a nation of nations and
suggested the metaphor of an orchestra composed of many different
groups, each playing its own instrument. Dewey, however, did not
admire groups that had interests of their own, suggesting that they
became too selfish, too devoted to protecting their own interests. He
was fearful of “the antisocial spirit” of any group that had “interests ‘of
its own’ which shut it out from full interaction with other groups . . .”
Such a spirit, he worried, promoted “isolation and exclusiveness,” which
tended to preserve past customs rather than stimulating the sort of
exchanges that broke down selfishness and discouraged traditional
customs.

Educators could quite reasonably conclude after reading Dewey that
any schools serving a particular group—such as parochial schools or
single-sex schools—were undemocratic because of their isolating
effects. Dewey’s definition of democracy, on the other hand, was quite
supportive of the comprehensive school, a school that incorporates all
kinds of programs and curricula under one roof. Since these views
gained currency when many cities were undertaking school construc-
tion programs in the 1920s, they lent support to the creation of multi-
purpose schools with multiple programs.

But what should schools do to advance democratic society, aside
from trying to bring everyone under a single administrative umbrella?
What should their educational program be? This was far more difficult
for the conscientious educator to discern, for it was easier to understand what Dewey was against rather than what he favored. Certainly his view of democracy implied that individuals should join in shared activities to the greatest extent possible. Beyond that, his followers understood that life is growth, education is growth, and growth is its own justification. Dewey believed that students should engage in “orderly and ordered activity,” but he was eclectic or at least “catholic” with a small “c” about what they should study.11

He wrote, for example, that it was absurd for educators to try to establish what they believed to be the proper objects of education, just as it would be absurd for the farmer “to set up an ideal of farming irrespective of conditions.”12 Whether farming or educating, both were responsible for carrying out certain activities from minute to minute and hour to hour, rather than accepting aims imposed from without by external authority. Dewey claimed that “education as such has no aims.”13

Yet the comparison between education and farming was not a good choice, as it tended to confuse educators about the relation between their methods and their purposes. Farmers must know in advance what they intend to grow; if they wish to be successful, they must pay heed to agricultural science. They must plan ahead, based on their goals, and use the methods likeliest to advance those goals. When their crops are ready, the farmers must carefully measure their results to know which seeds and methods were most productive. Any farmer who did not know what crop he wanted to grow, under what conditions it was likely to grow, and which methods were most successful would surely be a poor farmer. And certainly farming has clear aims; no one says that people farm to improve their personality or to get exercise or to commune with nature. They farm to grow crops; if they don’t achieve this aim, they won’t achieve any of the others, and they won’t even be farmers. Why then must education be without aims?

Ultimately, Dewey believed that anything might be studied in ways that made it valuable, especially if students understood its social significance. He wrote that it was not possible “to establish a hierarchy of values among studies. It is futile to attempt to arrange them in an order, beginning with one having least worth and going on to that of maximum value . . . Since education is not a means to living, but is identical with the operation of living a life which is fruitful and inherently significant, the only ultimate value which can be set up is just the process of living itself.”14 This view led Dewey to conclude that there was no reason to favor a course in zoology over a course in laundry
work; he said that either could be narrow and confining, and either could be a source of understanding and illumination about social relationships. This was true in theory. In practice, however, the children who were studying zoology were learning about the principles of science, while the children in the laundry work course were learning to wash and press clothes.15

Because he believed that no subject was of intrinsic value, Dewey’s ideas were used by advocates of social efficiency to undermine the academic curriculum. If every subject was of equal value, whether zoology or laundry work, whether geometry or sewing, then why struggle to preserve equal access to algebra, chemistry, foreign language, and other subjects?

The work of creating new curriculum tracks and assigning students to them was facilitated by the invention of the group IQ test during World War I. At that time, the nation’s most prominent educational psychologists offered their services to the military; as part of their effort they devised group intelligence tests that made it possible to determine quickly which recruits were officer material and which were not. The tests were used with apparent success to assign nearly two million men.

