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NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION: HOW THE ABSENCE OF CORE AMERICAN VALUES IN K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS CAN CAUSE PERCEPTIONS OF FAILURE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines negative perceptions that cause negative outcomes of American K-12 public schools through a literary and cultural analysis that identifies conflicting behaviors and traditions between American cultural history and the American institution for K-12 public education. Examination of these conflicting behaviors and traditions finds the American public education system has not embraced core American values in its purpose, structure, or curricula, resulting in negative public perceptions and educational outcomes. Core American values of individualism, equality, competition, and change are identified using the works of Robin M. Williams and L. Robert Kohls. Data from the World Values Survey, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, Pew Research Center and Gallup polls are used to show attitudes towards American K-12 public education, and first-hand experience as a public-school educator is also used in the evaluation of these findings. Despite a multitude of attempted school reforms, public perceptions of schools continue to decline. It is essential that public K-12 schools place the core American values of individualism, equality, competition and change at the center of future reform efforts. These contemporary reform efforts are only possible because of digital age technologies that can emphasize core values.

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Preface

In my 8th grade English Language Arts classroom we often read the young adult novel, *The Giver* (1993) by Lois Lowry. This dystopian novel explores various ideals of humanity through the creation of a single community. After what can be assumed to have been an apocalyptic event, this community is created with strict rules that value "sameness" and avoidance of conflict. It first appears to be a utopia in which each person has a job especially suited to their talents and abilities, the young and the old are well-cared for, and no person goes hungry. There is no violence, and those who refuse to comply with these rules are simply "released," a vague concept that only becomes apparent later in the novel. The members of this community don't experience pain, suffering or loss, as death is inexistent.

When I introduce this novel to my students, you can immediately see their interest is piqued, and even the most unengaged reader quickly questions, "How?" "How is there no death, no suffering?" By thirteen, most of my students in the Title I school in which I teach, have already experienced many of these hardships, and they realize that this utopia seems too good to be true. Still, there is hope that a place like this exists, and so my students read on, often ravishingly, to try to find what is really happening in this community. It doesn't take them long to start making more observations and asking more questions. Early on they start to recognize the lack of choice that the characters have, and often, there is frustration and growing distrust of the Committee of Elders, the governing body that makes the decisions. Even more so, my students are shocked by the lack of individual recognition. There are no birthdays and no holidays. I then remind them, "Remember, this community values sameness as a way to avoid conflict and suffering. If there was individual recognition, there could be jealousy, which could lead to conflict and suffering."

Later in the novel, they learn how families are created. Parents are assigned to one another, and then they may apply for children, one boy and one girl to each family unit. Then I often get at least one brave student that asks, "But how do they keep the parents from having their own children?" Lowry addresses this in the novel with the required consumption of a daily pill, which suppresses desires and emotions. By this point, my students are generally furious. "How can they tell them what to do, and why do they do it?" By the end of the novel, they find out what the Giver means when he says, "The people in the community know nothing." There is disappointment and devastation when they discover that death does exist in this supposed utopia, and they recognize the price for not experiencing suffering is far too much. There are lengthy conversations about the controversial ending, and then we close the novel to move onto our next unit, rushing to meet the standards of the Common Core curriculum.

After several years of teaching this novel to my students, and after many conversations about the differing values between the community in *The Giver* and our society, there was a particularly poignant discussion. We were talking about how the community in *The Giver* had made sacrifices to assure no conflict. The community wanted to protect its people by taking away their individuality, choice and freedom. As we described the values of this community, one student said, "It's kinda like school."

I asked, "What do you mean?"

The student explained, "Well, we all do the same things in school, and we don't get to choose, but in the real world everyone chooses what they do."

Then, another student chimed in, "Yeah, it's like how they don't want to cause any problems in *The Giver*. The school doesn't want anyone to get upset, so they have everyone do the same thing."

Yet another student asserted, “And we don’t get individual recognition like *The Giver*. The most we get is a certificate at the end of the year when they recognize all of us together.”

It quickly became a discussion that could have looked like all the typical student complaints about being forced to go to school, but this was different. Through this classroom discussion about the contrasting values of our society and those of the community in *The Giver*, we began instead a study that accentuated the contrasting values of our society and those of the school.

As a teacher in the public-school system, I had struggled for some time to reconcile my idealism about the power of education with my experience with disengaged students and parents. In this moment, I started to form an idea. What if the values that we embrace at the core of American culture do not align with the values we embrace in education? What if this is the reason for growing discontent and disengagement in American education? As an American Studies scholar, I wanted to investigate this further through an American Studies perspective that focuses on the interplay of the institution of education and the larger American culture.

An essential element of this study is the attention given to public perceptions. As teachers, we know that listening to our students often provides us with as much learning as we provide to them. While a great many educational scholars have attempted to implement reforms based on their own ideals and philosophies about the purpose of education, it is now time for consideration of public needs and values in our attempts to improve public education. Listening to the experiences and viewpoints of students and parents reveals concerning negative perceptions of K-12 education.

For instance, a Virginia mother received national attention for a blog post in which she sounded off about the negative experiences her children are having in public school. As a former

teacher, Laura Goodman wants nothing more than for her children to come home excited about their day. Instead, when she greets them at the end of the school day, she is met with exhaustion and disinterest, and her children are only in elementary school. She describes her two children in very different ways, explaining that her son is “academically-strong,” but that school can be boring at times for him, and describing her daughter as having a potential learning disability that causes her to think she can’t keep up. Goodman says that it is difficult for her children to come up with any positive recollections of their day outside of lunch or recess. She writes, “I would blame the teachers for this bleak attitude, but I was one, and I know that the teachers are just as tired, frustrated and overworked. Their teachers are trying to inject as much fun into the day as possible, but are obligated to keep up with deadlines, adhere to the curriculum, and meet the standards. No, this pressure is coming from high above. And it is squishing my children with its weight" (2015). Goodman received such an outpouring of support from other parents that could relate to her experience that her blog was spotlighted on ABC News, which also stated that her writings would be featured in the annual journal of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children (Pelletiere, 2016). Goodman’s words are reflective of the feelings of thousands of Americans in regard to modern American schools.

The American K-12 educational system meets a variety of societal needs, going far beyond its academic role, yet it is often perceived as a failing institution by much of the American public, causing a lack of engagement and investment in public education that results in negative outcomes. The purpose of this dissertation is to consider the reason for this perception and to propose a new focus when considering potential changes or reforms that would improve public perceptions of American K-12 schools. In this dissertation, I make the claim that the reason for the perceived failure is that the American public education system has not embraced

core American values in its purpose, structure, or curricula. While some critics of public education may argue that perceptions are derived from results, this dissertation takes the position that negative perceptions drive attitudes that discourage engagement and investment necessary for positive outcomes. However, in either case, the reform proposals presented in this dissertation are for systematic change that would result in positive outcomes for public education.

The impact of the Digital Age is essential to this dissertation and proposed reforms in public education. In order to emphasize individualism, equality, competition, and change in education, contemporary technologies, such as computer adaptive learning systems, are a necessity. Less than a decade ago, these technologies did not exist, and so it has only recently become a real possibility to emphasize these core values in public education by utilizing Digital Age technologies. The Information Revolution has also created, in many ways, this need for drastic change in K-12 education. As knowledge grows exponentially, the task of selecting what knowledge is of the most worth becomes more difficult and even arguably unnecessary. The skills needed to comprehend and analyze information, follow directions, and create and innovate have become more important than the content. Immediate access to content has drastically changed the needs of people to memorize and learn specified knowledge. The use of new technologies can individualize education in a way never before possible, engaging students and families, improving educational outcomes and perceptions of K-12 public schools.

This thesis is clearly not the first scholarly work to approach the topic of school reform. It builds upon the work of a multitude of scholars, legislators, and educators that have implemented, studied, and reformed American education throughout its centuries of existence. Some of this history will be presented in the introductory chapter to this dissertation. In

contemporary scholarship, this thesis adds to the conversation regarding public school reform by presenting a unique interdisciplinary perspective that focuses on creating school reform that embraces core values.

While contemporary voices in education come from diverse backgrounds, including educational historians, scholars, entrepreneurs and journalists, each present a different proposal for what will "fix" American education. Some of the most influential voices in modern education discussions are from outside academia. In the last decade, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation has had significant influence in both the conversation and implementation of reforms, especially those that stress data driven decision-making, including the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and journalist, John Merrow, has been instrumental in opening the conversation to the public. His most recent book, *Addicted to Reform* (2017) presents, "A 12-Step Program to Rescue Public Education." Using his decades of experience reporting on American education, Merrow proposes common-sense changes that could improve public schools. Merrow uses various media to reach a variety of audiences, and he has become a well-respected and trusted voice in American education.

In the scholarly conversation, perhaps the most renowned modern educational intellectual, Diane Ravitch, has proposed several differing ideas throughout her career, reflecting the everchanging philosophies of educational reform. In the 1980's and 1990's Ravitch was a proponent for conservative educational principles. She was a champion for the No Child Left Behind legislation that looked to increase accountability in schools, and she supported school choice that gave individual students and families the opportunity to flee failing schools. In her more recent literature, however, Ravitch has changed course. In her book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (2010), she reflects on her career and rejects her previous

standings on charter schools, vouchers and high-stakes testing. She observes negative consequences of these reforms, and therefore, is refreshingly willing to change her assessment of school reform.

Other scholars, however, have remained more committed to their educational philosophies. E.D. Hirsch has long been viewed as one of the most influential voices in education, writing a number of important texts including *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1988), *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them* (1996), and *Why Knowledge Matters* (2016). For decades, Hirsch has focused his argument for school reform on the need to emphasize knowledge development in schools. He sees the movement of schools towards skill-based learning, including emphasis on critical thinking, as detrimental to student learning, and he argues instead for a knowledge-rich curriculum that will help students make connections. While elements of Hirsch's argument remain relevant today, his commitment to the necessity for students to learn a specified collection of information is becoming increasingly antiquated in a society that continues to see a breathtaking rate of knowledge expansion.

Linda Darling-Hammond is another well-known voice in the conversation regarding modern-American education. As a respected scholar, professor, and policy-advisor, Darling-Hammond has presented some of the same arguments that I advocate for in this dissertation. In her book, *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future* (2010), she emphasizes the need for a systematic change in education that moves away from the "factory school" model and instead prepares students for innovation and creation. She argues that schools that focus on knowledge production will engage students more. Additionally, she sees the lack of equity in education as a fundamental flaw that must be rectified

in order to achieve any relevant change in education. She advocates for increased federal funding to fix this problem.

While there is a great deal of consistency between Darling-Hammond's argument and the one put forth in this dissertation, a key distinction is that I look towards shared core values as a means by which to reach public investment and engagement in American education. The values I have identified are individualism, equality, competition, and change. These values were identified using the works of scholars, most notably that of Robin M. Williams, Jr.'s *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation*, first published in 1951 and L. Robert Kohls's "The Values Americans Live By," published in 1984. While each of these authors produced lists that totaled between thirteen and fifteen different values, I have identified what I refer to as "core" American values. These values are found on both of these lists, as well as a multitude of other works. It can also be said that the more comprehensive lists of Williams and Kohls attempt to identify all American values, while I wish to focus on the most foundational. Additionally, the majority of the values identified by Williams and Kohls could be categorized under the core values that I have listed above. In fact, in the conclusion to Williams's chapter, "Value Orientations in American Society," in which he identifies American values, he goes on to generalize these values into a more succinct list. He focuses on action, and "the approval of ego-assertion," an open world view that embraces the future rather than the past, "equality rather than hierarchy," and "individual personality rather than group identity" (p. 441-2). These could easily be interpreted and categorized accordingly as core values of competition, change, equality and individualism.

This is a qualitative study that uses literary and cultural analysis to identify conflicting behaviors and traditions between American cultural history and the American institution for K-

12 education. Research consists of close readings of historical and literary sources, interpretation of quantitative data, specifically from the World Values Survey, data compiled from the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development and various opinion surveys including Gallup, as well as first-hand experience as a teacher in Pennsylvania's public-school system. This study is unique in that American Studies methods are being applied to a problem in the American education system. Rather than using traditional education methodology, I am approaching the problem of public perception by presenting an intellectual, social and cultural history of the United States and the American education system.

A great number of educational scholars have addressed needs for educational reforms throughout the existence of public education, but few address or even consider the role of public perceptions about education in their reform efforts. Many may even disregard negative public perceptions of education, believing that the scholars and educators at the top of the field are much more positioned to make decisions about what is best for the public when it comes to education. Other scholars, however, particularly in the fields of psychology and human behavior, recognize the significant role that perceptions play in a person's engagement, attitude and motivation, and when connecting perception to education, it is clear that negative perceptions of education affect student achievement (Akey, 2006; Downson and MInerney, 2001; Hancock and Betts, 2002; Lumsden, 1994; Kirsch et al., 2002). If a student enters the public education system with the belief that education is of no value to him or her, it is unlikely that that student will be engaged in learning or achieve in school. If negative perceptions of public education become more pervasive, overall educational achievement is likely to decline. This is a clear problem that requires attention to the reasons for negative public perceptions of education.

The use of American Studies methodologies allows investigation into the social constructs and intellectual history that have created the current cultural climate surrounding American K-12 education. This perspective provides a fresh and unique look into modern American education. Rather than ignoring the viewpoints of the population that the American education system looks to serve, this study attempts to find the disconnect between an essential American institution that provides a variety of necessary functions in society and the American public that continues to lose faith in its effectiveness.

As a teacher in the public education system, I have witnessed first-hand the devaluing of education. Over the last 14 years, I have watched families become less invested in our schools and question the long-term benefits of education. In poor districts, like the Title I school that I teach in, I have seen growing gaps in resources and opportunities in comparison to wealthy school districts that are just miles away. As an educator, I also recognize the many roles that the school plays in every community, from providing mental health supports and preventing hunger to identifying child abuse and homelessness. Education is just one function of public schools. Still, with all these essential contributions, criticism of the American education system continues to intensify and public perceptions grow more negative. This seeming contradiction and nearly inexplicable phenomenon is one reason that I decided to pursue my Ph.D. in American Studies. While educational scholars continue to make important contributions to public education, I believe that interdisciplinary study and consideration of cultural components will open the discussion surrounding the modern American education system. This includes the consideration of public perspectives, shared values, and individual experiences with education in America. This dissertation will use American Studies methods to provide a potential reason for this problem in American education.

The introductory chapter of this dissertation provides evidence that shows the existence of negative perceptions of American K-12 schools and explains the history of public school reforms that focus on varying purposes, social change, and curricular modifications. The chapter ends by presenting the argument that schools must embrace core American values as the foundation for educational reform and institutional change.

Each of the four body chapters are devoted to one of the four core values identified. Chapter 2 discusses individualism as a fundamental American value and shows how America's schools fail to emphasize individualism in education. Chapter 3 focuses on equality, but differentiates between various definitions of equality, determining that the American value of equality focuses on equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. Chapter 4 considers the controversial core value of competition, recognizing contemporary arguments against competition in schools, but finding that competition is necessary in student development and to ensure equality in education. Chapter 5 discusses the importance of change, defined as progress and growth, in the American perception of success and the school system's failure to embrace change. Each of these chapters are divided into two distinct parts. Part 1 of each chapter defines and contextualizes the selected core value within American history, showing the significance of the value throughout various time periods. Part 2 of each body chapter focuses on the impact of the failure of American schools to embrace the core value as a foundational principle in decision-making and reforms.

The final concluding chapter of this dissertation reemphasizes the thesis by providing additional detail regarding the identification of the core values of individualism, equality, competition, and change. It also considers the impact of perceptions, in this case negative

perceptions of public schooling, and it ends with envisioning schools that embrace core American values.

The field of American Studies emphasizes cross-curricular cooperation in an attempt to consider various perspectives that lead to a more comprehensive understanding of an issue or problem. In this dissertation, I am using American Studies methods to consider the problem of negative perceptions of the American education system. As a fundamental American institution, public schools both reflect and create American culture, and so it is reasonable to consider that identification of contradictions between public school culture and the larger social culture could provide areas for further research and discussion in regard to educational reform.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The History of Education and School Reform

The United States public school system has been a controversial institution since its inception. Scholars, politicians, educators, students, and citizens have argued over its purpose, structure, curricula, and countless other elements. Despite the continual conversation, many aspects of American public education have remained remarkably unchanged. Students are grouped by grade levels that are determined by age. In early grades, the focus of learning is on reading, writing, and basic arithmetic. Teachers act as authority figures that govern their own classrooms by disciplining students for misbehavior and assigning grades for student work. Community schools are controlled by local school boards, who make decisions regarding the administration, curricula, and overall policy of each school. With consideration as to how drastically American culture and society has changed and shifted throughout the last two centuries, it is striking how resilient to change the public-school system has been.

While American public education has always been a topic for debate, in the last several decades the attitude towards public schooling has become increasingly negative. Although it often seems as though parties can never agree on anything in the conversation regarding America's schools, most Americans seem to agree that the public education system is in dire need of repair. Gallup has surveyed Americans each year, asking "Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality of education students receive in kindergarten through grade 12 in the U.S. today – would you say you are completely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat unsatisfied, or completely dissatisfied?" (2015). Since 1999, Americans have consistently reported

dissatisfaction with the American school system. At its lowest, in 2000, only 36% of Americans were satisfied with American schooling.

The United States' world status in education has been a recent cause for research and concern as well. For decades the United States has been viewed as a leader in democracy, equality, individualism, and education. In the past decade, however, the U.S. has seen a significant drop in its educational ranking among developed or developing countries. The Paris-based company, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, which conducts the annual study of educational systems and student achievement among multiple countries throughout the world, reported that the United States ranks as low as 36th in Mathematical PISA standings. The United States ranked 28th in Scientific Literacy and 24th in Reading Literacy. Countries that topped the lists included China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Finland (OECD, 2016). In addition, the United States dropped from first in the world just two decades ago to seventh and ninth respectively among industrialized nations in rankings regarding percentage of students gaining a high school or college degree (Lagorio, 2008).

Scholars have studied and provided proposals for educational change since the earliest days of the new republic. Part of the problem of American public schooling is that consensus, as to the purpose and overall curricular goals, has never been reached. In the earliest days of schooling in America, there were drastic differences in educational attainment. The sectarian nature of colonial America created drastically different cultures that affected schooling. In the northeast, populations were more concentrated, so the creation and cultivation of schools came more naturally. Leaders of northern colonies, like Massachusetts Bay, were also more educated and understood the value and necessity of education for citizens. In the south, however, a form of aristocracy was created, where wealthy plantation owners were in positions of power and

generally did not consider education vitally important for the citizenry. They would, of course, provide education for their own children through the hiring of private tutors, but most poor children went without schooling. Dispersed populations in southern towns also created an obstacle for public schooling.

Religious and philosophical differences amongst the varying groups of people in America also caused difficulty in creating consensus for schooling. The Puritans, who held significant governmental control, were most concerned with developing religious leaders and providing appropriate discipline for young people. They had great influence over the creation of Latin grammar schools in the northeast, which were modeled after the Latin schools in Europe, focusing on a study of the classics and Latin language in connection with religious instruction. Others were concerned with maintaining the learning of Latin so that religious practices could be continued in the new world. With the Enlightenment, new secular concepts encouraged people to pursue scientific and mathematical understanding of the universe.

Influential leaders like Benjamin Franklin embodied the philosophies of the Enlightenment and supported schooling that emphasized the learning of useful skills for a growing middle class. In *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania,* Franklin proposed a utilitarian curriculum with a wide variety of subjects. He wrote:

> As to their studies, it would be well if they could be taught *every Thing* that is useful, and *every Thing* that is ornamental: but Art is long, and their Time is short. It is therefore propos'd that they learn those Things that are likely to be *most useful* and *most ornamental*. Regard being had to the several Professions for which they are intended. (para. 13)

Thomas Jefferson, on the other hand, was most concerned with uncovering the most talented students, who would later go on to serve in state leadership. He believed in the elementary education of all children, but he proposed that only the top white, male performers go onto

grammar school to study the classics, Latin, Greek, geography, and then eventually the sciences if one's intellect would be capable of such tasks (*Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1782). While the plan is strikingly aristocratic, for its time, it was also highly democratic in its suggestion to educate all children despite family wealth or status. Both Franklin's and Jefferson's attempts to affect public schooling would eventually fail. However, each would create a successful college that would grow in prestige throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

After the American Revolution, industrialization played a major role in a changing American society, landscape, and educational philosophy. The invention of the cotton gin reinvigorated slavery in the south, and this authoritarian system stifled creative thinking. Southerners were distrustful of a proposed public schooling, which may have influenced people's opinions about slavery and questioned their way of life. With the expansion of the railroad and steamboats, more Americans moved throughout the United States, and many moved westward to a new frontier. The initial needs of survival in the frontier overshadowed a public concern for education.

