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The Shore Dimly Seen
Educating All Our Children by Doxey A. Wilkerson
Review by: Richard J. Margolis
*Change*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Apr., 1980), pp. 48-49
Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40163428
Accessed: 30/10/2012 13:28

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children what God says is right, and the schools say 'Do what is right for you,' " charges the director of Parents of Minnesota. "Cheating was wrong, stealing was wrong, lying was wrong. Now it's OK to cheat and you have to lie to get along with people. Two plus two used to equal four. Now it equals four only if you want it to."

Thriving on hard times and widespread community discontent, protesting parents leave few school materials untouched:

- In Springfield, Missouri, school officials ordered that a pair of shorts be drawn over a nude boy in copies of Maurice Sendak's fantasy for children, *In the Night Kitchen*.
- In Milton-Freewater, Oregon a principal clipped pages on evolution from a state-approved text. (An Oregon court later ordered school officials to replace the expurgated texts.)
- In Columbia, South Carolina, state education officials refused to approve two remedial-reading texts that included the words damn, hell, and by God.
- In Levittown, New York the school board of the Island Trees Union Free School District removed 11 books from school libraries (including works by Bernard Malamud, Kurt Vonnegut, Richard Wright, and Piri Thomas), following a list of "objectionable" works prepared by Parents of New York-United.

After examining these and many other censorship incidents, including the violent battles over English language arts texts in West Virginia's Kanawha county in 1974, the author concludes that censors don't have to be in a position of authority to impose their views on the schools. They simply have to exert sufficient pressure on teachers, administrators, and school boards. And they get plenty of help from the organized watchdogs: "Always try to make your case to key area leaders and one or more board members before confronting your school or making a public protest," the Gablers ironically advise parents. "To educators you are an 'outsider' who is 'infringing' on 'their' area when you question, or even examine, school subject matter. Thus, because of professional pride, even good, concerned educators will feel professionally bound to defend what they are using."

What's to be done? After considering past court decisions on free speech in the classroom (although rather sketchily, compared to Nat Hentoff's treatment in his recently published *The First Freedom: The Tumultuous History of Free Speech in America*), Jenkinson holds out the hope that forthcoming court decisions may clarify matters. In the meantime, he suggests, schools should institute procedures for handling parent complaints about materials. He lists several national organizations, including the National Council of Teachers of English (where Jenkinson heads the Committee Against Censorship), that can supply such procedures. And he suggests that publicity may be the best weapon against censorship. In many instances, "the general public would oppose the censors if they only knew what they were after."

In sum *Censors in the Classroom* is a useful, chilling study of the new surge of censorship in the schools. As Jenkinson observes, it is a story not without its twists: "In nearly every community in which books have been banned, the forbidden works become best sellers among students."

*—Joseph Barbato*

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### The Shore Dimly Seen

*Educating All Our Children* edited by Doxey A. Wilkerson. Westport, Conn.: Mediax, Inc., 173 pages, $12.95.

The rather extravagant jacket copy proclaims this brave little collection to be "the first round in a debate" over "back to basics," and the contributors to be "giants of American education." What they are, it turns out, is less titanic but more interesting: a saving remnant of humanist scholars holding on for dear life to the American Dream. To give the flap writer his due, some of the names represented here might, at least among the Dewey-eyed, pass for household words: Ralph W. Tyler, James S. Coleman, Edmund W. Gordon—the Hoseas and Amoses, in short, of contemporary liberal education.

The scholars, we learn, gathered "recently" in Chicago with about 20 like-minded colleagues in order "to review and appraise a decade of compensatory education" and in particular to discuss a set of papers written for the occasion, the papers that now make up the book. What we are not told is that the conference was in 1974. The six-year hiatus between presentation and publication suggests how hard it is these days for reform-minded educators, even "giants," to get a word in edgewise.

Still, sluggish as the dialogue has been of late, this work can hardly be said to signal a "first round" in the Great Debate. The dream we are being asked to share is essentially the same one Jefferson entertained two centuries ago, the one about universal education. "Enlighten the people generally," Jefferson promised, "and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day"—a reasonable-sounding proposition, except that he never told us how to enlighten the people generally.

If the dawn hasn't exactly come up like thunder since Jefferson's time, that may be due to a nasty paradox which he could not have foreseen. For in tribute to enlightenment we invented a peerless public school system capable of keeping children in the dark. A rough rule of thumb now seems to be: The poorer the child, the dimmer the light. As Wilkerson observes in an angry epilogue, it is discouraging and bewildering: "...our country maintains a truly enormous educational apparatus. It includes more than 107,000 elementary and secondary schools and nearly 2,700 institutions of higher education; it is served by instructional staffs numbering more than 3 million professionals; and it costs approximately $107.5 billion a year." The astonishing upshot, marvels Wilkerson, is "a vast uneducated population.... What incongruity! It is a contradiction that may yet bring our country down."