When the war was over, the psychologists turned their skills to developing group IQ tests for the schools. By the early 1920s, intelligence testing was a regular feature in American public education. Psychologists of education hailed the new mental tests, which they believed provided a sure and scientific basis for curricular differentiation. The test developers assured the public that intelligence was innate and fixed; the aura of scientific certainty with which the testers advanced their work persuaded teachers and principals that the tests were a reliable scientific tool that would enable them to guide their students into the proper curriculum. No longer would these decisions be based on guesswork. The tests allowed the schools to decide quickly which students should be in the college track, which should be directed to technical careers, and which should be directed into a program that would limit their opportunity for further education or technical vocations.

All of this was considered a socially efficient approach to the problem of mass education in a democratic society. Educators believed that they were using the most scientific tools to achieve the most democratic results: an education fitted to the needs of each individual and the needs of society. The best minds in education recommended curricular differentiation based on IQ testing.
Objections to Doctrines of Social Efficiency

There were not many dissenters, but there were a few. William Chandler Bagley of Teachers College, Columbia University spoke out vigorously against both curricular differentiation and IQ testing. He saw them as decidedly undemocratic, and he argued during the 1920s and 1930s for a common academic curriculum and higher standards for all students. Bagley gained little more than professional opprobrium for his contrarian views. Isaac Kandel, an internationally renowned scholar who was also at Teachers College, complained in 1934 that the lower schools had adopted social promotion as the norm and the high schools had reduced their standards to the lowest kind of pabulum. Under these intellectually debilitating conditions, Kandel noted, the high school seemed to have embraced the cult of mediocrity.

Bagley and Kandel believed that schools in a democratic society must improve the intelligence of their pupils through the systematic study of certain disciplines. Both were sharply critical of the reformers who wanted to abolish subject matter or reduce standards to the vanishing point. They agreed with Dewey that a democratic society needs a certain fund of common values and ideas, so that it could function as a community of shared purpose; but they did not believe this fund of shared values would arise without instruction and purpose.

Another dissenter from the educational ideology that had become commonplace by mid-century was Robert Hutchins. Hutchins, the president of the University of Chicago, achieved a large popular following in the late 1930s because of his eloquent advocacy of the great books. During the next two decades, Hutchins was one of the most prominent critics of American education.

Hutchins identified four ideas that were responsible for the emptiness of education. First was the doctrine of adjustment, the idea that the purpose of education is to adjust or adapt young people to fit into their society. This was wrong, he said, because society changes with such rapidity that the student would be educated for the past, not the future. Vocational training, he charged, not only failed to prepare young people for work but failed to educate them.

The second misguided idea, according to Hutchins, was the doctrine of immediate needs, the idea that students should study only what interests them at the moment. This, he insisted, had produced a curriculum of ad hoc courses, a reliance on marketing and sales techniques to find needs and fill them, and once again, a withdrawal from the responsibility to educate young people. This doctrine of immediate needs, he said,
had disintegrated the curriculum of both the schools and the universities, as they vainly sought to offer courses on every imaginable need and want.

The third of these misleading doctrines he called the doctrine of social reform. This was the idea that educators could use the schools to promote social reform. The problem here, said Hutchins, was that the only reforms that a school can preach are the ones that the public already wants to do. It can’t be the leading edge of an unpopular reform, so it must reflect society, rather than change society. The danger of this course of action is that once the schools are seen as vehicles for reforms, they may be converted into battlegrounds for competing political programs and become vehicles for dubious agendas.

The fourth of the wrong doctrines, which he found most abhorrent, was the doctrine of no doctrine at all. This is the curriculumless curriculum, the school that meets all needs, the program of infinite variety, lacking any ideals, any sense of good and bad or better and worse. This doctrine guarantees that there can be no common intellectual life, no basis for communication among Americans about anything other than sports.

What underlies all these doctrines, Hutchins asserted, was the belief that everybody has a right to an education but that not everyone is capable of being educated. The tension between these two beliefs, he argued, produces an adulterated education of low quality.