By the mid-nineteenth century in northern cities, large populations of foreigners emigrated from Europe to escape difficult conditions and find economic prosperity in the newly industrialized nation. These large numbers of immigrants made Americans fearful that the new republic may be influenced by foreign cultures and ideas. Proponents for public schooling became more vocal, but the purpose transitioned from religious and democratic reasons to a perceived need to "Americanize" immigrants. As more people found jobs in factories where production was the focus, questions regarding the treatment of children and the drastic gap between the wealthy manufacturers and working class came into sharp focus. Trade unions not only were concerned with wages and hours, but they also fought for public schooling, which they

believed would provide workers' children with the opportunity for social mobility. The union's intentions when opposing child labor and supporting compulsory education was not purely to assure the best circumstances for children, but rather to decrease competition for jobs.

After the Civil War, the need for education in the south became strikingly apparent, yet there was strong resistance towards public schooling. Huge numbers of uneducated former slaves were now free, but unprepared for the harsh realities of southern life. Oppositional voices, like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois argued about the manner in which African Americans would advance towards equality. Educational opportunity was an essential aspect of both propositions, but Washington advocated for industrial education, emphasizing dignity of labor, self-respect, and confidence, while Dubois believed in intellectual achievement to win civil equality and representation.

While the south faced considerable hardships and transition, the north continued industrial development. With this progress, the voices of business called for efficiency of schooling, which would prepare students for vocational and manufacturing jobs. They viewed schools as a waste of tax-payer's money, and insisted that students were not being prepared for life, which is what they considered the purpose of schooling to be. S. Alexander Rippa, author of *Education in a Free Society: An American History*, discusses how quickly American educators "absorbed the business creed and responded to repeated demands for 'efficiency.'" He contends, "This development had profound consequences: it narrowed the function of the public school by teaching specific skills and attitudes that mirrored the business world and molded the individual to fit into an industrial society" (1997, p. 130-131).

The influence of industry on American education was significant, but by the turn of the 20th century, poverty and social issues became so prevalent that people began looking to the

schools to help effect social change. Many school reformers began arguing for a variety of curricula that would best meet the needs of society. By the mid-twentieth century, schools were being used to affect substantial racial and societal change. Governmental policy and court decisions, like *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* showed the importance of education in American society and its role in effecting change within society.

Throughout all of these evolving social conditions, schooling was always recognized as an important element of American society, but its overall purpose and curricula was consistently disputed. These debates over purpose and curricular goals of education have guided a variety of changes and reforms, but the results remain the same. Groups of individuals who have different ideas regarding the purpose of education and how to achieve that purpose argue that public schools are failing, while students continue to be required to meet the standards set by the elite group in power at any given time. The evolution of curricular reform shows the application of a group's goals and philosophies, each benefitting a particular agenda.

Most of the curriculum designers and educational reformers, beginning in the late nineteenth century, focused on how education was essential to a particular social condition or a vital part of changing the current social condition. At the beginning of the scholarly discipline of curriculum development, many supported education that emphasized efficiency and scientific methods. This type of educational thinking aligned with growth of industry and factory systems. Curricular scholar Franklin Bobbitt argued that schools should use data analysis to help prepare students for productive adult lives. He saw the purpose of education as a manner of fitting people with the existing social and economic order.

Others, who were discussing educational purpose and designing curricula during this same time in the early twentieth century, recognized problems in the social condition and saw

education as an agent of change. John Dewey and Jane Addams, who are representative of the early Progressive ideals, wanted education to play a role in addressing racial, gender, and economic problems in society, while focusing on the development of the child. Dewey emphasized learning through experience and the use of student interest in determining subject matter.

Progressivism is often placed in opposition to Essentialism in curricular scholarship. While this is a simplification of these two viewpoints, concepts associated with both Progressivism and Essentialism have dominated American schooling since this time. William Bagley, the founder of the Essentialistic Education Society published the *Essentialist's Platform* in 1938, which laid out the basic educational principles of their philosophy. This included providing a well-educated teacher that would provide guidance to immature students and impart values and ideals onto subsequent generations, as well as assuring specific curricular programming. Bagley, who gained most of his education in psychology before spending his life teaching teachers, viewed an effective curriculum as one that would guide students toward a greater understanding of society through knowledge of essential subjects and skills.

Since the writings of Bagley and Dewey, essentialism and progressivism have experienced change, division, and distortion. Contemporary discussions are marked by contention and opposition, and the voices controlling the discussions seem guided by political and economic interests. In 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act in response to the launching of Sputnik, the Soviet satellite in 1957. Government viewed this event as a sign that the Soviet Union was surpassing American knowledge of science, technology and mathematics. This act was intended to provide financing to schools and students in order to improve education in these subject areas. The National Defense Education Act reads, "The

defense of this Nation depends upon the mastery of modern techniques developed from complex scientific principles…The national interest requires that the Federal Government give assistance to education for programs which are important to our defense" (Flynn, 1995). During the Cold War, government began having a greater role in educational policy and curriculum, and many of the essentialist values of focusing curriculum on particular subjects were adopted.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and 1970's, government continued to enact law and policies affecting American education. Many of these policies focused on the integration of races and equality of opportunity. Legislation like *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act* and *The Equal Educational Opportunities Act*, as well as projects like Head Start emphasized progressive values. But, after decades of progressive reforms, accusations of failing schools again took control. In 1983, a government agency published the report *A Nation at Risk*, which provided data portraying that American students were falling behind students of other countries. The report called for comprehensive reforms in teacher education and curriculum. As a response to this report, essentialists seized the opportunity to promote curricular reform focused on returning to "the basics" in education.

One of the most extreme perennial manifestos produced during this time was Mortimer Adler's *Paideia Proposal* (1982). In this text, which preceded the publication of *A Nation at Risk* by a year, but coincided with concerns regarding failing schools, Adler presents a specific curriculum that claims to provide "the best education for all" (184). Using the alleged arguments and theories of Robert Maynard Hutchins and John Dewey to support his overall proposal, Adler argues that students should be required to take the same classes, choosing only the elective of a second language. Vocational education and other electives or specializations are eliminated. Adler explains, "Allowing them will always lead a certain number of students to voluntarily

downgrade their own education" (Flinders and Thornton, p. 185). Adler's extreme standardization of educational curricula provided no choice for individuals because, as Adler saw it, individual choice equates to a lowering of standards.

The Paideia Proposal claimed to reflect democratic principles of equality, but the platform produced a great deal of criticism that emphasized the lack of individual freedom in the proposed curriculum. Critics and scholars also expressed concern with Adler's misleading representation of the positions of Hutchins and Dewey, as well as the overgeneralization of the main theoretical approaches presented to appeal to a wider audience. Nel Noddings points out in "The False Promise of the Paideia: A Critical Review of *The Paideia Proposal*" that Hutchins and Dewey are inappropriately linked, "as though no disagreement separated the two" (Flinders and Thonton, p. 187). He states that "Mr. Hutchins would be an eloquent and outspoken advocate of the *Paideia*: Mr. Dewey would be a softer spoken but rigorously thoughtful opponent of the program. To suggest, even tacitly, that the *Paideia* fulfills the dreams and recommendations of both John Dewey and Robert Hutchins does a monumental disservice to John Dewey" (p. 187-188). Other critics might argue that even Hutchins, a colleague and co-founder of the Great Books program, would take issue with *The Paideia Proposal*. James Scott Johnston argues in "The Dewey-Hutchins Debate: A Dispute Over Moral Teleology" that "Hutchins did not demand an equal education for all…While Hutchins subscribed to a liberal education for all, he did not presume that a single method would accommodate all students" (p. 5). The misinterpretation and potentially purposeful misrepresentation of the curricular views of these two respected scholars presents one assault on the credibility of the *Proposal*.

Potentially the most significant criticism of *The Paideia Proposal* is that Adler fails to address the complex and crucial question of power. The historical context of *The Paideia*

Proposal may suggest that Adler was appealing most specifically to government agencies who had recently taken control of many of the curricular decisions imposed on American schools. After all, Adler's promotion of the same curriculum for all students could only practically be achieved by federal mandates. The pressure that American government experienced as a result of failure in international academic assessments in the 1980's provided Adler with the opportunity to promote his manifesto.

Despite criticism of *The Paideia Proposal*, elements of the essentialist and perennial platforms can be found in modern curriculum. In contemporary essentialist curriculum, however, concerns regarding international academic competition have been transformed into concerns over global economic competition, bringing the voices and interests of "big business" to the forefront of curriculum development and educational policy. Leaders in the capitalist sphere of American society have taken on powerful and influential roles in American schooling.

Educational theorist, Michael W. Apple discusses the role of politics and business in the development of curriculum in his article, "Conservative Agendas and Progressive Possibilities: Understanding the Wider Politics of Curriculum and Teaching" (1991). Apple expresses growing concern that decisions regarding American education are being influenced and controlled by economic needs. Connections are drawn between educational issues like voucher plans, teacher accountability, and standardization, and the increasing pressure to meet the needs of industry and business. He asserts, "In essence, this new alliance has integrated education into a wider set of ideological commitments. Its objectives in education are derived from the same principles that guide its economic and social welfare goals…In the process, the value of education is increasingly being reduced to its economic utility" (p. 280-281). Apple sees the pressure from government and business as a force that has diminished the purpose of public schooling into

creating workers to partake in a global economy. Additionally, he views government control of education as the ultimate standardization of education, which removes power and freedom from teachers and implements commercial curriculum. Apple writes:

> Increasingly, teaching methods, texts, tests, and outcomes are being taken out of the hands of the people who must put them into practice. Instead, they are being legislated by state departments of education, state legislatures, and central office staff, who in their attempts to increase 'the quality of educational outcomes' are often markedly unreflective about the latent effects of their efforts. (p. 282)

Other critics echo Apple's concern about standardization and rationalization, and their effects on power relations in the larger society. Christine Sleeter and Jamy Stillman examined and analyzed a state mandated essentialist curriculum in California. The authors found that the curriculum is reminiscent of early "Tayloristic" curriculum that emphasized efficiency and production. More menacingly, they argue that the contemporary standardization of curriculum is part of a "political movement to reconfigure power relations among racial, ethnic, language, and social groupings" (p. 27). Sleeter and Stillman, using Bernstein's (1975) theory of codes, determined that the standardization of education not only brings into question its effectiveness for improving student learning, but it also tends to retain current power structures that withhold equal opportunity for marginalized groups.

Elliot Eisner, scholar and champion of arts education, identifies various elements of rationalization and their potential fallacies in his article "What Does it Mean to Say a School is Doing Well?" He argues that rationalization creates problems in schools like limiting of curriculum, marginalization of subjects, undermining of intellectual development, and neglecting of deeper school problems. Eisner questions the process and validity of standardization and assessment, and argues that the broad learning and educational experiences that take place in American schools cannot be assessed on a standardized test. He contends that, "If we are going

to use proxies that have predictive validity, we need proxies that predict performances that matter outside the context of school. The function of schooling is not to enable students to do better in school. The function of schooling is to enable students to do better in life" (p. 281). As schools face financial hardships, the standardization and high stakes tests required of schools has forced cuts in the arts and other areas that are untested subjects.

As Eisner explains, America's obsession with scientific and data-based assessments can be traced back to the Enlightenment. Today, business and industry utilize data and scientific assessment to track production and display growth. The power and influence of business and industry on curricular decisions is, perhaps, most obvious in the standardization and rationalization of schooling. In today's technological age, businesses are interested in producing skilled workers that will be prepared to work for American companies. Emphasis is now on core subjects, as demonstrated by the Common Core Standards and federally funded STEM programs. Preparation for college and career is the newly stated objective of the Common Core curriculum, and it seems evident that private corporations and economic interests have guided the essentialist reform.

Education scholars and researchers warn of the possible dangers of an industry-based curriculum in public schools. In "The Answer to the Great Question of Education Reform? The Number 42," Adam Bessie expresses his concern with the indoctrination of students and the use of a prescribed curriculum. He describes potential consequences explaining, "Rather than ask our children to imagine what the 21st century will look like, rather than ask them to question the society into which they were born, rather than study our values, our morals, the quality of our lives, our democracy and our environment, the technicians want more technicians, ones who will ask how but never why" (p. 3).

The influence of business and industry on education is particularly evident in the educational initiatives like that of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. Self-proclaimed as the "leading advocacy organization focused on infusing 21st century skills," the group consists of members of the "business community, education leaders, and policy makers" (2008, p. i). In "21st Century Skills, Education and Competitiveness: A Resource and Policy Guide" (2008), they use jargon and loaded words to scare the public into believing that America's future is uncertain and bleak if American education does not adopt the platform presented. They insist that an educational reform that emphasizes the skills needed to fulfill jobs in the business and technology sectors is the necessary anecdote to this problem. The guide for this program claims to summarize "the challenges and opportunities that, if left unaddressed, will curtail our competitiveness and diminish our standing in the world" (p. i). Emphasizing, much like Adler, that this is a "seminal moment in history," the Partnership advocates for its program insisting that it is "supported by voters, employers, educators, researchers and thought leaders" (p. 16). The language and arguments presented are compelling, but they omit any other considerations, like that of John Dewey, that schooling is not simply or even primarily to prepare students for adulthood.

Throughout all of these reform efforts, it is apparent that each reformer has a particular agenda that they are attempting to promote. Whether the platform is sustaining a social order or effecting change for a perceived improvement to the social condition, each reform reflects a singular agenda. Even for progressive reforms that seemingly focus on the student, there are social elements that drive curricular and pedagogical decisions. While scholars like Paulo Freire (1968) would argue that education for the purpose of improving the social condition is the highest form of education, these reforms have done little to improve the negative perceptions of

public schooling. Educational leaders continue to argue over the purpose of schooling and the best curricular goals to achieve this purpose with very little consideration of public opinion.

While politicians, educational administrators, and other elite officials have argued over the purpose of schooling and the best curricula to meet that purpose, all have failed to identify the most significant problem with modern American schooling. If one considers the cultural values that are represented in American schools in comparison to the values that are most important to the larger American culture, you will find a substantial disparity, which creates general discontent and cynicism towards American public education. It is this discrepancy that causes Americans to view public schools as failing because it fails to embody the values that are most important to American culture.

As Americans, despite drastic differences in subcultural values, there are foundational values that are universally shared. Countless numbers of anthropologists, cultural historians, political analysts and other scholars have studied and identified various values important to American culture. Arguably the most significant works are those of Robin M. Williams, who wrote *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation* and L. Robert Kohls, who identified 13 "Values Americans Live By" (1984). Others have used these seminal works and have expanded or changed terminology and explanation of these values. A comparison and review of these texts shows that there is both overlap within the values listed, as well as a difference in importance among the values. For this study, I have identified four core American values that are particularly essential to American culture: individualism, equality, competition, and change. Each of these concepts can be interpreted in a variety of ways; therefore, I will clearly define each of these values in the body of this text and provide historical context for the evolution of the term.

The values exemplified by American public schools, however, clearly contradict these four values presented. For any student or teacher in public schools, it is easy to identify the values that are most important to schooling in America. These include discipline, conformity, group-orientation, cooperation, authority, tradition, and equality of outcome. In "The Values American Live By," Dr. Kohls provides a chart that places opposing values on opposite sides of a T-chart. The values that represent American public schools are in direct opposition to the values listed as most important to American culture. Until public schools embrace the values of individualism, equality, competition, and change at the core of their purpose, structure, and curricula, American schooling will continue to be viewed as a failing institution. An effort to align the values of American schooling with American cultural values is key to bringing successful reform to American education.

CHAPTER 2

INDIVIDUALISM

A favorite project in my 8th grade ELA class is the "Identity Project." As part of a unit on theme, we read Sandra Cisneros's collection of vignettes in *The House on Mango Street*. For one of our theme studies, we focus on identity formation. As a class we read Cisneros's vignettes, "My Name," "The House on Mango Street," "Hairs," "Laughter," and "Four Skinny Trees." Each of these vignettes exposes a piece of the narrator's identity. Through this study and literary analysis, we consider the numerous elements that go into each individual's identity, and for our culminating activity, my students create a poster or collage of images and words that combine to reflect each student's unique and individual identity. When we are finished, we cover my classroom walls with my students' identity posters. For weeks, as students enter my classroom, they walk to the walls and gaze at the posters like pieces of artwork displayed at a museum.

For some students, they proudly point to their identity poster hanging on the wall. For others, they shy away, uncomfortable with the attention. For all my students, however, this is one of the few times they are given an opportunity to display their individual and unique identities in school. Those students who are unnerved by the attention often express their desire to fade back into the crowd, a practice with which they have become very familiar. Despite a fierce commitment to individualism in American society, schools have suppressed individualism in many ways. From lack of choice in educational curriculum to avoidance of recognition for individual achievement, schools fail to show the same fierce commitment to individualism that is apparent in American culture.

In this chapter, I focus on the importance of individualism as an essential American value. Part I attempts to define American individualism by locating concepts of individualism in American history. The first section in Part I looks at "Individualism as Separatism," which explores a history of individualism that embraces isolationism. The second section in Part I, "Individualism as Mobility" investigates utilitarian individualism in American cultural history, and in "Individualism and Society," the importance of individualism to improve society is discussed. The final section of Part I emphasizes freedom of choice as the foundation of American individualism.

Part II of this chapter discusses individualism in the American education system. Sections include consideration of "Essential Curricula and Individual Choice," which focuses on the process by which curricula and standards are determined without opportunity for student choice, and "Individual Pace," which discusses the lack of individualism inherent in the traditional grouping and movement of students through grade levels.

Part I: The Essential American Value

Individualism is arguably the essential American value. This concept and contention stems from the earliest years of colonial settlement, in which waves of groups risked all to find a place free from persecution and oppression. These immigrants wanted a place where they were free to live the lives they chose without influence of authorities. Puritans, however, were less concerned with the rights of individuals within their group than with the need to live according to Calvinist ideals, which shows the flexible or contextual nature of the idea. Over time, the term individualism has changed and evolved and today carries a multitude of meanings. Some believe

that individualism refers to a desire to live separately from others and provide for oneself and family. Others see individualism as the right to make one's own decisions about his or her life.

Individualism, of course, is not without its vulnerabilities, specifically social cohesion. Critics since Tocqueville have warned of the dangers of an individualism that focuses on isolationist ideologies that devalue the needs of society. Scholars into the present have argued that there are different types of individualism, like Utilitarian individualism, which emphasizes self-improvement, and Expressive individualism, which reflects romantic ideals of identity and authenticity of self (Bellah, 2008). Understanding the varying definitions and evolution of this term and concept in American society is critical in finding commonalities. It is through the commonalities that the foundation of this persistent yet malleable value is revealed.

Individualism as Separatism

Throughout American historical culture and still in existence today is the idea that true individualism is the ability for a person to live separated from society, free of government control, and capable of sustaining one's own life and that of his or her family. It is this concept of individualism that is most harshly criticized and romanticized. The earliest observers, like Alexis de Tocqueville viewed this need for separation as a false egotism, which caused people to believe that they were capable of providing for themselves and not in need of others or of a particular social order. Tocqueville defined individualism as "a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself" (1838, p. 360). He considered individualism as selfishness and warned that, "Selfishness is a vice as old as the world, which does not belong

to one form of society more than another; individualism is of democratic origin, and it threatens to spread in the same ration as the equality of condition" (1838, p. 360).

While there may be fewer people in today's society that desire an isolationist individualism, there are certainly people who want government to have much less influence on American citizens. Aaron Barlow discusses what he calls the "borderer culture" in American society and its continuing influence on the broader American political culture in *The Cult of Individualism* (2013). The borderers, who immigrated to the United States in the 18th century, were escaping poverty and mistreatment in the borderlands of Scotland and England. Upon arrival in America, they also met with unwelcoming colonists and natives, and they found themselves settling on lands near the edges of the colonies, including what is known as Appalachia. Despite suggestions that white cultures have melted together in American society, Barlow argues that these Scotch-Irish descendants have continued to remain separated from many other English and European immigrants. In today's contemporary society, they form a foundational conservative culture that resists and distrusts government control (Barlow, 2013). In *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016), J.D. Vance provides a unique personal insight into this world. Vance's autobiography describes a boy whose young life is devoid of the potentialities promised by the American Dream. Having been subsumed by poverty, alcohol and addiction, Vance's family loses all belief in American institutions that falsely advertise the existence of a better life. They look only to family for help and survival. Several times he points to the Scotch-Irish distrust of outsiders, including politicians, media, and people from other social classes. He writes, "This is deep skepticism of the very institutions of our society. And it's becoming more and more mainstream" (p. 193). This distrust has led to a

fierce individualism that emphasizes separatism and has become a growing phenomenon in modern American culture.

Still, the growth of Appalachian culture in the United States is also apparent in the literature produced in the early 19th century. James Fenimore Cooper's woodsman characters, like Natty Bumppo from the Leatherstocking Tales, were representative of this particular culture in America. He is not only a rugged individualist who refuses civilization and government control, but he is a strong, heroic character, capable of surviving without assistance. In *The Pioneers,* Bumppo describes an incident that epitomizes the strength of the isolationist individual explaining, "I travelled seventy miles alone in the howling wilderness, with a rifle bullet in my thigh, and then cut it out with my own jack-knife" (p. 14). When he meets with a local official, Bumppo expresses the political views of the Appalachian culture: "…although I am a poor man I can live without the venison, but I don't love to give up my lawful dues in a free country" (1835, p. 8). Characters like Bumppo show the growth of the borderer culture throughout the nineteenth century.

