

TO THE ESTEEMED LEGISLATORS OF IDAHO

The fact that America spends more money on public education than any nation in the history of mankind and that we have a growing number of functional illiterates in our society -- estimated by the Department of Education at 24 million -- is no accident. It is no accident because virtually all of these functional illiterates have had from six to twelve years of public schooling. To believe that it's an accident is to believe that our educators don't know what they are doing. I believe the contrary. Our educators know exactly what they are doing, and the existence of a growing number of functional illiterates is not a sign of their failure but of their success.

Now there is no ~~big~~ secret, no big mystery, to teaching children to read. They've been doing it for over 3,000 years, and I was taught to read in the public schools of New York back in the early 1930s. In those days they used phonics -- that is, they taught you the alphabet and the sounds the letters stand for and before you knew it, you could read. In those days there were no dyslexics, no functional illiterates or reading disabled students. Everyone, including the not so bright and the minorities, learned to read. Today, even the very bright can't learn to read. Why? Because children since the 1940s have been taught to read via the sight method, or look-say, a method calculated to produce widespread functional illiteracy.

In 1955 Rudolf Flesch wrote a book called WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ. In it he wrote:

The teaching of reading all over the United States, in all the schools, and in all the textbooks, is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense.

What was the reaction of the educators to Rudolf Flesch's book which had exposed the look-say method as an instruction system calculated to produce illiteracy? They said he didn't know what he was talking about, and they continued to teach look-say.

Fifteen years later, in 1970, Karl Shapiro, the eminent poet-philosopher who had taught creative writing at the University of California for 20 years, gave us an insight into what had happened in the interim. He told the California Library Association:

What is really distressing is that this generation cannot and does not read. I am speaking of university students in what are supposed to be our best universities. Their illiteracy is staggering. . . . We are experiencing a literacy breakdown which is unlike anything I know of in the history of letters.

Did this statement disturb the educators? Not at all. They not continued to do what they'd been doing for the last thirty years, but now they had much more money with which to do it. Congress, at the urging of the NEA, had passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which opened the floodgates of federal funding, and by 1970 the schools were swimming in money. Most of the money went into Title One, a program of compensatory education meant to help the socially and culturally deprived children of our country. Most of that money

went into reading programs calculated to produce <sup>more</sup> functional illiteracy. <sup>not</sup> ~~less~~

And if you need any proof of that, simply take a look at the SAT scores. These Scholastic Aptitude Tests are taken by high school students across the nation seeking college entrance. They measure aptitude in literacy and mathematics. From 1952 to 1963 the SAT Verbal mean score rose a modest two points, from 476 to 478. But three years later, in 1966, it was down a full eleven points to 467. These declining scores were those of high school seniors who had been taught to read in the mid 1950s when Rudolf Flesch came out with his book. In 1970 the SAT mean score was down to ~~460~~, and in 1977 it had plummeted to 429, a staggering decline of 48 points ~~from in~~ <sup>1963</sup> seven years

The Boston Globe of August 29, 1976 described it as:

. . . a prolonged and broad-scale decline unequalled in U.S. history. The downward spiral, which affects many other subject areas as well, began abruptly in the mid-1960s and shows no signs of bottoming out. . . .

Only recently have facts become available that reveal the magnitude and disturbing nature of the achievement decline, its pervasiveness and consistency across all academic areas and all segments of American education.

What was the reaction of the educators to this unprecedented decline in academic achievement? The article went on:

For the most part, educators and those connected with schools and colleges have tried to ignore or discount the significance of the achievement decline. At a national conference of school administrators earlier this year, for example, it was alluded to as the "big lie" being perpetrated against education.

But who was doing the lying? The fact is that the educators themselves had been doing all in their power to conceal the decline that was taking place from parents and the public at large. The article states:

At the same time as declining achievement engulfs the nation's schools and colleges, American education is beset with another problem: wholesale grade inflation. From high school through college, "A" and "B" grades have become the common currency for work which probably would have earned a "C" grade 10 years ago. "C" grades are now relatively few, and "D" and "F" grades are all but nonexistent. . . . Grade inflation at least partially blinded many to the reality of the achievement failure.

Many of you may be wondering what in blazes are our teachers doing to produce this mess. They are in fact doing exactly what their mentors have told them to do. Never has a profession been more devoted and dedicated to the ideals of its mentors. Never have teachers been more obedient to the men <sup>who</sup> ~~that~~ taught them everything they know.

Who are the these teachers of teachers who have created the present epidemic of illiteracy? They are the present day disciples of John Dewey, Edward L. Thorndike and James McKeen Cattell. These three men, along with numerous colleagues, revolutionized American education in the name of Darwinism, Socialism, and Behaviorism. All three considered themselves scientists and psychologists determined to remake American education so that it could meet its socialist destiny.

Dewey believed that the function of public education was to make children into little socialists who, when they grew up, would vote socialism into power. To him the greatest obstacle to socialism was our traditional form of education which stressed intellectual development through high literacy.

Dewey strongly objected to high literacy because it encouraged the development of independent, competitive people who would pursue careers for their own selfish interests rather than for the good of all. He wrote in 1899 in School and Society, his blueprint for American education:

The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. There is no obvious social motive for the acquirement of mere learning, there is no clear social gain in success thereat. Indeed, almost the only measure for success is a competitive one, in the bad sense of that term -- a comparison of results in the recitation or in the examination to see which child has succeeded in getting ahead of others in storing up, in accumulating, the maximum of information. So thoroughly is this the prevailing

atmosphere that for one child to help another in his task has become a school crime.

What kind of a school did Dewey want? He wanted a school organized around activities and occupations. The child would learn to read as an aid to his other activities, not as a focal point of intellectual development. For Dewey, the social motive in education was the supreme force to be cultivated. He wrote:

Too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the fact that undue premium is put upon the ability to learn to read at a certain chronological age. . . . The entertainment plus information motive for reading conduces much to the habit of solitary self-entertainment which ends too often in day-dreaming instead of guided creative activities, controlled by objective success or failure.

Apparently, to Dewey day-dreaming was a capitalist vice. In any Dewey provided the social philosophy for the new education. It was up to others to develop the new teaching techniques and textbooks. And that's where Thorndike and Catell come in. Catell had studied psychology in Leipzig under Wilhelm Wundt. He did a series of reaction-time experiments with words and letters and concluded that adults read whole words as quickly as they did individual letters. So why not teach children to read that way? And thus the look-and-say method was given its scientific basis. Thorndike, who studied psychology under William James at Harvard, had studied how animals learned. He decided that there wasn't much difference between animals and children. Conditioning was

C.

The basis of an information society is information, and the means of handling information is literacy. In addition, the health ~~of a society~~ and success of an information society depends on the freedom of exchange of information and easy access to ~~the~~ information. All of this can be best exercised in a free/society, without censorship without restriction <sup>and open</sup> ~~except~~ <sup>those</sup> imposed by the ~~discretions~~ <sup>closed</sup> of privacy or copyright ownership. Obviously/Communist societies cannot develop successfully into the information age, because under communism ~~information is~~ the exchange of information is one of the most tightly controlled activities in the state. For example, in Rumania, all owners of typewriters must register their typewriters and provide a sample of the typeface. In the communist countries, access to Xerox <sup>secret</sup> type machines is strictly controlled by the/police. You cannot have an information ~~society~~ society based on thought control.

And so the development and growth of an information society depends on the development of those talents, skills, and social activities frowned on by our educators. They depend on ~~the~~ high literacy, mental creativity, intellectual independence, and a mastery of the symbols of learning: everything that Dewey said we must reject. Yet, our education system has been shaped in Dewey's mold.