Hutchins believed that the true doctrine of education requires us to recognize that we improve society by educating the individuals who compose it. Education, he wrote, deals with the development of the intellectual powers of people. In a democracy, where the government is based on self-rule, every person is a ruler and all need the education that rulers should have. They should have, in other words, a liberal education, because that is the education appropriate to free men. A liberal education is one that gives young people the skills, knowledge, habits, ideals, and values to continue to educate themselves for the rest of their lives. Everyone, whether a bank president or a ditch-digger, must be educated, Hutchins asserted.

“The liberally educated man,” he wrote, “must know how to read, write, and figure. He must know and understand the ideas that have animated mankind. He must comprehend the tradition in which he lives. Citizens in a democracy must be educated to exercise their intelligence, to think and discuss, to debate and reflect. . . . Perhaps the greatest idea that America has given the world,” said Hutchins, “is the idea of education for all. The world is entitled to know whether this idea
means that everybody can be educated, or only that everybody must go to school."\(^{18}\)

Where Should American Education Be Headed?

From Noah Webster to Thomas Jefferson to Horace Mann to John Dewey to William Chandler Bagley and Isaac Kandel to Robert Hutchins, American education has been offered many definitions of the ways in which education and democracy are connected, the ways in which one might promote the other. Well ahead of his time, Webster understood that education could be used to shape society. Jefferson saw education as a valuable means to preserve one’s freedom and rights against the depredations of the powerful. Mann believed that education would allow people to develop their talents and the national economy at the same time. Dewey envisioned education as a lever to reform society by expanding the contacts among different people and reducing the exclusiveness of groups. Bagley, Kandel, and Hutchins insisted that education would improve democratic society by improving individuals and teaching them to use their minds well.

My own estimation of these thinkers reflects, unsurprisingly, my own values and beliefs. In Webster, one sees the beginnings of an ideology that saw students as instruments who might be formed to serve the purposes of the state. This is the root of social engineering. One sees this ideology in full flower with the rise of the industrial education movement, whose proponents discussed among themselves what to do with other people’s children, to whom they would give an education that the planners would not choose for their own children. Jefferson continues to appeal to those who are unwilling to surrender their fate to social planners and other wielders of governmental and corporate power. He recognized that education should foster the critical intelligence of the citizenry, so that each person might understand and defend their rights. . . . Horace Mann articulated an appealing concept of education as a mechanism for social and economic development, based on intellectual development. Mann was a great proponent of public education, because he believed that the government had a responsibility to see that all of its people were educated and productive.

Dewey remains a powerful voice on behalf of democracy, even to the present. His view of democracy as associated life is a profound idea, though it is not without problems and contradictions. He was in many respects a prophet of contemporary American life, forecasting as he did an age in which everyone is engaged in sharing purposes with everyone.
else, everyone is communicating with everyone else (through the Internet), and cultural life is both homogenized and polarized as more and more people search for new identities or lost group identities.

Bagley, Kandel, and Hutchins, it seems to me, had it right. They understood that the education of citizens is a first priority for the schools of a democracy. They understood that a democracy’s goal must be not just universal enrollment but universal education. They understood, at a time when others were content with their mediocre intellectual caliber, that the schools were far from meeting their responsibility for universal education. Democratic education, they knew, meant that everyone must be educated as if they were children of the most advantaged members of society. They wanted everyone to have a liberal education and to be able to communicate intelligently through reading, writing, and speaking. They understood that a democracy depends on the intelligence and resourcefulness and character of its citizens. These accomplishments, they knew, could not be left to chance.

Now, in the early years of the twenty-first century, the survival of American democracy cannot be taken for granted. The schools must teach youngsters about our history, our civic institutions, and our Constitution. More, they must give students the intellectual tools to comprehend science, mathematics, language, the arts, literature, and history. Democratic habits and values must be taught and communicated through the daily life of our society, our legal institutions, our press, our religious life, our private associations, and the many other agencies that allow citizens to interact with each other and to have a sense of efficacy. The best protection for a democratic society remains well-educated citizens.

NOTES


12. Ibid., 125.

13. Ibid.