In early years of westward expansion, borderers and other non-conformists were pushed towards the frontier. Frederick Jackson Turner famously explained the culture of the frontier as a place where individuals were concerned with survival of themselves and of their families. It was primitive and wild, and any form of control, direct or indirect, was seen as a form of oppression ("The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893).

Following the industrial revolution, masses of immigrants flocked to the United States, causing significant change and again redefining individualism in America. Intellectuals began renouncing individualism as selfishness, and instead began promoting collectivism in hopes of correcting the growing poverty in cities. After the conclusion of the World Wars, however,

separatist individuality reemerged in a different form that affected not only the rural borderer cultures, but also affected the suburban and urban mainstream. The romanticized, alienated individual entered popular culture in a substantial way.

As portrayed in media, the concept of the loner as hero became popularized. Stars like James Dean, Marlon Brando, and John Wayne played characters without family, community or goals. These characters were representative of more than westerns and frontiers, but were now influencing isolationist individualism in new settings. One of the most famous of these films was *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). The film explores the changing American culture and the destruction of the family. This concept was contrary to the values of borderer culture, which emphasized family structure often in opposition to social structure. *Rebel Without a Cause* also considered the influence of capitalism on individualism. James Dean's character, Jim Stark, is thrust into a world that affords him no support and gives him no hope. He comes from an upper middle class family, and he is given all of his material wants. Jim, however, has no clear male role model, as his father is emasculated until the end of the film, where he finally removes his apron and stands up for his son. His mother is also more concerned with social status and material goods than she is with her relationship with her son. In *Rebel Without a Cause,* materialism has damaged all of the key elements of society and only those able to withdraw from it will find happiness and success. This film only emphasized the problems of society and strengthened the values of separatist individualism.

In today's America, the influence of isolationist individualism is apparent and the warnings that Tocqueville expressed in his pivotal text continue to be discussed. Barlow explains that current borderer cultures have a foundational belief that a person is capable of achieving more on his or her own and that society often presents barriers to success rather than providing assistance

(2013). Often, this view refuses to recognize the economic, social, or cultural obstacles that others face. In doing so, it begins to echo Tocqueville's concerns regarding selfishness.

Individualism as Mobility

Other concepts of individualism focus on the improvement of one's self, sometimes referred to as utilitarian individualism. This notion considers a person's efforts and character in determining success. Often considered the originator of this idea, Benjamin Franklin provided advice and suggestions to other Americans as to how to improve one's social status in *Poor Richard's Almanack* (1732) and in his *Autobiography* (1791). These texts also presented guidance for readers left aimless in a world of shifting rules, as the nation transitioned from colony to republic. Unlike Puritan beliefs of predestination, Franklin insisted that good works resulted in self-improvement, and often improved a person's social position. In many ways, Franklin and this concept of individualism stood in direct opposition to borderers and isolationist individualists. In Franklin's teachings, doing well for others and for one's community directly and positively affected the self. One of his many proverbs from *Poor Richard's Almanack* states, "The noblest question in the world is 'What good may I do in it?'"

Franklin's own life, described in his *Autobiography*, stood as the example that any individual can improve himself and his social condition by his own initiative. Born of humble beginnings, Franklin was primarily self-educated, since his family could not afford an education equal to that of other notable American figures, like Thomas Jefferson. Franklin then took an apprenticeship under his brother at a printing press, so that he could continue to educate himself. Franklin consistently practiced good virtue and hard work, resulting in his position as one of the most well-known and respected figures in America. "In short, Franklin gave classic expression

to what many felt in the eighteenth century – and many have felt ever since – to be the most important thing about America: a chance for the individual to get ahead on his own initiative" (Bellah, 2008, p. 33). He was, in many ways, the quintessential American, having come from nothing and made something of himself.

The influence of Franklin's life and philosophies are apparent in various literary examples. Horatio Alger was one of the most popular fiction writers of the late nineteenth century. While his stories are unlikely to be compared to the canonical works of Twain, Melville, or Hawthorne, Alger's formulaic stories about young characters who overcome obstacles with hard work and respectable character have resonated with readers for over a century. In the introduction to the 2001 reprinting of *Ragged Dick* and *Tattered Tom* Charles Olson Cook asserts, "Alger's immense popularity shaped the public consciousness in ways that more cerebral writers could only dream of" (p. vii). Alger found success in tapping into the tastes and values of the public, and his characters and themes reflect the American belief in individual achievement.

His most well-known novel, *Ragged Dick*, presents a street-smart fourteen-year-old bootblack who has been orphaned and is on his own on the streets of New York. While shining boots one day Dick has a chance encounter with a gentleman, Mr. Whitney, who hires Dick to take his nephew on a tour of the city. Whitney quickly recognizes Ragged Dick's wit and potential. They discuss the many tales of self-made men, and Whitney inspires Dick to pave his own path towards upward mobility, emphasizing respectability and education as the key component to success. While capitalist dreams of material wealth certainly play a role in Alger's novels, the attainment of respectability always remains the worthiest goal. Education is also

portrayed as a necessity for reaching individual achievement. When Dick finally saves enough money to open his own bank account, his attention immediately shifts to education:

> Dick was too sensible not to know that there was something more than money needed to win a respectable position in the world. He felt that he was very ignorant. Of reading and writing he only knew the rudiments, and that, with a slight acquaintance with arithmetic, was all he did know of books. Dick knew he must study hard, and he dreaded it. He looked upon learning as attended with greater difficulties than it really possesses. But Dick had good pluck. He meant to learn, nevertheless, and resolved to buy a book with his first spare earnings. (p. 115)

Dick then goes onto secure a tutor to further his education. Throughout the novel, Dick consistently proves himself to be an honorable and honest citizen while he manages to improve his status from a homeless bootblack to a "spectable" office clerk.

This story of individual achievement earned by a respectable and honest young man that "pulled himself up by his bootstraps," has earned plenty of criticism in a modern American society. For many, especially those from marginalized groups, hard work and good character has proven not to be enough to improve their social position (Archer, 2012; Grzeszczyk, 2014) . Still, Alger's nineteenth and twentieth century popularity, despite a lack of literary merit, displays the American commitment to the ideal of individualism. As Cook contends, "If ever there was evidence that pulp fiction – more than highbrow culture and landmark literature – is closer to telling us who we are and to reminding us of how we perceive ourselves, both now and in the past, it is the writing of Horatio Alger" (p. xi). Alger, with all of his deserved criticism, has managed through his writing and its popularity to display the pervasiveness of America's commitment to individualism.

Alger, like some of his contemporaries, including William Graham Sumner and Russell Conwell, was concerned with the attack on traditional values during the Gilded Age and endeavored to provide moral guidance through his literature. Using the teachings of Benjamin

Franklin, Alger's stories depicted characters rewarded for integrity, diligence and frugality. Along with an excellent work ethic and frugality, most importantly Dick has strength of character, which Franklin saw as the most important characteristic to possess for those attempting self-improvement (Packer-Kinlaw, 2013).

This concept of self-improvement as the epitome of American individualism focuses on how the desire to improve oneself will also improve society. When questioning whether there is a common American culture, Robert Bellah identified utilitarian individualism as "a dominant element of the common culture" (2008, p. 616). However, Bellah and others express concern that this drive for individual success transformed into materialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result, expressive individualism, which consists of a more romantic cultivation of self-identity, originated as a way of balancing the materialism inherent in utilitarian individualism.

Most renowned for expressive individualism are the transcendental writers of the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly, expressive individualism, like Transcendentalism stood in opposition to the rational ideologies expressed by Franklin and other voices of the American Enlightenment. While expressive individualism also focused on self-improvement, unlike utilitarian individualism, social status played no role. Instead, expressive individualists viewed interconnectedness with nature and the universe as the goal of improvement. Walt Whitman, like Franklin, came from modest beginnings and achieved recognition for his talents. Whitman, however, was not concerned with material success. Instead, he viewed experience and intense feeling as the manner by which one achieved self-improvement. A successful life was one filled with connections with people and nature, enjoying the variety of experiences that life has to offer. Bellah writes, "Freedom to Whitman was above all the freedom to express oneself, against

all constraints and conventions" (p. 34). Individualism, to Whitman, was the opportunity for each person to travel his own path, live his own experiences, and find joy. In *Leaves of Grass* Whitman writes, "Not I, nor anyone else can travel that road for you. You must travel it by yourself. It is not far. It is within reach. Perhaps you have been on it since you were born, and did not know. Perhaps it is everywhere - on water and land" ("Song of Myself," 1855).

This idea is carried into other transcendental writings promoting expressive individualism in education and schooling. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, along with Amos Bronson Alcott, advocated for schooling that would help children achieve self-realization. Perry Miller, in his notes introducing Peabody's *Record of a School* writes, "The 1835 discourse was a mélange of her own ideas and Alcott's; it is one of the more engaging documents in American Transcendentalism, with its contention that human nature is compacted of three principles – Happiness, Love, Faith – and that education is a method of realizing them in consciousness" (1971, p. 142). Peabody viewed Alcott as a visionary who was leading the Transcendental fight against classical education that disallowed the individual child to pursue external learning that would help find the true self.

Transcendentalists took on a variety of issues using the concept of individualism. From Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* (1849) that called for individuals to stand up against injustices created from government control, to Margaret Fuller's book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), which encouraged women to become individuals prior to marriage so that marriage would be a union of equals, the transcendental movement highlighted the needed for a different type of individualism. Expressive individualism condoned materialism and authority, and instead inspired intellectual discovery and the importance of the individual in relation to others.

While most critics of individualism continued to question components of isolationism, materialism, and selfishness, expressive individualists like Ralph Waldo Emerson began to consider the importance of community. James M. Albrecht discusses Emerson's feeling of obligation to others within a community or society. He writes, "Emerson's ethics attempt to synthesize these demands: he envisions community as a collection of mutually inspiring and antagonizing individuals who, in their diversity of vocations, serve as catalysts for the creative change that reinvigorates society. Self-reliance thus is not opposed to community (as is often assumed), but a means to more vital community" (2012, p. 55). While Emerson's view of society may be seen as idealistic, it shows his consideration of the social effects of individualism and his pragmatic approach to self-reliance within a community. Emerson, after all, understood the interconnectedness that cultivated ideas. American Transcendentalism, for example, did not develop in a vacuum, but rather grew from a connection with European Romanticism. Emerson's relationship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the pervasive influence of Romanticism on Transcendental philosophies is discussed in Samantha Harvey's book, *Translatlantic Trancendentalism: Coleridge, Emerson, and Nature* (2013). Harvey asserts, "the relationship between Coleridge and Emerson serves as a lens to magnify the ways in which ideas transferred across thinkers, oceans, and time periods, on one hand forging enduring legacies while also warping, reinterpreting, and renewing ideas in new climates" (p. 2). It was this sense of intellectual community that expressive individualists recognized as essential to individualism.

Both utilitarian and expressive individualism stand in stark contrast to isolationist individualism, which shows a continuing evolution of the core value in America. However, Alexis de Tocqueville's early concerns regarding individualism in America are persistently

discussed. There continues to be questions regarding the binary positioning of individualism and society in modern America.

Individualism and Society

Many scholars like Robert Bellah, Amitai Etzioni, and Jean Elshtain argue that individualism threatens or even destroys community. Robert Putnam argues in *Bowling Alone* (2001) that the decrease in community involvement and civic participation reduces networks that provide social capital and threatens the foundation of democracy. He warns, "What is at stake is not merely warm, cuddly feelings or frissons of community pride. We shall review hard evidence that our schools and neighborhoods don't work so well when community bonds slacken, that our economy, our democracy, and even our health and happiness depend on adequate stocks of social capital" (p. 27-28). Collectivism is often placed in opposition to individualism, particularly in the study of varying cultures. Since collectivism is defined as prioritizing the group over the individual, the assumption in these circumstances is that cultures are either individualistic or collective. That is, nations either prioritize the individual or the society. Like Tocqueville, these scholars often warn that individualistic cultures will eventually see a dissolution of social unity.

Other scholars, however, have argued that individualism actually improves collectivism. Emile Durkheim's groundbreaking work, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), was one of the first to argue that individualism in an industrial society requires community. While others were concerned about the destruction of society by extreme individualism during the industrial revolution, Durkheim recognized that division of labor "creates between men a whole system of

rights and duties joining them in a lasting way to one another" (p. 337-338). Durkheim argued that rather than standing in opposition to collectivism, individualism inspires collectivism.

Using Durkheim's assumptions, other scholars have also argued that individualism in America has created a dependence on society. Allik and Realo (2004) analyzed data regarding the relationship between individualism-collectivism and social capital in the United States and in 42 other countries. They found that countries with high levels of individualism also had the highest levels of social capital and interpersonal trust (p. 41). This study argues that there is no existing data to support concerns that individualism destroys unity of society. Instead, findings show that when individuals are given autonomy of choice and are not required to hold particular social connections, they are more likely to create voluntary associations and take part in social activities.

Defining Individualism - Freedom of Choice

In addition to conflicting definitions of American individualism and its impact on society, there are also existing contradictions within its practice in American culture. While it may be thought that Americans would be the most likely to support individual interests against group interests in comparison to other large Western nations, results from the World Values Survey and the International Social Survey Programme have shown the opposite. While Americans often consider themselves exceptionally individualistic, these surveys showed that Americans were least likely to question the authority of an employer, and among the lowest to condone refusal to support the country, even if it is in the wrong. Americans were also shown to be the most group-oriented in individual commitment and belonging to social groups, organizations, and churches (Fischer, 2008).

Claude Fischer reconciles these contradictions by uncovering a basic logic. He argues that, "What distinguishes American culture is not individualism but *voluntarism*" (p. 368). This is the concept that each individual enters into a group, community, or even marriage by choice. That person is then voluntarily agreeing to the rules, standards, or expectations of membership. If he or she is a member of the group, he is expected to meet those expectations, but he is also free to leave the group at any time as well. This explains the above contradictions within American individualism. For example, as long as a person chooses freely to be an American and live in the United States, they are expected to be loyal. This same concept is relative in marriages, churches, and employment. A person chooses freely to be employed by a particular business. If that employee is not satisfied or is unwilling to follow the rules, rather than questioning an employer, that employee is free to dissolve his membership and find another job.

Fischer's observation is critical to the understanding of American individualism. American culture and society is one of the most diverse in the world. While it is unlikely that all groups will ever agree on the complete definition of individualism, it is possible, like Fischer, to unearth a foundational principle that most Americans would agree describes the underlying concept of individualism in the United States. While Fischer's work focuses on explaining inconsistencies between concepts of American individualism and practices of perceived conformity in American society, his ideas regarding freedom of choice are relevant to a foundational definition of American individualism.

It is clear that ideas regarding American individualism have always been contested. As the country and culture evolved, so too did the definition of individualism in America. Some Americans desire separation from society, while others recognize the importance of social improvement. Some Americans see material or financial wealth as a sign of success, while

others argue that personal experiences and depth of feeling are the purpose of life. It is in this disparity that the foundational principle of American individualism becomes clear. The freedom of each individual to choose how he or she will live life is the essence of American individualism. Every person has the right to choose his own goals, activities, interests, and passions, as long as the rights of one person do not hinder the rights of another. This foundational principle of individualism, freedom of choice, is the defining characteristic of this core value.

Of course, there is no perfection in American individualism. The person who chooses isolationism and self-reliance still must adhere to the laws and regulations of the state. The individual who values life experiences and rejects materialism must still live within a capitalist economy. There is a national and governmental structure that limits the individual's freedom to choose, but the American commitment to this core value remains one of the most essential components of American culture. Any institution or group that attempts to weaken or challenge individualism is viewed harshly. In order for any American institution to be considered successful, individualism must be of significant value to its mission and operations.

Part II: No "I" in "School"

American education is an institution that has failed to consider the importance of the core value of individualism. Since the beginning of the 20th century, when school attendance started becoming compulsory, American education has devalued individualism. Few people today would argue that education is not necessary, but within the existing school system, there has been very little allowance for individualism. As a result, many Americans have a negative view towards public schools.

The lack of individualistic practices in America's schools is both obvious and detrimental. While finances, resources and social cultures vary dramatically, the experiences of American students are strikingly similar. Most schools begin their day with a pledge to the flag; students file to classes with peers of their same age at the sound of ringing bells; students learn required curricula in math, science, social studies, and language arts, and if they are fortunate, they may take classes in art, music, or foreign languages. Despite their interest level or learning ability, each student that is promoted from one grade to the next learns the same material, takes the same classes, and are assessed with the same state standardized testing. Common Core standards have solidified this concept of essential curricula, but who can argue that all students must learn to read, write, add, and subtract? All students need to understand how our country functions in order to be able to take part in the democratic process; and every person should have a basic understanding of how the natural world we live in is vital to our own existence. These subjects set a foundation that is necessary for academic growth. But, how far should these subjects be carried? To what level of detail should all Americans be required to learn these subjects? Is it necessary that every American be able to solve algebraic equations? Should every person learn the classics of literature, both American and European? Potentially more important is the question of who should make these decisions regarding what every American must learn?

Throughout the history of American education, government elites have made the decisions. Elites existed at a national level, but within smaller communities, the wealthy were influential in schooling decisions. In early years, these elites decided that only boys should be provided with classic academic education. Girls were later given the opportunity to learn so that they could provide their sons with a foundational education. Poor white boys were eventually given technical training so that they could learn skills that would afford them jobs in factories.

While American education has certainly made strides to include all young people in free and public educational opportunities, educational requirements and standards of curricula have consistently been decided by elite officials.

Students are not simply required to learn the basics of arithmetic; they are required to learn and pass complex geometry and algebra courses, which reach well into their high school education. There are similar requirements in science, literature, and social studies. This means that students are forced to study these particular subjects, which have been deemed essential by those individuals with power and influence, for nearly every year of their 13-year public education. Individual schools have been given little choice but to focus on these tested subjects, since their funding can be negatively affected if students do not show required proficiency and growth. Therefore, schools that have struggled to meet budgetary needs have been forced to cut programs like music, art, and extracurricular activities in order to focus on these few "core" subjects.

Individualism, that treasured American value, is absent from American schooling. Over the course of their education, students are forced to study a few subjects in great depth that may not interest or benefit them. Many of these students also struggle in these subjects, but with governmental pressure to make sure students are graduating at high rates, many teachers and administrators allow low achieving students to pass to the next grade level without having learned the necessary material to help them be successful in the next grade. Instead, these struggling students "learn" that they are not as smart as their classmates and that school is not for them. This practice ends up emphasizing student weaknesses instead of helping young people find their strengths. The lack of academic options and student choice creates an environment that separates students into achievers and non-achievers. Children figure out who these students

are early in their schooling, especially when they all take the same classes and move together from one grade to the next (Martin, 2011; Frey, 2005; Matthews, Monsaas, & Penick, 1997).

In traditional classrooms, despite efforts for differentiation of instruction, students are required to move at the same pace, regardless of ability. This has been an issue discussed and debated for years, yet no successful solution has been enacted. In modern schooling, educational officials have encouraged differentiation and co-teaching as resolutions to this problem. They insist that students are not affected by being placed into different groups within a heterogeneous classroom, and that effective teachers can easily manage several groups learning at different levels and paces within a single classroom. The reality is that students recognize the levels within the classroom, and again they view themselves negatively in comparison to their higher-achieving classmates. Teachers struggle to keep groups on task while they work with a particular group, and many schools cannot afford to provide co-teachers or instructional aides to help with differentiation. Even in successfully differentiated classrooms, with instructional support, students are placed into groups to learn the same material rather than providing students with individual choice and support. Struggling students continue to recognize their inadequacies and high-achieving students are ignored and bored (Fenwick, 2012; LeTendre, Hofer, & Shimizu, 2003; Gallagher and Harradine, 1997).

Since a great number of American students experience difficulty and frustration with traditional schooling and feel entrapped by limitations in academic choice and individualization of education, many Americans view schools as failing, and in essence, they are. They are failing to provide individual choice, so that each student can discover his or her own strengths and pursue his or her own interests. Incorporating individualism into education is not an easy task under current governmental and budgetary restraints, but it is a necessary component of change

if public schools are going to be successful in altering American perception and providing every American with the opportunity for individual success.

Essential Curricula and Individual Choice

Since William Bagley presented the Essentialist platform in 1938, educators have argued for a required curriculum that focuses on the most necessary content for students to learn. The obvious problem with this concept is that there are varying opinions as to what the most important and essential curriculum is. From Bagley, to E. D. Hirsch's "back to basics" movement, to the current Common Core standards, educational scholars have attempted to implement curriculum that emphasizes essential knowledge.

In 2010, when the Common Core State Standards were introduced, many officials deemed it to be the necessary fix for failing schools. Common Core was the result of complaints that public education's standards were too low, and that academic curriculum should be more closely aligned to the needs of the career sector. There also were significant differences between the state standards for curriculum and proficiency. The Common Core State Standards attempted to rectify all of these issues by providing consistency among the states and increasing the depth of knowledge required within the targeted subjects.