But the country itself seems full of contradictory impulses. In the sixties, as nearly all the writers wistfully recall, educators and politicians rushed into ghetto classrooms brandishing compensatory slide rules. At the peak of this revolution of good intentions—between 1964 and 1969—we spent more than two billion federal dollars a year on the education of "disadvantaged" children, and in the eyes of Wilkerson et al it was our finest moment. Then came the Selfish Seventies, with its residue of backlash and back to basics. Suddenly the lights went out.

Much of the book is presented in just such a Manichaean context, as a struggle between the forces of light and darkness. On the one hand we get anger and discouragement, along with a litany of faults in our educational system: It is resistant to change; it classifies children instead of developing them; it fails to individualize. On the other hand we are offered large amounts of faith, hope, and charity—and the greatest of these turns out to be faith, both in the capacity of children to learn and in society's capacity to teach them.

"All children can learn," says Tyler, "when effective conditions for their learning are provided." And Gordon writes, "If our impatient society...does not lose hope and faith too soon, it is conceivable that we of these United States...could bring a major share of the children of the persistent poor into the mainstream of society." But how? The solutions presented add up to a familiar liberal agenda. Henry J. Casso, a Mexican-American scholar, calls on the public schools to accept "our nation as a culturally pluralistic society," which among other things would mean more bilingual education. Vera P. John (University of New Mexico) and Eleanor Leacock (City University of New York) think the reform of teachers is useless without "basic organizational changes in school structure and school-community relations...." Coleman and several others emphasize connections between children's feelings and their intellects, warning that the two should be nurtured as one. Most of the contributors want citizens to have a greater say in shaping school policy; they want less credentialism, less bureaucracy, more kindness. Children don't fail, insist these scholars; schools do.

Despite the academic language and the obligatory nods to scientific rigor the essays at bottom are cries in the night, scholarly sermons against the sin of spreading ignorance. When their recommendations make sense, it is not because they are empirically grounded (though some may be) but because they are humane, democratic, and affectionate, qualities that most of us appreciate *a priori*. By contrast the back-to-basics preachers and practitioners, with their love of lockstep and their odd aversion to *differences* among children, seem grim and sterile. Ultimately, one guesses, they become killers of the dream.

So it is good to have these essays in hand and between covers. If they say nothing new, they do offer something old and valuable—a way back to basic enlightenment.

—*Richard J. Margolis*

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## The Literacy Noncrisis

*The ABCs of Literacy* by Stephen N. Judy. New York: Oxford University Press, 361 pages, $15.95.

Is there in fact a literacy crisis? Stephen N. Judy, a Michigan State University professor and editor of *The English Journal*, views the issue as a red-herring media event that masks the weightier problem of how to motivate youngsters and reshape our educational system:

> If the complaints about the decline of English over the years were even half true, literacy would have hit rock bottom generations ago, and we would be communicating with grunts and hand signals.... Those who have publicly worried about the decline of English have often failed to do their linguistic homework. They have also failed to review the relationship between the historical tendency toward expanding the public educational system and the language skills of the children and young adults who are being educated. In fact, every outcry of "back to basics" has followed on the heels of major expansion of the educational system.

Back to basics. The very idea stirs Judy's splenetic juices. He responds to the widely publicized report from the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, the one that's becoming the literacy movement's Sputnik. The ETS and the College Entrance Examination Board announced that College Board scores had been declining steadily since 1964 and, by 1973 when the report was issued, that the nation's average scores had dropped approximately 40 points. While those findings have caused much panic, Judy remains unimpressed, citing the sensationalism of a scandal-hungry press suddenly thrust into the complex business of defining literacy. There were gross overstatements of the problem and inevitable calls to get back to some manner of the Good Old Days, where teachers were teachers and students, by God, learned to read and write. Judy sandblasts such notions with a full page of historical quotations from exasperated administrators and teachers who found a so-called Golden Age of Literacy rather illiterate. He uses these remarks, chosen from 1841 to 1975, to demonstrate that dissatisfaction with the skills of incoming collegians is a campus fixture, like complaints about cafeteria food.

When the ETS report came out, notes Judy, college recruiters had already begun to scour less decorous streets for students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Those students tended to follow immigrant patterns. They were often intelligent but not especially