Officials of Common Core are careful to point out that teachers and the public had an influence on the development of the standards. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, this was done through feedback groups, public comment sessions, and teams associated with national organizations, such as The National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) ("Preparing America's students

for success," 2016). However, it is difficult to determine exactly how much influence these groups actually had in the determination and finalization of the Common Core State Standards. Considering the strong public backlash upon adoption of these standards, it is unlikely that a majority of teachers or public were aware of, and certainly did not have influence over, the creation of the Common Core. While many continue to advocate for these standards, arguing that they are better aligned to college and career readiness, provide more consistency between states, and encourage learning of subjects in more depth, there is growing public dissatisfaction with the Common Core (Porter, Fusarelli, L, & Fusarelli, B., 2015; Smith, Appleman & Wilhelm, 2014; Welner, 2014).

The public discontent with Common Core is reflective of the contradiction between standardization and individualism. Standardization allows for little to no individual choice. Common Core standards specify the exact knowledge that students are required to learn, know, and master at a particular grade level. Concentration on particular subjects, specifically English Language Arts and Mathematics, requires schools to focus time and resources on the "Core" subjects. Other subjects like art, music, foreign languages, industrial arts, home economics, physical education, and even social studies, which has been considered a fundamental aspect of American education since its founding, are devalued in the current public school system. In many school districts, students spend a majority of their day learning English Language Arts (including reading) and Mathematics, with remediation classes and Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) specified periods. Students who are struggling most in these areas are given very little time to learn any other subjects of their choice because the Common Core State Standards have determined that every child's learning must follow this same path.

Consideration of individual choice in educational standards is a necessary change in American public education. Until choice is provided to students and their families, the perception of schooling will continue to be negative. While some students are prepared for their academic and career goals by the institution of the current "Core" standards, a large percentage of students see no connection between the required curriculum and their own goals and life. Common Core does not allow for any variation from their standards, and it certainly does not meet the needs or goals of every individual student. While general expectations for student learning in particular areas may be appropriate, the level of specificity and application to grade (age) level students allows no room for individualism in American education.

Individual Pace

Current structure of American schools assumes that students learn at a similar developmental pace, which is based on the age of the student. Most U.S. schools group students with other similarly aged peers in grade levels K-12. Several times throughout the history of public schooling, this type of student grouping has been challenged. Scholars and educators have argued that this type of grouping is not effective because students do not learn at the same pace, age does not effectively determine a child's developmental ability, and these practices encourage retention or social promotion, both of which are detrimental to student success.

In the early days of public schooling, students of varying ages often learned together in a one-room schoolhouse. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, along with the chaotic circumstances that accompanied industrialization and urbanization, there also came a call for expansion and organization of public schooling. The growing populations necessitated larger schools where students were grouped into grades based on age and similar ability. These schools

were also in larger buildings with separate classrooms that closely resemble the same structure that most Americans have experienced in recent public education. Even textbook companies like *The McGuffey Eclectic Readers* benefitted from the grade level grouping, which allowed them to easily organize material into appropriate age-specific texts and skills. Today, the billion-dollar textbook industry continues to be a driving force of graded schools.

Because of the simplicity of age-level grouping, it has persisted in public education. However, it also has come into question multiple times since its inception, and this has resulted in a variety of independent evaluations of non-graded schools. Studies were done in the 1960’s with schools who had chosen to combine multiple grade levels into one classroom. Much of this data, however, produced inconclusive results at that time (Kelly-Vance, Caster, & Ruane, 2000). In the late 1980’s and 1990’s, non-gradedness again gained attention, and some scholars believed that a pervasive restructuring would be initiated thanks to the wealth of knowledge available to educators and reformers (Anderson & Pavan, 1993). This comprehensive reform and school restructuring has proven to be more difficult than anticipated, and after the implementation of *No Child Left Behind*, there has been little consideration of major restructuring of public schools.

Despite the lack of reforms, scholarly research has consistently shown that student achievement is higher with nongraded schools in comparison to graded schools (Kelly-Vance, Caster, & Ruane, 2000; Anderson & Pavan, 1993; McLoughlin, 1970). These studies also showed that the perception of education was more positive in nongraded schools than in graded schools (Byrnes, Shuster, & Jones, 1994; Anderson & Pavan, 1993; Krasner & Hanley, 1984; Wong, Erickson, King, Stroller, & Allen, 1977). In *The Nongraded Elementary School* (1987) Goodlad and Anderson discussed characteristics of the non-graded classroom, which focused on the individualization of education for each student, and the need for the teacher to tailor

curriculum and instruction for the individual student. It is not surprising then that students and parents perceived this type of classroom more positively, since it incorporated the core value of individualism into its foundational characteristics.

If there are so many positive outcomes to the non-graded classroom, then why has it not become a pervasive reform in American education? There are a multitude of potential answers to this question. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, *No Child Left Behind* was instituted. This Congressional legislation supported standards-based reforms, required states to create assessments to test students' basic skills, and based federal funding on testing results. Schools became more concerned with preparing students for tests that would greatly impact yearly funding than considering major restructuring. Another possible answer is that the textbook industry is a billion-dollar industry that easily organizes production by grade level. There is also a simplicity to grade level grouping that allows schools to ignore individual student development and achievement. Additionally, the U.S. public school system is stunningly resistant to structural change. For example, most states still practice a 9-month school year, despite comprehensive research that proves that students lose knowledge and learning throughout those months off. Finally, a significant challenge to the non-graded classroom is the impracticality of individualizing education for an entire class of multi-aged students.

This final reason would have been of considerable concern in the twentieth century. Today, however, there are technological advances that not only make individualized education possible, but make it irresponsible to ignore the necessity for individualization. Schools should be held responsible for implementing comprehensive reforms that use technology such as computer adaptive learning systems or intelligent tutors to individualize education. These new technologies can adapt to student learning styles, development and progression, and even adapt

to student interests to improve engagement and achievement. Students would be able to move through required material at their own pace, and teachers could act as facilitators of educational success. While this technology is new and further study is needed, there is already data that shows the effectiveness of this type of individualized learning (Najar, Mitrovic, & McLaren, 2016; Yang, Gamble, Hung, & Lin, 2014; Walkington, 2013). While it is important to note that computerized learning should not replace hands-on authentic learning experiences, for specific skill acquisition, these technologies can provide the opportunity for an individualized educational experience that, before the Digital Age, was not previously possible in the mass education setting. The specifically designed use of computer adaptive learning systems would allow for more authentic experiences in the traditional classroom setting, where students could apply the skills they have learned, create and innovate, hold debate and discussion, and solve real-world problems. These new technologies would also allow for student choice in their own education, where they may show significant progress in one subject while receiving additional supports in another subject. Currently, if students struggle in particular subjects but excel in other subjects, they are pushed along without appropriate time and support for the weaker area, while they are obstructed from moving faster than the pace of the average students in stronger areas. These practices also create possibilities for retention or social promotion.

Retention and social promotion have both shown to negatively impact student achievement, behavior, attendance, and attitude (Lynch, 2013). Student retention and social promotion is a result of standardized expectations and school conformity. The accepted notion that every student learns and develops at approximately the same rate and to the same level is illogical and has been disproven by research. Brain maturation occurs at different rates and affects a multitude of abilities, including memorization, critical thinking, and behavioral control.

Researchers have found that full development of the brain occurs for some people at the age of 18, while it is not fully developed for other people until the age of 25. Therefore, some students that graduate high school at the age of 18, may not be developmentally prepared for college or career for several years (Semrud-Clikeman, 2010). Currently, students that cannot complete the necessary requirements within a few years of the expected graduation age, may not have the opportunity to graduate from high school at all.

Often, those same students were not prepared for grade promotion and were socially promoted to avoid retention. The standardized movement from one grade level to the next allows for no variation in pace, and results in frustration for both struggling and excelling students. Non-graded schools and year-round schooling are two proposed alternatives to retention and social promotion. Matthew Lynch (2013) argues that these strategies, “allow students to make continuous progress and learn at their own pace, without the need to worry about grade promotion” (p. 292). Allowing students to receive individualized instruction, using technology, and moving through required curriculum at their own pace, will empower them to reach their own academic goals and will ensure that students learn the necessary skills.

Clearly, the implementation of non-graded schools, the incorporation of individualized instruction through technology, and the elimination of the 9-month school year and grade promotion would require a comprehensive restructuring of the current public school system. There remain additional questions about funding that would need to be addressed at both the state and national levels in order to make these necessary changes. These reforms, however, would emphasize individualism in education and would change the perception of American schooling.

CHAPTER 3

EQUALITY

As part of our speaking and persuasive writing unit in our English Language Arts class, students are asked to construct a persuasive speech based on a school or community issue. In more than a decade of student speeches, there is a recurring theme that appears in the topics they choose. More often than not, my students select a topic that focuses on an opportunity or program that they wish was available to them in our school. Many student-athletes pick a topic that argues the need to add a middle school sport to our school. They have cousins and other family members that attend other schools where they compete in a variety of middle school sports. Our small, rural, Title I school (schools that have more that 40% of its student population identified as low-income), on the other hand, offers only middle school wrestling and basketball for girls and boys, although our girls are required to compete in the fall, an untraditional season for the sport, because of issues with shared resources. For student athletes, they have dreams of expanding the sports offered at our middle school, and while they often present thoughtful and well-constructed arguments, the reality remains that funding is not available to provide these programs.

Our artistically and musically talented students present speeches that argue for the addition of art and music opportunities, some of which have been cut in recent years. A decade ago, for example, the middle school proudly presented its own play, but when furloughs hit the school because of budget issues, the teacher that was responsible for coordinating the middle school play was cut. A small number of middle school students are offered roles in the high school play as an alternative.

Our most academically motivated students, who have recognized disparities in academic offerings, argue in their speeches that our school should offer more advanced math and science classes. Students often maintain that nearby districts offer pre-algebra a year earlier than we do, so they feel a step behind. After years of listening to students expressing feelings of unfairness and inequity, one element of education has become strikingly clear: Not all schools are equal.

Many educational scholars and policy-makers focus on the difference between equity and equality. The difference in the rhetoric is that equity refers to individual needs and providing required assistance to overcome differing barriers for students and schools, while equality focuses on everyone receiving the same rights, opportunities and resources. The reality is that these terms go hand-in-hand, particularly when taking a closer look at what equality means in American culture. Equity is absolutely necessary to provide students with equality of educational opportunity. While I focus on the value of equality in this chapter, the role of equity in achieving an equal quality education that will provide young people with an even playing field upon graduation cannot be overemphasized. The focus on equality does not imply that every school should receive the same resources or funding, but on the contrary, in this chapter, I will argue that equity in education is the means by which the value of equality is realized. Students and schools that are at a disadvantage should receive the resources and funding necessary to raise the quality of education in order to achieve equality of opportunity.

In Part I of this chapter, I explore the meanings of equality in the history of American society. Using data from *The Pew Research Center* and *Gallup*, I present the unique connection between America's commitment to equality through individualism in comparison to other developed nations. Then, I define American equality by highlighting types of equality, including political equality, equality of the law, equality of opportunity and equality of autonomy. The

final section of Part I reviews the history of equality in America during different key eras including in the construction of the *Declaration of Independence*, the Jacksonian Era, Reconstruction, Industrialization, the Depression era and the New Deal, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights Movement. The final section in Part I discusses a final type of American equality as equality of knowledge cultivation, which introduces the importance of schools in our cultural definitions of equality.

In Part II of this chapter, I consider the role of equality in modern American education. First, I reflect on equality in school funding, specifically evaluating funding issues connected with the hiring of teachers, consideration of student background when allocating resources, access to technology, and class size. The second section of Part II focuses on inequality among subjects, including the implication of "core" subjects, and the final section of Part II reflects on inclusion of equality in curricular content.

Part I: The American Concept of Equality

If individualism is the essential American value, then equality is both its counterpart and its contradiction. The concept of equality has been a point of contention and confusion through most of America's history. Simply reading the Merriam Webster's dictionary definition of *equality* as, "the quality or state of being equal: the quality or state of having the same rights, social status, etc." can initiate debate regarding the social and political interpretation of this value. At one time, people would have argued that not all individuals should have equal rights, and many today would still dispute any suggestion that people in a society should all have equal social status, as this contention may rekindle Cold War reactions to communist regimes. Still, equality is a fundamental value in American culture, only matched in its overall acceptance by

the value of individualism. The American concept of equality, however, differs in many ways from the global perception of equality and is always connected to freedom and individualism.

Equality without individualism is in many ways un-American. The extreme dedication to individualism affects Americans' views of equality, which is shown in the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes and Trends surveys. In comparison to the developed European countries of Britain, Germany, France and Spain, the United States has a far higher percentage of people that view the individual as more important than the state. 58% of Americans surveyed said that "Freedom to pursue life's goals without state interference" is more important than ensuring the "State guarantees nobody is in need." This is a stark contrast to all other countries on the list. Only 35% percent of Americans said that the state's guarantee that no citizen is in need is more important that individualism freedom to pursue one's goals, while every other country on the list showed a majority believed that the state's guarantee that nobody is in need is more important than the individual freedom to pursue life's goals ("The American-Western European Values Gap," 2015).

Table 1

Views of Individualism and the Role of the State

Which is more important?			
	Freedom to pursue life's goals without state interference %	**State guarantees nobody is in need %**	**DK%**
U.S.	58	35	7
Britain	38	55	7
Germany	36	62	2
France	36	64	0
Spain	30	67	3

Success in life is determined by forces outside our control			
	Agree %	**Disagree %**	**DK%**
U.S.	36	62	3
Britain	41	55	4
Spain	50	47	3
France	57	43	0
Germany	72	27	1

Note: Adapted from "The American-Western European Values Gap," 2015, *Pew Research Center* Q15a & Q61.

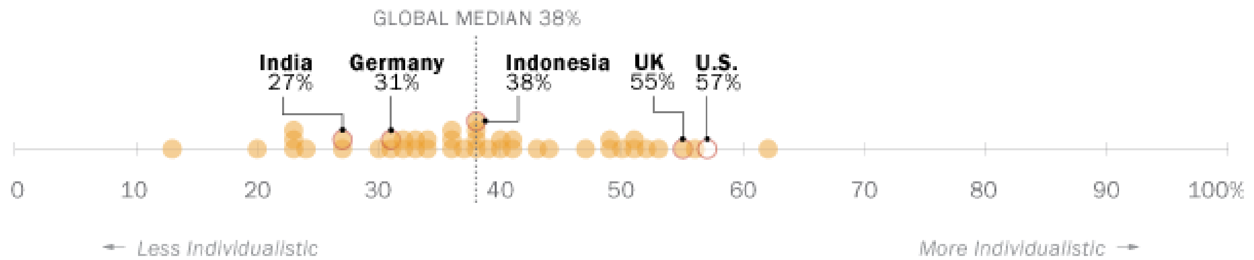
Additionally, surveys showed a significantly higher percentage (nearly 20% higher than the median) of Americans disagree with the concept that "Success in life is determined by forces outside our control" (Gao, 2015). 72% of Germans surveyed believed "Success in life is determined by forces outside our control." It is clear here that Americans have a strong belief that each person is responsible for their own success in life.

Figure 1

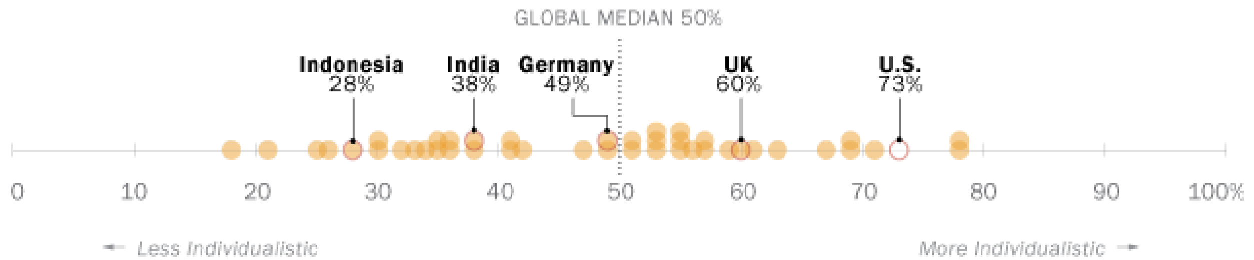
Americans Stand Out on Individualism

Americans Stand Out on Individualism

Percent who disagree that success in life is pretty much determined by forces outside our control



Percent who say it is very important ("10" on a 0-10 scale) to work hard to get ahead in life



Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q13b & Q66b.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Note: Reprinted from "How do Americans Stand Out from the Rest of the World," 2015, *Pew Research Center*.

Americans clearly believe that the hard work of the individual affects the outcome of a person's life. However, it is required that every person has an equal playing field, and the percentage of Americans that believe that it is the federal government's job to assure this equality of opportunity is even higher than the percentage of Americans that emphasize individualism. Even in the face of increasing income gaps, Americans don't believe that the state should intervene, but it is necessary that all Americans are given an equal chance to

succeed. 70% of Americans believe that the federal government must create legislation that, "Increases the equality of opportunity for people to get ahead if they want to." Still, only 46% of Americans believe the government should, "enact policies to reduce the income and wealth gap between the rich and the poor" (Kohut and Dimock, 2013, p. 20).

Table 2

Increasing Equality Is Far More Important Than Reducing the Income Gap

How important is it that the federal government enact policies to…	**Extremely/Very Important %**	**Somewhat/Not Important %**
Increase the equality of opportunity for people to get ahead if they want to	70	30
Reduce the income and wealth gap between the rich and the poor	46	54

Note: Adapted from "Increasing Equality is Far More Important Than Reducing the Income Gap," 2011, *Gallup*.

While it takes some careful consideration to define what equality means to Americans, it is very clear what equality is not. Americans believe that individualism and equality go hand in hand because equality means that every person has an equal opportunity to achieve his or her dreams and goals, but Americans believe strongly that there should be no guarantee that there will be equality of outcome. Despite a long history of problems achieving the ideals of equality in the United States, it remains a core American value, and the deep commitment to this ideal drives American culture, politics, and life. Many scholars focus on the economic or political aspects of equality, but, as Verba and Orren assert, "writers on equality too rarely acknowledge the importance of values" (1985, p. 2). Considering equality as a value, a deep-seeded ideal around

which parameters for decision making are set, allows us to evaluate the core of its meaning in coordination with other fundamental values. While the values of individualism and competition may seem to contradict the value of equality, it is in their coordination that we clarify its meaning.

Defining Equality in America

Equality has been one of the most debated values in human history. Concepts of equality drive social and political decisions, and varying definitions have been used to create vastly different governing philosophies. From Locke to Rawls to contemporary philosophers, there is very little agreement about the definition of equality and how it should be applied in society. Locke believed that equality existed in nature, so all men had inherent rights including life, liberty, and property, as reflected in the natural condition. He saw government as a voluntary contract between people for the purpose of securing these natural rights. Social egalitarians champion the idea that every person should have equal social status, and that distribution of goods and opportunities should be equal. They see true equality as a complete lack of hierarchy. Luck egalitarians, having grown from the philosophies of John Rawls, focus on equal conditions for people who make responsible choices. Therefore, how well-off someone is should be based entirely on the responsibility of his or her decisions, not affected by indiscriminate factors (Rawls, 1985; Hull et al., 2015).

Equality in America, however, requires a definition that encompasses individuality and competition. For many scholars of equality, they would consider these concepts contradictory, which creates confusion and conflict at first consideration. For Americans, the definition of equality embraces several types of equality but clearly denies others that would conflict with

other core values. It is only in this limited area, where each of the core values exist simultaneously, that the definition of American equality is discovered. Most predominantly, these definitions include political equality, equality under the law, equality of opportunity, and equality of autonomy.

Political Equality

Political equality is the idea that all persons should have an equal influence in political decision-making. America's incorporation of widespread suffrage, while not disregarding that it took time for the country to include particular groups within this equal practice, and the concept of one person, one vote, are foundational democratic principles of equality for Americans. Despite the fact that in the country's earliest days, the framers did not intend to have each citizen display equal influence in political decisions, instituting a representative government, the commitment to political equality gained strength until all adults or of age citizens were given voting rights. It is certainly arguable that within a representative government, not all people display equal influence because of a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, religion, education, and socioeconomic status, but the opportunity to vote provides, at least, an equal access point for every American.

Political equality is also accessed through local participation in political decisions, which helps to form a shared social sphere. As explained by Danielle Allen, the purpose of democracy is to empower each citizen to take control of their lives so that they can protect themselves from domination. Political equality, then, not only provides the opportunity for democratic participation, but it also encourages shared ownership in a community. She writes, "The point of political equality is not merely to secure spaces free from domination but also to engage all

members of a community equally in the work of creating and constantly re-creating that community. Political equality is equal political empowerment" (2015, p. 34). While people can be empowered and encouraged to participate in the political process, it is still an individual's choice as to how and to what extent they choose to participate. Ideally, there is participation from every person to create an equal shared society. While there is always continuing conversation about ways to improve the application of political equality, it is only through political participation that change can be produced. This deep commitment to political equality is a fundamental component of equality in America.

Equality Under the Law

This definition of equality calls for each person to be treated equally under the law. In other words, the law should apply equally to everyone regardless of specific traits such as race, religion, or gender. It is the law's responsibility to assure that no person is treated with privilege or discrimination. This became a guaranteed right under the 14th Amendment (1868) of the United States Constitution. The Equal Protection Clause introduced the phrase, "equal protection under the law," which has become common rhetoric in the American legal system and a foundational concept of American equality. It reads, "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" (U.S. Const. amend. XIV sect. 1). The initial vernacular of "equal protection" is often connected to Jacksonian democracy, but the Fourteenth Amendment was eventually extended to include all American citizens, which clearly would have gone against the intentions of Jackson himself (Pole, 1978, p 146). Through political

equality and participation in creation of laws, Amendments like this expanded equality. Americans continue to be committed to equality under the law despite clear errors with the application of this value.

In fact, the history of equality under the law is one of controversy and corruption. Despite the passing of the 14th Amendment, states found ways to consistently deprive groups from their promised equal protection under the law. This is obvious in a multitude of historical examples, including the refusal to recognize citizenship and suffrage rights of native Americans, the failure to protect women from physical domestic abuse, the unlawful internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, and the extensive violence against African Americans through the Jim Crow system.

In the decade following the end of the Civil War, reconstruction provided rapid advancement for ex-slaves. African Americans quickly became land-owners, business owners, and political representatives. However, the pervasive racism and white-supremacy existent throughout the country, and especially in the defeated south, laid the foundation for corruption. After the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson loosened Union control of the south and opened the door for Jim Crow, a series of laws that repealed the rights of blacks and permitted violence against them. In a shocking Supreme Court decision in the United States v. Cruikshank (1876), the court ruled that the 14th Amendment does not apply to individual actors or organizations that commit violent crimes. In other words, the decision said that no rights guaranteed by the 14th Amendment were denied in acts of violence because private citizens are not required to uphold those rights.

This ruling made it extremely difficult for the federal government to protect the rights of African Americans, virtually legalizing violence against blacks. In the many decades following

reconstruction, white supremacist groups would regularly attack, lynch, rape, and murder African Americans without any threat of conviction for their crimes. The example of the murder of 14-year old Emmett Till in 1955, shows the brutality and the lack of retribution for crimes against African Americans, even children, nearly a century after the ratification of the 14th Amendment. Till, who lived in Chicago, was visiting family in Mississippi when he was accused of whistling at a white woman. For this supposed crime, he was attacked, tortured, lynched and murdered by the woman's husband and his brother. A month after the murder, an all-white jury acquitted the men of Till's murder, despite the obvious evidence of their guilt. Till's mother held his funeral with an open casket so that the public could view how the men had disfigured her son.

Unlike the unjust protection of whites during Jim Crow years, blacks were rounded up and arrested for minor crimes, and then they were leased to farmers and other business owners through "convict leasing," which both reinitiated a form of slavery and displayed the clear dichotomy of treatment and inequality of protection of the law. This lucrative practice continued throughout the nineteenth century and did not begin to be phased out until decades into the twentieth century.

The horrendous treatment of blacks which was protected under Jim Crow also continued well into the twentieth century. It became clear that federal legislation would be needed to close the loopholes that allowed for Jim Crow laws to persevere at the state level. Eminent historian of the South C. Vann Woodward (1955) noted this trend, and he was proved right with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which extended protections to all Americans, regardless of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

Even after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which again extended equal rights to every United States citizen, equal protection under the law continues to be questioned. Evidence of unequal treatment to particular groups remains a focus for social change in contemporary society. The Black Lives Matter movement has brought attention to incidents of racially motivated police brutality against African Americans today, while other groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community continues to be the victims of violent crimes that often go unreported as a result of distrust in the police (Johnson, Hoyer, & Heath, 2014; Bryant-Davis, Adams, Alejandre, & Gray, 2017; Hein & Scharer, 2012). While it is evidenced through the language of the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause and through subsequent legislation that the American ideal is equality for each individual under the law, it has proven to be much more difficult to attain this equality in reality, and there is still much work to do.

Equality of Opportunity

Equality of opportunity is a key element of American equality. This concept encompasses the essence of the American dream. Equality of opportunity assures that each person is given an even playing field so that a person's achievement and growth in life is a direct result of his or her work ethic and talent. As early as the colonial days in America, initial concepts of equality of opportunity were emerging. It became more common for individuals who gained personal prosperity through profitable business endeavors to claim this as a public good (Pole, 1978). It was here that the first inkling of equality of opportunity was found and encouraged. Later, the American dream became a linchpin of hope in American society, and only through equality of opportunity was each person given the chance to achieve this dream.

Like other components of American equality, there are many critics of this idea. They argue that equality of opportunity only serves to justify inequality of condition and furthers hierarchical structures within American society. Even these critics, however, stop short of suggesting that true equality of condition is the goal. Instead, the conversation centers around the growing gap that exists between the rich and the poor. Advocates for social change argue for policies that lessen this gap, but few believe that there should be true equality of result. In their book, *Equality in America* (1985), Verba and Orren discuss the creation of "floors" and "ceilings." Americans are more likely to support or tolerate floors, below which individuals cannot fall, and that ensure that each American receives the necessary goods and services to survive or live a minimally content life. However, Americans are much less likely to advocate for ceilings, which would set an absolute limit on individual achievement. This contempt for ceilings or limits on achievement is a direct result of its conflict with other core values of individualism and competition. Assuring equality of opportunity provides the necessary equal playing field but allows for differentiation of outcome based on personal talent, work ethic, and achievement.

Equality of Autonomy

Equality of autonomy provides that each person is given equal freedom and concern in order for an individual to make his or her own decisions in life. Ronald Dworkin has written extensively on the topic of equality and has argued that a government should show equal concern for a person's dignity by allowing each individual to be responsible for one's choices and be given the freedom to act on one's will. Because each person will make different choices for his or her life, it is possible that allocation of resources will be different for each person.

Economically, this means that the amount of money a person possesses does not equate to a more or less meaningful life. Dworkin's equality, "presumes only that we treat people with equal concern when we allow each to design his own life, aware that his choices will have, among other consequences, an impact on his own wealth" (2011, p. 363). Wealth, however, is only one conception of what the good life is, and a government should not prefer one conception of the good life to another (Dworkin, 1978).

While Dworkin is considered a luck egalitarian by most, others argue that his theories are more reflective of equality of autonomy because he emphasizes the commitment to freedom and individualism in relation to equality (Finegan, 2015; Dworkin, G., 2015). Gerald Dworkin observes that "Ronald Dworkin, in his article on Liberalism, does not use the word 'autonomy,' but in discussing the idea of treating people as equals, he is arguing for equal respect for the autonomy of citizens" (p. 7). Thomas Finegan (2015) accentuates Dworkin's devotion to individualism in his article, asserting, "under his schema liberty and equality *cannot* conflict as two fundamental political virtues because equality cannot even be defined except by assuming liberty, and cannot be improved by policies that compromise the value of liberty" (p. 146-147). This is the essence of equality of autonomy: The valuing of both individualism and equality without providing preference to either foundational principle.

History of Equality in America

The history of equality in America is both long and complex. Its origins are found in a multitude of foundational ideas, including concepts of natural law, revolutionary propaganda, and foreign observations of early American culture. From John Locke to Alexis De Toqueville to Thomas Jefferson, the American concept of equality was introduced through influential

characters and has developed into a unique and foundational principle for American society. It is easy to look at the history of equality in America through a contemporary lens and quickly assess that equality has never been reached in this society that seems to so boldly profess its commitment to the ideal (Laurent, 2019; Katz & Stern, 2006; Mattson, 2001). This is a fair assessment when we consider the history of slavery and racism, delays in equal suffrage, and wide gaps in pay and economic standing. While there is clearly work to do to move toward greater economic, racial, and social equality, the consideration of the American concept of equality in historical context helps us to see the development of this foundational value as well as the American perception of what equality means for a state. This includes several eras in American history in which there were waves of expansion in the definition of American equality.

The Declaration of Independence

The concept of equality first came to American vernacular in its consideration of Britain's treatment of the colonies in comparison to its citizens at home. The colonists viewed themselves as fellow subjects of the crown, but it was becoming increasingly apparent that they were being treated unequally. Unfair legislation, such as The Townshend Act and various taxation practices were violating constitutional and common law. Soon, colonists realized that the only way to ensure equality was through revolution. It is through the impassioned rhetoric of the revolution that the concept of American equality is born. While there were a variety of revolutionary documents that served as propaganda, it was through the Declaration of Independence that equality became an established American value. In writing about equality, Sidney Verba and Gary Orren observe, "The Revolutionary rhetoric became an American ideal because it was so explicitly codified in the founding documents" (1985, p. 25). By making

equality, along with freedom, the focus of the Declaration of Independence, it solidified it as a foundational value in American society.

In her book, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (2015), Danielle Allen provides a close analysis of this crucial document. She outlines five facets that define equality in the Declaration. These facets include equal freedom from domination, equal access to government, equal reciprocity, and equal ownership of public life (we will address the fifth facet later in this chapter). Equal freedom from domination relates specifically in the Declaration to the fact that Britain was unfairly dominating the colonists, and this was provided as a reason for revolution. However, this concept eventually extended from a state conception to an individual equal protection of the law. The facets of equal access to government, and equal ownership of public life outline the necessity for each citizen to have equal access to the tool of government so that there is co-creation of community. Allen writes:

> Human equality is grounded, fundamentally, in the capacity for judgment, which we all employ in navigating our lives. The second sentence of the Declaration connects equality to judgment, and makes an argument for government as the most important instrument available to us for acting on our judgments about the relation of present to future. To secure our futures we all need an equal opportunity to use the instrument of government. (2015, p. 145)

While initially there were large numbers of citizens blocked from accessing the government, this concept, presented in the foundational document, eventually led to the extension of voting rights to all citizens. The next ideal of equality that Allen presents, equality of reciprocity, consists of the idea that each individual relies on a principle of reciprocity, in which justice is achieved through mutual respect and cooperation. In the Declaration, this facet addressed the lack of responsiveness from King George, but as American equality developed, this concept expanded to the individual relationships of citizens, and to the relationship between citizens and the state. This facet accentuates the importance of freedom in equality. Allen explains, "Such principles

provide the basis for interaction through which both friends and fellow citizens can achieve equality of agency in their relationships with one another. The king has violated these principles, principles rooted in human equality that anchor freedom. The importance of reciprocity – of fair give-and-take in human relations – links equality to freedom" (p. 192). These four facets help give clarity to both how and why equality is defined as it is in America. There is a clear connection between these facets of the ideals of equality in the Declaration of Independence and the definitions of American equality previously presented in this chapter. The influence of this document, not only in the founding of the nation, but in the development of the value of equality in American society is evident.

It is also evident, however, that the framers of this document never intended that pure equality of position be a goal in America. As noted in the contemporary views of American equality, the initial document and major actors in the creation of the Declaration recognized that people are not born with equal abilities or faculties; this contributed to the creation of a representative government, rather than as a pure democratic institution. For early Americans, there was to be no guarantee of equality of outcome, and there were intentional limitations created to ensure that the most "capable" members of society had the most influence in its decisions. Verba and Orren stress, "Thomas Jefferson and the other framers held no illusions that men had been born equal in their endowments of intellect or virtue; for that reason, it seemed prudent to them that participation in governance be limited to those who had proved themselves equal to the task, say by accumulating wealth and property in a competitive society" (p. 28). This could easily be viewed as a systematic ensurance of inequality, but for many Americans even today, equality of position, outcome and influence are not facets of American equality. These facets of equality presented in the Declaration of Independence, which often

seem to purposefully turn a blind eye to many forms of inequality, in actuality walk a thin line that protects other values of individualism and competition. Through many forms of political and social equality, these ideas of equality, first introduced in the founding document, have been expanded upon in tremendous ways. However, there remains barriers to the expansion of economic equality, as this realm begins to interfere with free competition. The Revolution and the signing of The Declaration of Independence created an emotional commitment to the value of equality, but to a specific view of equality amongst individuals of clearly unequal standing. As J. R. Pole states, "The emotions released by the Revolution left many Americans deeply dedicated to the aim of keeping in being a society whose members, whatever their differences in wealth, education, fortune, or social style, would respect one another as equals" (1978, p. 57).

Jacksonian Era and Reconstruction

During the Jacksonian era and after the Civil War, equality began its first major wave of expansion. Jackson, having been born into poverty, became a symbol of American social and economic mobility, and Jackson, himself, was intent on ensuring equal opportunity and access to the American dream. While much of Jackson's legacy has been tainted by his harsh treatment of his slaves and by the Indian Removal Act, his influence on the expansion of equality to the "common man" is undeniable. During his presidency, he worked to remove property restrictions for the expansion of voting rights, and he took down the Bank of the United States, which was a symbol of unfair favor and monopoly. As a likely unintended result of Jackson's push to expand voting rights to non-land-owning white men, other groups within American society started to advocate for their own rights.

The Abolitionist movement gained traction during this time period, giving a voice to the enslaved as well as to women who joined the movement. This is seen in the speeches and writings of the Grimke sisters, who used their religious conviction and pious analysis of the Bible to argue against the institution of slavery, especially in a nation created on the values of freedom and equality. In *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (1836), Angelina Grimke reasoned:

> "We must come back to the good old doctrine of our forefathers who declared to the world, 'this self evident truth that *all* men are created equal, and that they have certain *inalienable* rights among which are life, *liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness.' It is even a greater absurdity to suppose a man can be legally born a slave under *our free Republican* Government, than under the petty despotisms of barbarian Africa. If then, we have no right to enslave an African, surely we can have none to enslave an American; if it is a self evident truth that *all* men, every where and of every color are born equal, and have an *inalienable right to liberty*, then it is equally true that *no* man can be born a slave, and no man can ever *rightfully* be reduced to *involuntary* bondage and held as a slave." (p. 445)

It was this type of close analysis of the Republican values expressed in the founding documents in conjunction with religious interpretation of the Holy Bible that led to war and emancipation. The ending of slavery following the Civil War fostered an increasing desire for equality amongst varying groups, and while Jackson would never have intended that equality be applied to these groups, his drive to provide equality under the law, which eventually was realized through ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, and equality of opportunity, which was reached through the destruction of the Bank of the United States, opened the door for increased equality among all. Still, Jackson, like his predecessors, never saw a society in which all citizens enjoy equal position or condition. Jackson believed, "Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, or education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions" (Pole, 1978, p.144).

Industrialization

The industrial age in America drastically changed the landscape and demographics of the nation. Prior to this time, the quintessential American figure was the farmer, but with industrialization came a new ideal. Corporations took the place of the farm, and rugged individuals achieved social mobility through innovation and entrepreneurship. In the late nineteenth century, the Populist party brought attention to the large wealth disparity and returned discourse about equality to non-racial issues. This wave of expansion for American equality marked the first time that there was discussion about economic equality in America. As Verba and Orren note, "The fortunes of the new 'captains of industry' were so unseemly that for the first time studies were conducted on the distribution of income. In 1893 the Census Bureau estimated that 9 percent of the nation's families held 71 percent of the wealth" (1985, p.37). As a result, parties such as the Populists and later the Progressives, advocated for a graduated income tax that took steps towards a redistribution of wealth. In 1912, the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, giving Congress the power to tax income.

Industrialization also brought significant change in employment and increased immigration. In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act marked the first legislation that restricted the rights of individuals based on race, minimizing social equality. While this period of history was important in the consideration of economic equality, industrialization also led to dangerous labor practices. Later, unionization would be necessary to ensure safe working environments and equal rights for workers. Industrialization created new issues for equality that would need to be addressed in the coming decades.

The New Deal

The Great Depression would further thrust economic issues into the spotlight and provide opportunities for change as a result of the harrowing conditions. While most of the previous discourse regarding American equality surrounded philosophical ideals, the introduction of the New Deal legislation pragmatically addressed the economic problems created by the Depression, but it also created massive and lasting social and political change. The Wagner Act of 1935 created the National Labor Relations Board, which assures that employees have the right to unionize and prevents unfair labor practices. A boom in union membership from four million in 1935 to nine million in 1947 was a significant result of this legislation (Verba & Orren, 1985). The Social Security Board was enacted as part of the New Deal reforms, and benefits were provided to the elderly, widows, unemployed and disabled. The New Deal placed responsibility on the government for guaranteeing equality to these groups that did not have the power to ensure their own social justice. While this equality was achieved in the political sphere, it only addressed economic issues of equality. The New Deal's Revenue Act of 1935 attempted to close wealth gaps, and while many groups inadvertently benefitted socially from these economic reforms, the New Deal did nothing to directly address racial or gender inequality.

The Cold War and Civil Rights

Following the second World War, issues of social and political equality based on race and gender came to the forefront of American discourse. As a result of international attention and criticism that Americans were hypocritical, fighting oppression and racism abroad while tolerating or even condoning it at home, the Civil Rights movement gained attention and favor across the nation. While it took decades of determination and sacrifice to achieve, policies such

as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 helped expand social and political equality to minority groups. This legislation guaranteed equal protection under the law and gave the courts the ability to intervene when states did not uphold this security. Laws specifically addressed selection of juries, physical safety of blacks, and unfair housing practices that prohibited blacks and other minorities from purchasing real estate in certain neighborhoods. Gains in social and political equality during this time were obvious and evidenced by statistics showing the addition of a million black voters to the rolls within seven years of the Voting Rights Act, and with the integration of schools, which included the decrease from 98 percent to 9 percent of black children attending all-black schools by the end of the same seven-year period (Verba & Orren, 1985). However, despite these political and social improvements in equality, large disparities in income remained for minority groups and continue to exist today. Neither Civil Rights legislation nor contemporary legislation have made any real strides in closing this gap, and many argue that the government should not make any attempts to redistribute wealth, viewing this inequality as the natural outcome for differences in ability, talent, and work ethic. These perceptions and attitudes are also as closely tied to early beliefs in natural law as they are to another major event that happened after the end of World War II – The Cold War.

The Cold War dominated the American mindset towards economic equality from the mid-1940's to its end in the early 1990's, and in many ways, it continues to control feelings towards government's interference in economic issues today. Americans abhorred anything associated with the Soviet Union, especially the political and social ideology of Communism. While Americans in this time period were open to the expansion of individual rights, including previously excluded groups, there was no room for any conversation that considered communist tendencies that gave government control over economic affairs. Capitalism provided open

competition and celebrated individual achievement and innovation, other foundational values for Americans, where Communism devalued individualism and competition in favor of pure equality, which was guaranteed by the state by systematic redistribution of wealth and the elimination of privately-owned property. The theoretical equality of Communism proved to be susceptible to corruption, furthering Americans' support for Capitalism. Americans saw Communism as a direct threat to the key values of American society, and in its fall, the superiority of Capitalism and the American way of life was confirmed. Although it has been decades since the Cold War ended, this perception endures and affects many attempts by government to act on economic concerns.

Equality of Knowledge Cultivation

While economic equality continues to be a point of contention in discussions regarding American equality, political equality, equality of the law, equality of opportunity, and equality of autonomy have been evolving and expanding components of equality in the United States. In addition to these types of American equality, there exists another potential definition of equality in American culture. As previously discussed, in Danielle Allen's *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (2015), she analyzes five facets that tie closely to these components of American equality. In addition to the four facets discussed above, the final facet, "egalitarian principles of collective intelligence," provides an interesting and insightful consideration of what equality in America means. In her analysis, she relates this concept to the list of grievances compiled by a multitude of colonists from various backgrounds and presented to the King through the Declaration. While Allen's interpretation of this facet focuses on the idea that each individual's experiences and observations can be used in a larger

understanding and knowledge creation, her idea of "developing egalitarian approaches to knowledge cultivation," opens the door to another key evaluation of equality (p. 238). Equality of knowledge cultivation provides that each person not only has equal access to knowledge, but also that each person plays a role in the collective creation and cultivation of knowledge. In order to truly achieve equality of opportunity or an equal ownership of public life, knowledge cultivation of each individual is necessary. Allen asserts, "We need to build a collective intelligence, and this requires egalitarian approaches to learning and discovery, and to the analysis of how the present connects to the future" (p. 191). In America, we rely on public education to provide each child with equal cultivation of knowledge in hopes of providing equal opportunity. Public schools are part of a powerful institution that impacts nearly every American child, and it is expected that each child has an equal and equitable education. Many perceive public education, however, as failing to provide equal cultivation of knowledge, therefore prohibiting both equality of opportunity and social mobility. Additionally, I argue that public education devalues equality as a fundamental value, despite the clear commitment to equality in the larger society, which further contributes to the negative perception of public education.

Part II: School as the Great "Un"equalizer

In another text by Danielle Allen, *Education and Equality* (2016), she continues her consideration of equality in America, but in this case, she focuses on the role that equality plays in education. In particular, she asks her readers to return to a foundational question: What is the purpose of education? The current Common Core Standards of education expresses the purpose of education to be college and career readiness, and it seems that many Americans have embraced this concrete need and outcome of public education.

This is reflective of one of the earliest ideals of public education: social mobility. School has often been viewed as the great equalizer. When provided freely to all, each person has an equal opportunity to learn and therefore, the thought goes, an equal opportunity to succeed in life. As time has progressed, however, this ideal has become as much of a myth as the American Dream. In modern American society, it is evident that not all schools are created equal. Some schools have the ability to provide the best resources, teachers, and opportunities, while others lack the funding or ability to provide the same level of education. Because of this inequality and inequity existent in education, even completing an educational program and receiving a high school diploma does little to guarantee success or improvement in one's social position. While two students from different schools may both meet the requirements for completion, the vast differences in quality of education produces an uneven playing field for these graduates.

This harsh reality came to light as early as the beginning decades of the twentieth century during the American industrial revolution, and has been particularly true for marginalized groups in American society. For many immigrants, for example, educational attainment was thought to be the ultimate goal, one that would ensure a family's success in a new world. Instead, for many immigrants, it often created an internal struggle of identity. In one direction they were pulled to old-world customs and traditions, while the other direction beckoned the possibilities present in a capitalist society.

Anzia Yezierska's novel, *Bread Givers* (1925) reflects these notions of duality and disappointment as the promises of the American Dream fall short. In this autobiographical novel about a young Jewish girl from immigrant parents, Yezierska draws from her own personal experiences to create the characters and relationship in the novel. The main character, Sara Smolinsky, based on Yezierska herself, is the youngest daughter of a Jewish rabbi. Like the

"double-consciousness" described by W.E.B. Dubois (1903), this family is torn between the beliefs and traditions of their culture and religion and the capitalist nature of the American Dream. Even the father, a dedicated rabbi who dictates the family habits according to his religious beliefs, experiences duality. He becomes taken by the power of money in capitalist America, and even marries his daughters to men that are seemingly wealthy while ignoring the morality of the suitors.

The youngest daughter, having observed the corruption and cruelty of her father, discovers a means by which she can escape her dreaded destiny. Sara recognizes that education provides an opportunity for her to achieve the American dream. She leaves her family abruptly following an argument with her father and does not return until she has earned a teaching degree. Having decided that she would be the creator of her fate, Sara returns home and secures a position as a teacher.

In the end, however, the story is not so obviously optimistic. When she returns home, she finds her mother sickly, close to death. She nurses her, and upon her death, her father quickly remarries, assuming his new wife will care for him. Eventually, after first denying him help after his treatment of her mother, Sara finds him cold and begging on the streets, and she offers to give him and his wife money.

In this emotionally conflicted ending the reader is left questioning the success of Sara's education. Did education help mobilize Sara in a direction towards a higher social class? It doesn't seem so, as her family is left poorer than before her educational journey. Will education serve to improve social condition or only serve to create a larger gap between the social classes? These are questions that remain at the forefront of today's educational discussions. If one of the most valued purposes of education is to provide opportunity for social mobility, why do so many

seem uninvested in schooling? Like Sara, too many people have worked hard to attain their education only to be left down by the reality that it has done little to improve their social position. These experiences only contribute to the negative perceptions of education.

While many still value the ideal that education should serve to provide opportunity for social mobility, there are others who despise the commitment to preparing students for economic involvement as the focus of education, and they argue that schools should be cultivating life-long learners and developing insightful human beings that are also prepared to participate in the political sphere. The challenge here is that schools should be achieving each of these purposes. If American education truly embraces the values of individuality and equality, then schools must meet the needs and desires of each student, including considering the varying purposes of education.

In addition to economic versus human development purposes for education, there is also attention given to the preferred benefits of education. In other words, is education intended to benefit society or the individual? Calling on the work of Hannah Arendt, Allen argues that education can and does again meet both of these ideals (2016). She writes, "Arendt's *The Human Condition* provides a valuably democratic account of human flourishing that can serve as a foundation for integrating our two concepts of education: our macrolevel social utilitarian concept and our microlevel eudemonistic concept" (p. 15). The devaluing of either individualism or equality causes significant difficulty in achieving these desired outcomes in education. In the modern public education system, there are a multitude of examples, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections, in which equality is devalued, affecting both the effectiveness of American schooling and the perceptions of Americans about public education.

Funding Public Education

No issue affects educational equality more than the issue of school funding. School funding affects every element of public education, and it is the most significant concern when discussing issues of equality and equity in American schooling. In recent decades, originating with the 1966 Coleman Report, many politicians and reformers have argued that funding has little to do with school performance and student learning. Not only does this go against any common-sense approach to school reform that focuses on improving equity, but many scholars have debunked these theories by showing various flaws in the data presented (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996; Wenglinsky, 1997).

In his text, *Educational Inequality and School Finance: Why Money Matters for America's Students* (2018), Bruce Baker argues that early comparisons of school finances that were used in the Coleman Report and other studies failed to take into account the complexities of school finance. Most of these studies looked at per pupil expenditures, but they did not consider a variety of differing factors that affect actual student spending, including adjusting value for regional cost differences, incorporation or negation of health and pension expenses, costs for students with special needs and varying backgrounds, among others. Baker asserts, "We must consider a plethora of exogenous factors that may further affect the value of the education dollar in the provision of programs and services" (p. 45). The failure to consider the complexity of per pupil spending and the multitude of varying factors that affect spending in different school districts causes a misrepresentation of real issues in school finance.

When scholars and statisticians begin considering these complex factors, it becomes even more obvious that there exists great inequity amongst schools in the United States. While states like Pennsylvania and Illinois consistently show large disparities in spending across schools,

other states, like Michigan and Massachusettes, who have instituted school financing that provides school funding that distributes large percentages to needier schools, show much higher equity along with more successful schools (Baker, 2018; Baker, Sciarra & Farrie, 2014). In order to assure equal opportunity for all students, issues in school funding must be addressed. These issues include teacher pay and quality, student background and associated funding formulas, incorporation of technology, and smaller class sizes.

Teachers

The largest percentage of school budgets go to paying the salaries and benefits of teachers and staff. School spending allotted to teacher salaries and benefits has remained at about 81% of the total school budget since 1993 (Baker, 2018; Baker, Sciarra & Farrie, 2018). While this has been used by some reformers to argue that the most cost-saving approaches to school reform include some type of elimination of teachers, the reality is that schools are a human resource driven industry, and high-quality teachers are the most important asset in education. In any other industry, the highest quality employees require higher salaries, better benefits, and better working conditions than the lower quality candidates. This is why money matters when it comes to hiring better teachers. In many lower income school districts, they simply do not have the resources to pay and retain higher quality teachers. Additionally, teachers in K-12 education get paid below the average of all college graduated positions, which detracts talented individuals from entering the teacher workforce (Baker, 2018).

Student background

Another major problem in school funding, and a significant reason that many types of school funding analysis based on per pupil spending is inept, is the impact of student background in the consideration of necessary resources. Scholars have found that varying school districts, as well as varying schools within the same school district, often have a large disparity in the number of students with special needs, who require additional resources to achieve equality of educational opportunity and individual achievement (Baker, 2018; Ladd & Loeb, 2013). Students with special needs could vary from students with learning disabilities to low-income students that come from undereducated families. Schools with high special education populations are required to provide more resources and allocate more money towards those students. Low income schools are often in a position where they are not only providing additional instructional resources to students to close any learning gaps, but schools also find themselves allocating resources to the basic needs of students from lower income families. In schools with more disciplinary issues, additional resources may be needed to assure more faculty and administrative supervision, as well as smaller classes with a reduced student to teacher ratio. The vastly different backgrounds that students have make a simplistic per pupil funding comparison inadequate in determining funding that will assure equality of education.

Technology

As the world shifts to a technology driven society, technology in education is becoming a bigger issue in discussion regarding educational equality. Schools that have more capital are integrating technology throughout curricula by providing training and development for high quality teachers and by increasing accessibility to students. In some districts, students participate

in online classrooms through personally assigned devices, and they may even have access to technologies like 3-D printers and hydroponic systems. In other districts, students are using outdated computers in superficial ways. According to the well-established SAMR Model of technology integration in the classroom, the most basic use of technology is substitution, where technology only acts as a substitute for traditional methods of learning, with no functional change. The goal is "redefinition," where technology allows for creation that was previously inconceivable. Not only does this require access to advanced technology, but it also necessitates highly trained educators that can facilitate this learning. The clear dichotomy in technological amenities affects educational equality in a multitude of ways, including instruction and learning, knowledge cultivation, college and career preparation, and even global and cultural awareness. In *Radical Equality in Education* (2014), Joann Larson argues that, "schools have become outdated…by not taking into account the changed and changing practices associated with Internet communication technologies and social media. They have missed the valuable learning and development going on in those spaces. Furthermore, authentic acknowledgement and use of culturally varied ways of knowing and being occurring in those spaces is also lost on schools" (p. 3). In a global society that continues to experience expanding uses for technology, technology is no longer a privilege for the rich, but rather it is a necessary element of achievement and participation in global citizenship and a competitive economy, both of which are goals of American education. A lack of equality in technological integration and access is a lack of equality in education.

Smaller Classes

Another commonsensical reform to improve educational equality is the reduction of class sizes. Still, this idea has been challenged by supporters of the Coleman Reports' findings. It is obvious that reducing class sizes would be an added expense for school districts, but it is also one of the most statistically sound arguments for improving school quality and equality. Many scholars have found that smaller class sizes had some of the most significant outcomes on student achievement (Konstantopoulos & Chung, 2009; Finn, Gerber, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Krueger & Whitmore, 2001). Additionally, reducing the size of classes in schools with higher populations of students with special needs, low income students, and marginalized groups could have an even bigger impact on student achievement. In his article, "Experimental Estimates of Education Production Functions," Alan Krueger (1999) reanalyzed data from Tennessee Project STAR and found that while all students benefitted from smaller class sizes, minority students and students on free or reduced lunch benefitted the most. In addressing issues of equity in education, it is important that effective strategies, like reducing class size remain an option, but schools with the most need must receive the necessary funding to make this possible.

Core Subjects

One area of inequality in education that needs further attention and research is that of inequality among subject areas. In public education, Americans have become accustomed to the concept of "core subjects." These subjects receive more time and credit, and students are often tested with state mandated exams, which then directly affect teacher performance ratings in these specific subjects. Generally, the "core" subjects consist of language arts, math, science, and

social studies. These subject areas clearly receive the highest attention and are valued by teachers, administrators, students and parents alike. Other subjects, often referred to as "specials" are given much less attention, time, and credit, and when budgets become tight, these are the subjects that are cut from academic programs.

There is a good deal of research that has been done in order to convince the public that these subjects are essential to student development. Usually, this scholarship attempts to draw connections between subjects like art, music, and physical education and higher test scores in math and reading (Garcia, 2015; Ruppert, 2006; Rauscher, Shaw, Levine, Wright, Dennis, & Newcomb, 1997). However, little attention has been given to the effects that devaluing these subjects in schools have on concepts of equality. As previously discussed, equality and individualism go hand in hand. The devaluing of particular subjects in school in turn devalues individual talents in students. Some individuals excel in math and science but struggle in art and music, and other students excel in art and music but struggle in math and science. By devaluing art and music, the student that excels in these subjects but struggles in "core" subjects is often viewed as a struggling student, despite his or her clear strengths in other "non-core" subjects. On the contrary, the student that excels in "core" subjects, but struggles in "non-core" subjects will be seen as a top student. This student can receive much higher grades because he or she can eventually opt out of certain "specials." Also, there is additional pressure placed on "specials" teachers to make sure that students are graded on effort, as it is accepted that not all students will be good at art or physical education, so administrators and parents don't believe it is fair that students may fail these subjects. On the other hand, students that struggle in language arts or math will continue to be held to high standards of achievement, and they will be graded according to the quality of their performance. The clear dichotomy between "core" and "non-

core" subjects creates a devaluing of subjects and talents that reaches far past the public school classroom. Inequity in the value of subjects and individual talents in schools becomes inequity in the value of jobs and pay in the economic sphere of society.

Curriculum

Finally, there is an essential element of equality that has been left out of this discussion, which is the role of equality in curriculum. After all, how do we continue to ensure equality in American schools and society without directly addressing equality as a fundamental value in our curricula? In his popular book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (2018), originally published in 1995, James Loewen brought to light the many inconsistencies and inaccuracies presented in textbooks in public schools. His book was widely read by the general public and began important conversations about the missing perspectives in American history textbooks used in schools, as well as the manner in which history is taught. While his focus is on history specifically, the selection of curricula and the manner in which it is presented is an issue for discussion across all classrooms in public schools. Inclusion of multiple perspectives and content in relation to history, science, literature, visual arts, music, physical education, and other subjects affects students' perspectives of society and humanity, whether teachers, parents, or students are aware of it. As Loewen states, "Even if they don't learn much history from their textbooks, students are affected by the book's slant" (2018, p. 344). Historically, schools have been used as a means to indoctrinate young people with falsehoods and inaccuracies in order to meet the needs of certain groups. For example, the Daughters of the Confederacy lobbied textbook companies and worked with schools to institute the teaching of a history of the Civil War that embraced the mythology depicted in *The Lost*

Cause (1866), a publication that presented the Confederacy as defending itself against an aggressive northern army. This history, taught to school children throughout the south, portrayed the Confederate purpose as a noble cause that strove to protect states' rights rather than protect the horrific institution of slavery. In an effort to recreate the truth and restore southern pride and dignity, this curriculum misled generations of students and extended dangerous notions of white supremacy.

Other authors, like the Fugitive-Agrarians, attempted to portray southern culture as superior to northern culture. They argued that the south's commitment to farming rather than industrialization and capitalism created a moral virtue that was not existent in the north. The failure of these authors to address the race issue in southern culture eventually led to the failure of the Fugitive-Agrarians and has contemporaneously led to the failure to recreate a fictional history of the south. Still, these attempts to subvert the real atrocities of southern history have had significant and damaging effects on education.

Not only are students affected by the inaccuracy of historical curriculum and the lack of diversity in instructional materials, but students are adversely affected by the failure of schools to comprehensively embrace equality in their curricula, instruction, funding, and overall operations, which leads to negative perceptions of public schooling. It is essential that public schools reconsider equity and equality issues, and create action and reform that makes equality a foundational value of American education.

CHAPTER 4

COMPETITION

For twelve years, I coached varsity girls' soccer. While I am an avid fan of the sport and a competitive athlete myself, coaching gave me a completely new perspective. It was amazing to witness the comradery and growth of the group. Preseason always provided the team with an opportunity to prepare for the upcoming season and build relationships with one-another. There were years where during this time I felt confident in our ability to compete in the regular season, and there were other times where I feared our certain defeat. While some of my assessments were accurate predictions, the truth is it was difficult to assess our team's true level before the games began. It was only through competing that we were able to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses and make any necessary changes to our preparation, planning and strategy.

It was also encouraging and enlightening as a coach to see the engagement and motivation of individual players, some of which I had taught in the classroom. I remember one student in particular that was a struggling student in my 8th grade classroom. She was often disengaged in the classroom, and it was difficult for her to ask for help. Now, as a freshman, I was able to see her in a completely different light. She was an above-average athlete, but soccer was new to her. At practice, she was laser-focused. If she couldn't get a particular skill, she was the first to say, "Coach, I need help." As the season progressed, she grew and improved, and soon she recognized her ability surpassed that of many of her teammates. She earned a varsity starting position as a freshman, and as games progressed, she began to recognize that she could compete with the best players from other schools. When I checked the eligibility reports, I found that her grades were much higher than they had been in middle school. It had seemed as though

she was transforming. She was gaining confidence and recognizing her own skills and strengths, and it helped her find success in various realms of her life.

Examples of growth, like this, were prevalent in my years of coaching. Each season presented a new exciting opportunity for growth, but I couldn't help but notice the different levels of engagement and motivation between my players on the soccer field and my students in the classroom. I noticed similar observations as the Spelling Bee Coordinator at our school. Students, some of which were surprising because of their general attitude towards school, would excitingly take part in the multiple voluntary rounds of spelling, even skipping coveted free time. Our school provides few opportunities for competition outside of sports, but they always result in unexpected experiences with students. They consistently involve students that may not be viewed as high-achieving, showing engagement and interest in academic or extra-curricular competition. While some students seem clearly uncomfortable with the competitive atmosphere, many students thrive under the same conditions.

In addition to providing motivation and engagement, opportunities for competition also give students the chance to compare and assess their own skills and strengths with others within and outside of the district. While sports provide ample opportunity for students to interact and compete with students outside of their home school, very few similar opportunities are provided for students outside of athletics. Despite the clear benefits of providing opportunities for competition, schools continue to avoid academic competition.

This chapter focuses on the importance of competition as a core American value, and how competition has been limited in American education. Part I of this chapter looks at the significance of competition throughout American cultural history, including how competition was manifested and valued in the earliest days of Colonial civilization, through elections,

economic competition, and in sports and games. In Part II of this chapter, I discuss the benefits of competition in education. This includes sections that focus on how "Competition Drives Achievement," and on "Competition and Social Mobility," which emphasizes how avoiding competition in schools only furthers current socioeconomic stratification. Part II also includes sections entitled, "Competition for Teacher," which highlights the importance of good teaching to have good schools, and "Competition Within Schools NOT Between Schools," which discusses the failures of vouchers, school choice, and charter schools while advocating for opportunities for competition within the school curricula. The final section of Chapter II, "Competition in Education" summarizes the reasons that competition is vital for American public schooling.

Part I: Controversy as Always: How Competitive Values Shaped American History

Polarization is nothing new in American History. From the Federalist-AntiFederalist disputes through the Civil War to the arguments over Vietnam, the United States has seen plenty of disagreement. Nevertheless, it seems as though today's Americans cannot agree on anything. In fact, in an entertainment-demanding age, consensus is boring. Matching opposing opinions and ostensibly friendly debate is ingrained into our everyday lives as utterly normal. Whether it be discussion regarding the better sports team, argument about the best political candidate, or deliberation over the best alternative ending to a favorite movie, Americans are always voicing differing ideas and judgments. Yet a cursory glance at books on intercultural communication makes it instantly clear that this American norm is not worldwide. In many cultures, the appearance of agreement is preferred to open debate. Even in the United States, there are different cultural zones where disagreement is perceived differently based upon context. As we

have seen in previous chapters of this dissertation, even our shared values create contention regarding definition and implementation. Each of these moments of disagreement creates an opportunity for contest and competition. In her book, *Playing to Win* (2013), Hilary Levey Friedman declares, “In contemporary American society competition seems to be everywhere. Organized, tournament-like competitions are held for the seemingly mundane, the inane, and the arcane” (p. xiii). In many ways, Americans seem obsessed with competition.

The World Values Survey shows that Americans view competition more positively than any other industrialized nation. Sociologist Francesco Duina explored this obsession. In his book, *Winning* (2011), he found that competition helps people understand their place in the world. Using Erik Erikson’s theories of “pseudospeciation,” Duina argues that competition helps us differentiate ourselves from others. He also sees competition as a way of proving our own worth and understanding our own values. He writes, “Competitive events in our society offer a battleground where alternative perspectives on life meet head to head and where, we hope, our doubts about ourselves are finally put to rest” (p. 36). In layman terms, at base, competition with another helps one to locate oneself and one’s own position relative to the other. Even slight disagreement can be clarifying in this way. Duina, like many others, however, warns of the dangers of competition.

Despite the obvious passion for competition that Americans possess, there continues to be people who argue that competition is a negative preoccupation that leads to a breakdown of community. An example from popular culture and political folklore helps to illustrate the tale. It was said about the Kennedy family that Joe, John, Robert, and Ted would make every activity, from dressing in the morning to eating, into a race. The family’s Thanksgiving football games were discussed across America as typifying the bracing effects of competitive drive. But as the

Kennedy family moved past Camelot into darker times, skeptics opined that such an environment might have been psychologically draining or unhealthy. More rigorous examination of the issue abounds.

The canonical American coming-of age novel, *A Separate Peace* (1959) also provides a warning about rivalry and competition in American society, specifically amongst American youth. Taking place during WWII, the preparatory school, which serves as the setting of the novel, becomes a microcosm of the larger society. *A Separate Peace* primarily explores the relationship of Gene and Phineas, two seemingly contrasting portrayals of human character. Gene, the narrator, is the cerebral and complicated academician, while Phineas represents physical excellence, loyalty and innocence. The novel is focused on an incident in which Gene, having become suspicious of his best friend Phineas's intentions and believing he is attempting to sabotage his academic success, causes an "accident" in which Phineas is seriously injured, ending his dominant athletic career. Phineas, however, quickly dismisses any thought of malice, and he contends that it was an accident. In this depiction, set against the backdrop of war, the most profoundly dangerous and traumatic outcome of competition, Gene's competitive drive leads to spiteful and malicious actions that result not only in the eventual death of his best friend, Phineas, but also to the destruction of innocence which he represents. This dramatic reflection of the potential negative consequences of competition stands in contrast to the many instances in which Americans embrace competition.

Tracing back to the work of Adam Smith and Thomas Hobbes, there has been contention over the role of competition in society. Smith argued that competition helps individuals and, thereby, society to reach its highest potential. Hobbes advised against competition, placing it in direct opposition to cooperation and seeing it as a human being's natural tendency to exploit

others. Today, the debate continues, and doubters voice their concerns about the destructiveness of competition. In *No Contest, The Case Against Competition* (1993), Alfie Kohn takes up Hobbes argument by refuting common beliefs about competition. He disputes that competition builds character and helps people improve their social position. He also argues against the idea that competition is human nature. While there are many scholars who agree with Kohn's findings, America's passion for competition persists. The argument today is often framed as a popular discourse trope: the disagreement focusing on childhood sports; a spat between those who think a nurturing spirit in which 'everyone gets a trophy' is either good because it reduces competitive pressure on vulnerable children, or bad because it fails to winnow out the weak from the strong performers. Although there are varying perspectives when it comes to this controversial issue, its existence as a common point of contention further shows the powerful impact that competition has on American society.

Like individualism and equality, Americans value competition in a way that seems innate and indestructible. Despite efforts to push America in a direction away from competition and towards cooperation, arguing that cooperation will make people happier, and even using institutions like public schools to achieve this outcome, Americans continue to value competition. This value may be more controversial than the values presented in the previous chapters, but it is precisely that contention that proves, ironically, the importance of competition in our society.

The History of American Competition

The Early Years

Competition has been a consistent and pervasive element of American culture since the earliest days of colonialism. Settlers brought games and recreation from the Old World, including ball and stick games, foot racing, swimming, and horseracing. While the Puritans and Quakers promoted mostly healthy activities that would provide both entertainment and discipline, southerners incorporated competitions with cards and happily gambled on a variety of outcomes. The frontier, with its harsh conditions and predominantly male population, saw fighting sports that would today be viewed as brutish, even in comparison to modern mixed martial arts fighting (Davies, 2007). After the revolution, these types of recreational games continued and expanded.

While these competitions were simple amusements, other areas of life reflected the true worth of competition. As economic positions became more disparate, people competed against each other for superior social status. In the south, some farmers found great success and luck in many instances, in order to expand their plantations. The use of indentured servants proved unpredictable, so slavery became the preferred method of ensuring consistent workers. Soon, slavery played an important role in social status. The more slaves that a man owned, the more affluent and respected he was. Along with social status, came power and influence.

In the north, Puritans and other religious orders sought discipline and community. However, within these communities there were clear hierarchies of power. The most divine wielded the most power and influence. The Puritans created a vision of a "city upon a hill," as articulated by Jonathan Winthrop in his famed 1630 speech on board the *Arbella*, which encapsulates their viewed superiority and chosenness over others. But it also set up a highly

pressurized environment in which their everyday performance at life carried potentially eschatological implications. That is, they were meant to save the world by building a perfect society so that the world would be impressed and emulate Puritan New England. This desire to differentiate themselves from others was in itself a form of competition. Within the Puritan community, sermons and jeremiads were used to communicate this vision as well as control and manipulate the populous. The key to the jeremiad, as explained by Sacvan Bercovitch (1978) in *American Jeremiad*, was to follow the Prophet Jeremiah's formula: after delivering the lengthy indictment, extend to the listeners one chance for redemption by returning to the proper path.

Ministers had a great deal of power and the positions were strongly sought after. In Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible* (1953), which fictionalizes the accounts of the Salem Witch Trials, Reverend Parris reflects this desire for power through the position of minister. When he is faced with the illness and impending death of his daughter, he interrogates and chastises his niece for her involvement. However, it quickly becomes apparent that he is more concerned with his own threatened social status than he is with the life of his daughter. Parris says, "Now tell me true, Abigail. And I pray you feel the weight of truth upon you, for now my ministry's at stake, my ministry and perhaps your cousin's life" (2003, p. 140). The potential and humiliating loss of social status is a greater tragedy than the death of his daughter. Another interpretation of the Salem crisis came from Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (1974) in *Salem Possessed*, where they located competitive envy as stemming from economic inequality and resulting social discord. Still another came from *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (1980), in which Carol F. Karlsen put noncomforming females forth as the victims of a fragmenting society competing for scapegoats. In all these studies of Salem, the gist is that the presumptive cooperation envisioned and mandated by the first-generation Puritans gave way to fragmentation and competition.

Competition in American society only grew stronger during revolutionary times. With independence at stake, the new republic was in a dangerous transitional period in which it needed to build a government. Local taverns became the settings for public debate and political discourse. Political pamphlets became a popular manner of communication, persuasion, and dispute. Authors like Thomas Paine and Samuel Adams argued for the severance from British influence, while many citizens still felt that America needed England to survive. In his influential pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), Paine persuaded the citizenry to take up the cause of freedom. He writes to his opponents, "But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families" (p. 289). Paine advanced the patriot cause by very intentionally framing the Revolution as a competition between the new and right, versus the old and incorrect. As historian William H. Goetzman (2009) observed, Paine viewed the potential for America as a utopian civilization that would embrace all people of the world. Paine regarded rationality and reason as the means by which civilization would achieve harmony, an ideal that was not possible in the long-corrupt British society. He appealed for a constitution that would guarantee individual rights of life, liberty, equality, property and the pursuit of happiness through a representative government that would encourage great democratic participation.

Politicians like Alexander Hamilton and James Madison wrote persuasive essays aimed at convincing citizens and states to accept and approve a proposed Constitution for the central government of the new nation. In a series of 85 essays, known as *The Federalist Papers*, Hamilton, Madison, and John Jay argued for the ratification of the Constitution. Opponents, however, contested the creation of a strong central government. Of course, war itself – from Concord through Yorktown, meant that the fate of the nation was resolved in one of the ultimate

forms of competition. The winners were extolled and became the founding heroes. The losers, Loyalists, were cast into exile and viewed as traitors. Had the British won, the roles would have been reversed.

During this time, dispute over the morality of slavery also found itself into the essays and pamphlets that were published and distributed, as well as in speeches in public forums. While respected essayist Thomas Paine was criticized for having omitted slaves and black Americans from his call for natural human rights, others emphasized the need for change. Samuel Sewall and Benjamin Franklin were two white men who questioned the practice of slavery and the treatment of black Americans in their writing. Sewell provided a religious perspective that all men shared the blood of Adam, while Franklin appealed to the morality and political logic of his audience by first exclaiming, “Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very extirpation, if not performed with solicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evils,” and then explaining:

> To instruct, to advise, to qualify those, who have been restored to freedom, for the exercise and enjoyment of civil liberty, to promote in them habits of industry, to furnish them with employments suited to their age, sex, talents, and other circumstances, and to procure their children an education calculated for their future situation in life; these are the great outlines of the annexed plan, which we have adopted, and which we conceive will essentially promote the public good, and the happiness of these our hitherto too much neglected fellow-creatures. (1789, p. 332)

The debate over slavery and the treatment of blacks would prove to be one of the longest in American history, and forms what to many is the signature failure in the American founding. Slavery provided the foundation for affluence and social status, which was clearly of such

importance that even civil war and abolition would not settle the matter. Moreover, the desire to ratify the Constitution and keep the Union together allowed for slavery to be backloaded, until the sectional pressures building through the 1850s finally burst forth into Civil War.

The use of pamphlets, essays, and speeches during this time had a major influence on the construction of government. It was a battle of words and ideas that placed Americans in opposition to each other, and resulted in the creation of a unique society that embraced freedom of expression and encouraged competition. It was through the sharing of opposing ideas that America determined shared values and beliefs that helped structure everyday life.

Elections

Within months of the ratification of the United States Constitution, the first presidential election was held. This election was uncompetitive, since the founding fathers expected that George Washington would become the first president. Because of a variety of reasons, including voter registration rules, a very small percentage of the population actually cast votes. Washington, nonetheless, was unanimously elected President of the United States. After two terms in office, Washington refused to run again, which initiated a much more competitive culture in the American electorate.

In 1796, a highly contested election was held, in which two political parties emerged as contenders. The parties, rather than the nominees themselves, campaigned vigorously for their candidates. John Adams ran as a Federalist and Thomas Jefferson represented the Democratic-Republican party. Federalists supported a strong national government and diplomacy with Britain, while the Democratic-Republicans fought for a limited central government and supported states' rights. This was the beginning of the two-party system and electoral

competition that would be the foundation of American government. This presaged the binary competition that still lies at the heart of American electoral practice today.

Political scholars have studied and analyzed the role of competition in the American electoral process. While there are critics of electoral competition, most scholars recognize its prevalence and importance in American democracy. Michael P. McDonald and John Samples assert, “The notion of competition as a necessary component of democracy is so fundamental that it can be found in introductory election textbooks” (2006, p. 2). Prominent theorists have concluded that representative democracy requires competitive conditions in which voters make significant choices (Schumpeter, 1950; Dahl, 1971; Lipset, 1960). Joseph Schumpeter, one of the earliest proponents of competitive democracy, defined representative democracy as, “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (1950, p. 269). Some scholars even warn that a lack of competition will lead to authoritarianism or tyranny (Sartori, 1976; Strom, 1992). Kaare Strom states, “Competitive elections, then, are the principal protective mechanism that allows voters to check the threat of tyranny” (p. 380).

Political parties are viewed as essential to electoral competition. These ‘factions,’ as James Madison put it, are in effect coalitions or teams. Since the initiation of parties in the 1796 election, the political party has ensured competitive elections that represent varying views within the American public. Political scientists have focused studies of competition on parties, and several argue that political parties are the foundation of contemporary democracy (Powell, 1982; Robertson, 1976). While America’s political parties have changed and evolved, they have continued to play an essential role in American electoral competition.

Elections in American democracy are a foundational element of competition in the United States. In essence, Americans compete against each other for representation of their values in government and society. If all competition, as Duina explains, helps us to prove our own values and put to rest our own doubts, then political elections certainly assist us in achieving this outcome. That the constitutional order is seen to rest upon intraparty competition, and that the evolution of that competition into a primary round and general election is now seen as natural and even constitutionally normative when it is not, shows how much faith Americans put in the democratic nature of competition.

Economic Competition

While elections are necessary competitions to preserve the democratic republican government, its counterpart, the capitalist economy may have an even stronger influence on the importance of competition in the lives and values of Americans. The sectional differences between North and South were, in part, a competition between two visions for socioeconomic organization. As the slow-growing South saw itself outstripped by the burgeoning North, it feared losing the competition and opted for war as a way out of defeat. After the Civil War, America's economy exploded with growing manufacturing, rapid industrialization, and innovative production. People flocked to cities where large corporations were able to offer expanding employment opportunities. By the late nineteenth century, some large business owners had become much savvier, and soon questions regarding legality of practices and the need for competition began to arise.

It is worth mentioning that in Europe at this time, the dialectical vision of Karl Marx, which he borrowed from Georg Hegel and connected to class conflict, emerged as a potent

political force. Marxism is nothing if not a competition-based historical and world view, in which different socioeconomic models face off, collide, and are resolved through synthesis. Indeed, Marx's appeal was that he promised an eventual end to ceaseless competition: once the dictatorship of the proletariat was established, the nation was to wither away and a non-competitive steady state would at last usher in a competition-free human existence. So powerful was this vision that in the Soviet Union, there was reluctance to accept the apparently competitive evolutionary ethos of Charles Darwin. Generations of Soviet biology instead relied upon the putatively cooperative theories of Trofim Lysenko, not the the greater benefit of Soviet science.

The best example of large business monopoly that threatened economic competition in the United States was John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil company. Rockefeller managed to make deals with the railroad companies that transported his oil, which provided Rockefeller with decreased rates and inside information, while other smaller oil companies were charged much larger fees. Standard Oil was able to undersell all of its competitors until they could no longer stand to be in business, and subsequently sold their companies to Rockefeller. This practice created a monopoly and brought attention to the dangers of non-competition in the market. It also began a process of government legislation and regulation to ensure competition. The counterreaction came about because of muckraking journalist Ida Tarbell (1904), whose *History of Standard Oil* exposed Rockefeller's practices as unsavory and produced a backlash. Americans valued competition, but wanted it to be fair and conducted according to lawful rules.

While there was and continues to be agreement that competition is necessary in the American marketplace, how this is achieved has been a contested topic since the Standard Oil debacle. Initially, in reaction to public concerns regarding the Standard Oil case, government

passed the Sherman Act. However, this legislation was quickly overlooked, and many of the same practices continued. Anti-trust regulation became an important issue in presidential elections, but it was increasingly clear that there was unrest regarding the implementation of government legislation that impacted the economic market.

Overtime, two schools of thought emerged. One side, often referred to as the Chicago School, believes that government regulation and anti-trust rules should be limited, allowing market competition to occur naturally, as a product of sound economic principles. Their focus is on liberty as a positive good, in terms of freedom of property ownership and action. Their belief is that free actors contracting freely and subject to free consumer judgment in the free market leads to best outcomes for the economy as a whole. This philosophy has governed economic decision-making for decades. One of the intellectual leaders of the Chicago School and a Nobel Prize recipient, Milton Friedman, advocated for limited government interference. Calling on the work of Adam Smith (1776), Friedman argues that government should be limited to essential functions, and that economic competition without central direction would naturally result in "individual initiative and voluntary cooperation" (1980, p. 7).

An even more extreme position favoring *laissez-faire* capitalism is that of Ayn Rand. The 20th century novelist and philosopher gained a cult following for her Objectivist ethics. Rand took the concept of limited government interference to another level, arguing that "capitalism is not merely the 'practical,' but the only *moral* system in history" (1967, ix). Her novel, *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) presents the potentially disastrous effects of government regulation and the removal of competition in society.

In the novel, the government makes rules and laws promoting mediocrity in an effort to emphasize the collective over the individual. They believe that competition creates disunity and

destroys community. After the approval of an Anti-dog-eat-dog Rule by the National Alliance of Railroads, the successful and efficient Phoenix-Durango Railroad is suddenly put out of business in favor of the aging and less effective Taggart Transcontinental. "The Rule provided that the members of the National Alliance of Railroads were forbidden to engage in practices defined as 'destructive competition.'" It is believed that a railroad existed to "provide transportation for the struggling inhabitants, since the prime purpose of a railroad was public service, not profit" (p. 76).

In *Atlas Shrugged's* America, it is thought that the strong and capable should provide for the weak and unmotivated. In doing so, ambition and innovation is discouraged. Upon hearing of the passing of the Anti-dog-eat-dog Rule, Dagny Taggart, the Vice President in Charge of Operation for Taggart Transcontinental, is infuriated. Dagny, unlike her brother Jim and most others, rejects the anti-competition sentiment and fears the consequences of a society that devalues ability and intellect. In her meeting with Dan Conway, President of the Phoenix-Durango, she recognizes his superiority and implores him to fight against the ruling. She exclaims, "Nothing can make it moral to destroy the best. One can't be punished for being good. One can't be penalized for ability. If that is right, then we'd better start slaughtering one another, because there isn't any right at all in the world!" (p. 79). Dagny also notices the sudden resignation and disappearance of the great minds and talents during this time. She begins a search for one of these great minds and discovers that they have retreated from society and banded together in a unified strike. The mysterious organizer of the strike, John Galt, explains, "We are on strike against self-immolation. We are on strike against the creed of unearned rewards and unrewarded duties. We are on strike against the dogma that the pursuit of one's happiness is evil. We are on strike against the doctrine that life is guilt" (p. 924-5). Galt later

continues to explain the purpose of the strike and the importance of one's own desire for happiness:

> Happiness is not the satisfaction of whatever irrational wishes you might blindly attempt to indulge. Happiness is a state of non-contradictory joy – a joy without penalty or guilt, a joy that does not clash with any of your values and does not work for your own destruction, not the joy of escaping from your mind, but of using your mind's fullest power, not the joy of faking reality, but of achieving values that are real, not the joy of a drunkard, but of a producer…Just as I support my life, neither by robbery nor alms, but by my own effort, so I do not seek to derive my happiness from the injury or the favor of others, but earn it by my own achievement. (p. 935)

This thinking is in direct opposition with that of the government and general citizenry in *Atlas Shrugged.* In fact, this would be viewed as a selfish desire. Therefore, the great minds of society refuse to participate in a system that devalues ability and discourages achievement. Rand, through her novel, illuminates the possible collapse of society under a government that acts with extreme regulation of competition.

An alternative school of thought relies on government intervention and legislation to make certain that market conditions ensure competition. In his book, *Free the Market,* Gary L. Reback argues against the Chicago School and in favor of government regulation, especially in modern global markets. He writes, "To maintain the country's high standard of living in the coming decades, antitrust policy must renew its commitment to competition, the font of economic growth. Competition engenders innovation, and innovation will keep our country ahead in world markets" (2009, p. 374). Reback believes that in an increasingly complex market, government regulation is necessary to avoid practices that allow manipulation and collusion. Using 21st century issues like hospital mergers and the resulting increase of health care costs, the author shows how unforeseen circumstances in contemporary American society calls for a change in the accepted Chicago School philosophy of self-correcting markets. He proclaims, "It is increasingly obvious to important people that the Chicago School approach is

not working well. The consequences of laissez-faire are no longer blithely accepted. The time has come to move past Chicago" (2009, p. 374).

While these economic ideologies are clearly in opposition as to the manner in which competition is ensured in the market, there is clear agreement that competition is necessary. Economic competition has been a cornerstone of American democracy, encouraging individuality, creativity, and innovation that has helped propel the United States into a respected global position. In fact, the varying economic viewpoints themselves, contesting for legislative support of their sides, is in itself an example of the pervasiveness of competition in American society.

Sports and Games

There is no better example of America's obsession with competition than that of American sports. In the earliest days of American life, colonists brought with them the recreational activities they had enjoyed from their homelands. However, in the harsh new environment, there was little time for leisure. Survival was initially a full-time job, so sports and games were not frequently played. The activities that were played varied widely depending on the location and culture of the people. For example, in Puritan New England, games that helped build community and health were promoted, but other brutish sports that had been brought from England were not permitted. In the south, elites competed in card games and often gambled on horseracing. In the Trans-Appalachian frontier, "rough and tumble" fighting, dog-baiting, and cockfighting were popular contests.

It was not until after the revolutionary era that sports became more common and organized. As Americans began the process of creating an organized and structured society with

rules and laws, and with increasing order, resulting from industrialization and urbanization, so too did sports become more structured and organized. Richard O. Davies writes, "As a result of the economic changes occurring in the United States, the playing of games underwent a substantial transformation from what was largely an informal, unorganized, and localized leisure experience into a structured and formalized set of activities that became, in lock step with the larger economic and social order, standardized along national lines" (2007, p. 22). With the need for efficiency and order in factories, and with the increased mobilization of society because of the railroad, national standards became important in both sports and the larger society. For example, baseball teams could now travel to play against teams a distance away, and the need for uniformity of rules became apparent. Scientific principles that were being applied to studies of efficiency in factories were then also applied to sports like baseball and prize fighting, where statistics helped determine the value and accountability of each player.

Sports quickly became tied to the economy and the work world in other ways. In the late nineteenth century, professional sports were established. Owners envisioned the development of industry and community pride, along with the gaining of profits through ticket sales with the creation of professional teams. For amateurs and average citizens, participation in competition became apparent through the incorporation of work sports and competitions. Some companies hired strong athletes at top salaries, just so they would have a winning team. The famous female athlete, Babe Didrikson was hired as a secretary, making $75 a month in 1930 by Employer's Casualty Insurance Company, so that she would lead their women's basketball team to a championship (Davies, 2007). In other trades, workers competed against one another in competitions that emphasized the particular skills needed for their jobs. In his book, *American Work-Sports* (2013), Frank Zarnowski presents a prevalent history of competitions within the

workplace. Like other sports, these competitions first started as informal games, and eventually became more organized contests. Zarnowski explains, “Worker competitions went through the very same stages of development as other sports and so many became popular and institutionalized that the entire experience can be classified as a sporting movement” (p. 13).

Sports also became an opportunity for business and profiting at the college level, where professional coaches and athletic managers were beginning to be employed. While the justification for such activities boasted that intercollegiate sports created character and supported the academic mission of the school, it was clear that winning was the end goal. Davies asserts, “The working model was that of American capitalism. The principles that underpinned the rise of the intercollegiate sports were the same that guided the American system of capitalism: rugged competition and the primacy of profits” (2007, p. 135). Colleges invested significant amounts of money in their athletic programs, students and community members bought tickets and attended events in mass numbers, boosters donated huge sums of money to specific sports, athletes were recruited and compensated with tuition waivers for their participation in an intercollegiate sport. Despite controversy over the line-blurring between amateurism and professionalism, colleges continued practices that would grow their athletic programs and attract the best athletes to help their schools win.

Whether at work, school, or play, America’s obsession with competition continued to grow into the twentieth century. America’s attitude towards sports reflected not only the deeply embedded concept of the American dream and social mobility, but it also distinguished the United States from other countries like England. In Britain, the social structure ensured that one’s social status remained the same from birth until death. But in America, the growth of capitalism and the explosion of industry and innovation created an unparalleled competitive

environment that allowed individuals, who were the best competitors, to improve their social position in ways that had never been achieved before. Competition, therefore, became a necessity for the achievement of the American dream, and sports helped hone the skills to win.

Soon, the concept of preparation for future competition and participation in the growing industrial society led to the incorporation of sports and competition in the lives of children. As early as the late nineteenth century, attention was given to the development of physical education for school-aged youth, but by the early twentieth century interscholastic competition had taken on a life of its own. While leaders and elites, like Luther Gulick and Theodore Rooselvelt, championed physical education and school competition for its intrinsic values, such as creating character, building muscle and fitness, and developing leadership skills, the drive of the American people for winning dominated even youth competition.

With the institution of compulsory education coinciding with labor laws prohibiting child labor, a clear delineation between school/work time and free time was drawn. In urban areas, there was additional concern that free time would create an opportunity for delinquency. As a result, adults started to create and organize after-school activities for youth, often in the form of sports. Both public school and private organizations, such as New York City's Public School Athletic League for Boys (PSAL) and the YMCA, began crafting athletic clubs for youth participation and competition in sports. Other types of non-athletic youth competitions also grew in popularity during the nineteenth century, further emphasizing the increasing interest in competition. These included the national spelling bee and The National Guild of Piano Teachers' National Piano Playing Tournament (Friedman, 2013).

After the Great Depression, however, the face of competition and educational philosophy transitioned. Most free athletic clubs could no longer financially afford to exist, so they were

replaced by fee-based organizations such as Little League Baseball. Much of the childhood sports and other activities continue to be run by similar private organizations today. Additionally, in the mid-twentieth century, physical education professionals and public schools became concerned with the potentially harmful effects of competition and instead promoted self-esteem building platforms that discouraged competition and the comparing of students to one another. Simultaneously, youth participation in athletic and other competitive activities, outside of school, has exploded in the second half of the twentieth century. As presented in the table below, growth in baseball, softball, and youth soccer grew appreciably between the years of 1950 and 2010. Baseball grew from 18,300 to 2,168,850 participants. Softball grew from 29,696 participants in 1974 to 344,910 participants in 2010, and soccer participation grew from 103,432 in 1974 to 3,036,438 in 2010.

Table 3

Estimated Number of Participants in Two Youth Sports Organizations

Year	*Little League Baseball*	*Little League Softball*	*U.S. Youth Soccer*
1950	18,300		
1960	825,000		
1970	1,371,200		
1974	1,640,000	29,696	103,432
1980	1,736,600	141,696	810,793
1990	2,107,590	259,080	1,615,041
2000	2,467,110	378,315	3,020,442
2010	2,168,850	344,910	3,036,438

Note: Adapted from *Children and Exercise XXVIII*, by Coelho-E-Silva, M., 2015.

Despite scholars' assertions about the detrimental consequences of competition, the American people's obsession continues to grow. This is not only true of adult forms of competition, but clearly parents are also obsessed with their children's participation in competitive activities, seeing it as a means to achieve success as adults. In her book *Playing to Win* (2013), Hilary Levey Friedman argues that in today's society middle class parents recognize the need for children to learn how to win through competitive activities, so that they can build what she terms "Competitive Kid Capital." In her definition, "Competitive Kid Capital" consists of five skills and lessons that children must learn in order to be prepared for adult life. These include, " (1) internalizing the importance of winning, (2) bouncing back from a loss to win in the future, (3) learning how to perform within time limits, (4) learning how to succeed in stressful situations, and (5) being able to perform under the gaze of others" (p. 17). Friedman also calls on the work of Annette Lareau (2003), to emphasize the concern that fee-based sports and activities further isolate less advantaged children from gaining these skills that have become apparently necessary to families who have achieved social mobility, adding another layer of complexity to an already controversial issue. Despite the insistence of scholars and public schools that competition has a negative impact on children's development and the larger social order, and regardless of whether there is merit to these arguments, Americans value competition.

Part II: Avoiding Competition in Schools

While competition in American society has grown at sometimes alarming rates, public education has attempted to remove all elements of competition from schooling, particularly from academics. Much of the inspiration for this movement stemmed from self-esteem studies that placed cooperation in opposition to competition (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Johnson, Johnson, &

Tauer, 1979; Johnson, Johnson, & Anderson, 1978; Sherman, 1986; Tjosvold, Marino, & Johnson, 1977). These studies often found that students' self-esteem, achievement, or perceptions of schooling were affected negatively in competitive environments. As a result, schools became anti-competitive. Even grading has become an issue of contention, causing some schools to remove grades totally, fearing that students who receive low grades will have low self-esteem. In schools where grading remains, there is pressure on teachers to award students with high grades, despite the quality of work or evidence of learning, and a student's grade is always private, never compared to the grades of his or her classmates.

The studies that initiated the self-esteem movement, however, are beginning to be viewed as limited in today's research. First, competition was originally defined in these studies as a concept in which one person's achievement automatically results in another person's failure. It was also placed in isolation, and in direct opposition to cooperation, which only observes both competition and cooperation in the most extreme settings. These studies are also flawed because they often only considered extrinsic rewards in considering outcomes when intrinsic rewards have proven to be potentially more important in many situations. In a 2000 study by Gordon, Welch, Offringa, and Katz, the authors replicated previous studies of cooperation and competition in the classroom, but they added additional conditions that neutralized the extreme conditions of previous studies. They found that students viewed competition more favorably than expected, and they found more negative responses to cooperative education, potentially negating the findings of previous studies due to a narrowness of definition and the presentation of only extreme conditions.

In this study (Gordon, Welch, Offringa, and Katz, 2000), the authors found that the relationship between extrinsic reward systems and social outcomes was much more complex

than previous studies had considered. Even in cooperative environments, the natural tendency for people is to compete. They may all, in the end, receive the same extrinsic reward, but there is competition for social status within the group, providing a significant intrinsic reward. Overall, low performers accepted a certain degree of differentiation in reward, but hostility and aggression were presented when social status was severely and negatively affected and when the condition of the competition was viewed as significantly unequal. This is vital in understanding how competition is viewed, as well as how these foundational values must work in conjunction. One may not be sacrificed in order to achieve another. Competition is an inherent value, but so is equality. Therefore, people are receptive to the fact that higher achievers in any particular area should receive reward, both extrinsic and intrinsic, but if the extreme condition of competition threatens the sense of basic equality of a competitor, then competition is viewed negatively because it sacrifices another foundational value to achieve competition. On the other hand, while cooperation emphasizes equality, when taken to its extreme, competition is sacrificed for equality, which results in a negative perception of equality. This can be easily observed in American attitudes towards communist and socialist political structures. Gordon, Welch, Offringa, and Katz discovered similar findings in their intricate study, which challenges previous ideas about competition and cooperation:

> Competition is not as easy to eliminate as these writers had hoped, but it is also not as destructive as they feared. It is not as easy to eliminate because it does not depend simply on interdependence of such rewards as money or grades, but may be based on status disparities…But it is not as bad as they feared because only extreme competitive systems produce desperate aggressive responses. Moderate competition produces stable status systems where the winners are often forced to cultivate the consensual respect of others, through affiliative and socially constructive behavior. Nor is the alternative to competition, egalitarianism, as attractive as claimed. Egalitarianism, when it "works," represents a distinctive psychology of group identification. But this psychology may have some unattractive features of its own: it may create conformist pressures, especially on low performers. And the strong group identification it engenders may be unstable under social conditions which provoke individuating tendencies, as when the prestige of

> high performers is dragged down by their shared identity with a group that comes to be seen as a failure (p. 266-7).

What this study shows is that the moderate conditions, in which both equality and competition are valued, are the conditions in which students thrived and perceived the activity positively. It also revealed that competition is both valued and inherent in a multitude of conditions, even when the condition is specifically created to eradicate competition.

Competition Drives Achievement

Not only has competition been shown to persist despite attempts to remove it, but competition has also been found to drive higher levels of achievement in a multitude of settings. As previously discussed, competitions were created in workplaces to improve production and encourage development of skills (Zarnowski, 2013). Physical tasks have shown to be completed more quickly when introduced to a competitive environment (DiMenichi & Tricomi, 2015). Even social movements have experienced encouragement through competition, as seen during intercollegiate energy saving competitions (Linden, 2015). It is not surprising, then, that some have begun to advocate for opportunities for competition in education. Josh Neubert, CEO of the Institute of Competition Sciences, has observed the removal of competition from schooling and sees the possibilities for enhanced innovations through the incorporation of competition in education. In "Redefining "competition" in Education" (2016), Neubert explains his vision:

> In 2010, there were 98 competition-based realty tv shows on air. One of these, The X-Factor, reached a record-breaking 19.4 million viewers in the UK for its championship episode. The same year in the U.S., 4 out of the top 5 viewed TV shows were competition-based. In 2012, Americans spent over $25.4 Billion viewing professional sporting competitions. Competition has been embraced in nearly every aspect of our lives garnering huge impact and influence…every aspect of our lives except education that is. Competition is an integral part of innovation and is critical to many career and life situations. In 2014, U.S. companies spent $70 Billion on employee training and team-building exercises. Successful teamwork, 21st century skills, and the ability to

> manage stressful, competitive situations are major success factors in today's fast-paced technology driven economy. We know that educational competitions can help students gain these critical real-world skills. (para. 3)

Neubert's organization helps develop educational competitions in the sciences, but schools and students need to pursue the opportunity. Therefore, if schools continue to embrace a no-competition philosophy for their students, these opportunities will go unrecognized.

Upon leaving the school environment and joining the workforce, students will inevitably enter a world filled with competition. Omitting competition from the school environment not only removes a competitive atmosphere that increases achievement in education, but it also fails to prepare students for a competitive global economy that they will enter immediately following their exit from the education system. While individuals may choose not to partake in opportunities for competition in schools, the refusal to provide those opportunities puts students at a disadvantage compared to students who experience and learn from competition in other realms. It is the responsibility of the school to provide the opportunity for competition in education.

Competition and Social Mobility

While some may see no detriment to the removal of competition in school, supposing that there are enough opportunities for competition in other settings, the lack of learning competitive skills in public schooling may serve to further impose barriers to social mobility for less economically advantaged students. As Neubert and others have pointed out, many of society's professional careers now require skills learned through competition. While middle-class families may afford to provide their children with competitive opportunities through participation in club sports or other activities, most underprivileged students rely on the public school to provide

similar opportunities. If schools fail to present students with these skills, how will they be expected to compete with others whose parents have paid for the training? In an economy that has moved towards specialization and required credentials for the majority of higher paying jobs, those children who are unequipped to compete, fail to gain the necessary skills and credentials for reaching middle-class status.

If schools do not provide students with the necessary skills for competition, then the responsibility is left to parents. This could be a positive influence, as is shown in the case of competitive mothers and their daughters. Studies have found that competitive mothers often have competitive daughters who devote more time to study and achieved higher grades in school (Reinboth & Duda, 2016; Schneider, Wallsworth, & Gutin, 2014). As women have become more competitive, they have seen positive social mobility and growth, and girls have exceeded boys in academic achievement and attainment of college credentials. However, the problem with relying on parents to provide competitive opportunities and skills for their children is that parents in lower socioeconomic positions typically have not experienced for themselves the atmosphere of competition that exists in the middle-class world of credentialing; therefore, they do not have the skills, knowledge, or means necessary to help their children gain these skills required for social mobility. Parents of middle-class children recognize the need for competitive skills because of their own experiences with credentialing and specialization. Therefore, they emphasize the need for their children to learn these skills early in life, and they have the means to provide them with opportunities. In *Playing to Win* (2013), Friedman argues, "the extensive time devoted to competition is driven by parents' demand for credentials for their children, which they see as a necessary and often sufficient condition for entry into the upper-middle class and the "good life" that accompanies it" (p. 3). If schools do not provide all students with these

skills and opportunities, then they are only perpetuating the inequality they have sought to overcome.

Competition for Teachers

Possibly one of the most significant issues created by the lack of competition in education is the production and retention of quality teachers. With the exception of students, teachers are the most important element of education. Having quality teachers, who are well educated and motivated to be successful, is an essential component to student achievement. Teachers become educators because they are passionate about helping children. Very few teachers choose the profession for any other reason, but there are a number of obstacles and stress factors that can quickly discourage any well-intentioned teacher. This is true of any job, but few jobs ask for the level of emotional involvement required of teachers. In return, teachers are paid low salaries for professionals with high degrees of educational attainment, and they are given little to no potential for salary growth, since most schools use a single salary schedule based on years of experience and level of education only. This type of pay system encourages mediocrity and provides no incentive for teachers to exceed expectations. The existence of teachers' unions, while necessary for a number of reasons in the current structure of public schooling, also makes firing bad teachers very difficult. The budget concerns of many school districts have created a system of hiring the cheapest option rather than the best option. All of these practices have created an environment that fails to reward good teaching and tolerates bad teaching.

Some strategies for expelling these problems have been introduced and studied, such as merit pay for teachers. However, these studies are not comprehensive, and have not presented reliable data studied over a significant period of time; therefore, results have varied drastically

(Gius, 2012; Fryer, 2011; Goodman & Turner, 2009; Lavy, 2009; Ebberts, Hollenbeck & Stone, 2002; Lavy, 2002; Ladd, 1999). Additionally, I would argue that offering merit pay without correcting other harmful practices, such as the hiring of inexperienced and underqualified teachers in order to save money and the difficulty in ridding districts of bad teachers, does very little to embrace a competitive and professional environment for educators. The documentary, *Waiting for "Superman"* (2010), addresses this issue in public schools, focusing on the challenge of removing ineffective teachers. First, it discusses the diluted concept of tenure in public schooling. Originally designed to be a long and demanding process for professors in higher education, it was adopted by the public-school system. However, in today's public education system, there are very few requirements for a teacher to be awarded tenure, and once achieved, it is very difficult for a school district to fire a tenured teacher.

Many schools hire inexperienced teachers because it costs the district much less, and then districts expect several years of mediocrity from these new teachers. By the time a teacher shows that they are not growing, they have already been awarded tenure, so school districts and students may be stuck with a bad teacher for 35 years. Even if new teachers are identified as ineffective in their first years, before achieving tenure, many districts will simply overlook the issues, or potentially place the teacher on an improvement plan. However, both the requirements for administrators during improvement plans and the process of opening positions and rehiring teachers is often arduous and, therefore, avoided. Since districts are not likely to hire experienced and high-quality teachers because it would require a significantly higher monetary investment, the hiring process becomes a crapshoot. Each school district takes a chance on an inexperienced teacher with no track record and hopes he or she will prove to be successful, usually with very little support from the district. When districts actually implement

improvement plans for unsuccessful teachers, the required steps are so intricate and time-consuming, that they are infrequently met, and therefore, even when districts attempt to remove teachers, the action is often successfully grieved.

As a result, districts are forced to “pass the trash,” or do “the lemon dance,” as termed in *Waiting for “Superman”* (2010). In larger school districts, principals move their ineffective teachers between schools, hoping there will be a different result in a different building. In smaller districts with only one building per school level, however, even this is not an option. Districts and, more importantly, students are trapped with poor teachers because of union contracts. The documentary provides statistics showing how difficult it is for teachers to lose their credentials in comparison to other professions. They report that one in 57 doctors lose their medical licenses; one in 97 attorneys lose their law licenses; shockingly, however, only one in 2500 teachers lose their teaching certification. While teachers’ unions were created to protect teachers from abuse, they are now prohibiting teacher growth and protecting ineffective teachers, resulting in damage both to students and to the public-school system. The incorporation of competition at every level of teacher preparation, hiring, and performance is necessary to the improvement of public education.

In addition to reforms that focus on hiring and retaining the most qualified and effective teachers, attention must be given to the varying factors that cause the persistence of a broken system, including subjective appointments of unqualified school boards and school administrators, the ineffectiveness of teacher evaluation systems, and frivolous litigiousness. Because of these unscrupulous practices, teachers require assurances that they will be protected. While unions may be viewed by some as a negative force that simply protects bad teachers, they remain a necessary protection for good teachers as well. Placing the best teachers possible in all

classrooms is the most effective way to assure student learning, but it requires that schools and officials be committed to solving problems at all levels.

Competition Within Schools NOT Between Schools

Many scholars, educators, politicians, and citizens are beginning to promote charter schools and school vouchers to create competition in education and provide choice to families stuck in failing schools. This becomes the focus of *Waiting for "Superman"* (2010). The film shows how successful charter schools can provide an enticing alternative for students and their families. However, the film fails to recognize the consequences of a system that relies on charter schools and non-traditional education. First, charter schools are given three to five years to prove effectiveness, and if they fail, the school is closed. This means that all of their students must find other options or return to the traditional public schools. There is also a lack of consistent standards in charter school regulation. Some see this as a benefit of charter schools because it allows for creativity and innovation. While this could be true, issues with oversight as charter schools grow in popularity would produce inconsistency of standards and educational expectations, which has been a major complaint of American public schools, resulting in legislation such as *No Child Left Behind* and the instituting of Common Core Standards.

While some believe that charters and vouchers are the best way to bring competition to education, most studies show that this type of competition between schools does not improve student achievement (Arsen, & Ni, 2012; Gibbons, Silva, & Machin, 2008; Lubienski, 2005). Results have found that public schools do not reallocate funds towards achievement-oriented goals, and charter schools focus on marketing and promotional strategies to be successful in the

marketplace, rather than directing their efforts towards student achievement and academic improvement. (Arsen & Ni, 2012; Lubienski, 2005).

While additional long-term studies are needed to consider the real impact of school choice on student achievement, charters and vouchers will never replace traditional public education. The majority of charter schools have opened in urban areas, but very few charters have been introduced in rural settings. It is unlikely that charters would be particularly successful in this setting, and few educators would initiate the process of chartering a school in an area that has a very low population. Whether charters and vouchers remain a viable alternative to traditional public education or not, it does not address the many students who will remain in the traditional educational system. These students will include rural students, students returning from failed charter schools, and urban students whose parents lack the skills and knowledge that competition affords. In order to attend these charters, families must initiate the enrollment process, which in itself is the commencing of competition. For many, who have been previously failed by the educational system, and who have been excluded from a middle-class world of competition, they see no reason to pursue education as a means to a better life. Students remaining in public schools deserve innovation and creativity as well, and reform of the public-school system will still be necessary.

Additionally, and more important to the main argument of this paper, school choice may provide competition between institutions, but it does nothing to encourage competition in the curriculum. Competition between schools is not the same as competition within schools. Students must be given opportunities in each school setting to display their talents and measure themselves against the abilities of others. The introduction of vouchers and charter schools

places public education in a more competitive marketplace, but this development only furthers the argument that students must be prepared for a competitive environment after schooling.

Competition in Education

Competition is missing in public education. Because of concerns about self-esteem and the need for cooperation, competition has received a negative connotation. It has become a concept that reflects a harshness that is contrary to ideas of educational achievement and student development. However, competition has been misrepresented. When implemented with other foundational values of individualism and equality, competition improves achievement, encourages innovation, and defines individuality. In an educational setting, competition can initiate cooperation and inspire creativity. However, the narrow acceptance of core academic requirements makes competition in the current system challenging. As schools continue to cut variety from their course offerings and focus on reading and math, as a result of high stakes testing, the talents of many students go unrecognized. Still, Americans value competition. Until this foundational value is embraced by public education, the perceptions towards the American education system will remain negative, and without personal investment of the American public, the educational system will fail.

CHAPTER 5

CHANGE

One of my favorite experiences as a teacher is when my former students come back to visit. Some have left for college or the military, and they return to share their achievements and reflect on their school days. Sometimes, former students bring their own young children to visit their old alma mater. They point to places they remember like where their locker was or their old spot in the cafeteria. They return to football games and chant cheers they remember from their days in school. There is a comfort in the nostalgia and a sense of security in the unchanging traditions.

After fourteen years of teaching, however, visiting former students have pointed out other unchanging elements in public education that are more concerning. During one visit, an alum picked up a textbook and shockingly asked, "Is this the same book we used when I was in school?" Disappointingly, I replied, "Yes," and then tried to consider the possible reasoning. I explained, "But, you know, we are able to get so many resources on the internet now; most teachers find their resources like that. We don't really use those old textbooks for too much anymore." In reality, I know that many other subjects like history, social studies, science, and health are using their textbooks quite frequently, and they are the same textbooks that were there when I started teaching.

Following a number of these reflective visits, I started to realize how little schools have ever really changed. Classrooms and school buildings across the country look strikingly similar today as they did generations ago. The image of teachers standing in front of a classroom, teaching children in linearly aligned desks where students raise their hands and await their turn

to be called upon is a common visual in American culture. While schools make efforts to "keep up with the times," they struggle to find the funding to make significant changes.

For teachers, when it comes to standards and expectations imposed upon them from governmental agencies, it sometimes seems like education is always changing. From Learning-Focused Schools to Common Core Standards, and from No Child Left Behind to Every Student Succeeds, teachers are bombarded with everchanging educational initiatives, all of which come and go without making substantial changes and improvements. It is clear that people want to change schools, and many elements of education are in need of change, but so much remains the same.

This chapter discusses the importance of change as a core American value and considers the negative implications of the American education system's resistance to change. In Part I of this chapter, I present a historical analysis of the value of change in American culture. Since Americans have historically viewed change as evidence of progress and growth, lack of change is perceived as lack of growth and progress. Each section in Part I introduces a historical time period in which change, progress, and growth were emphasized as necessary components for success as a nation. These include "Manifest Destiny," the "Industrial Revolution," and the "Digital Revolution." Part II of this chapter focuses on parts of the educational system that have been so resistant to change that they seem innately associated with schooling. These include the "Organization and Structure" of schools, "Curriculum," and the "Role of the Teacher." The final section of Part II, "Change Now," presents reasons for urgency in consideration of necessary change in American public education.

Part I: Progress and Growth

Throughout the previous three chapters, this dissertation laid out foundational values of individualism, equality and competition as essential components of American culture across eras. In each of these chapters, the definitions of these values were presented, and for each a level of contention existed in regards to these definitions. The prevailing reason for contention is a changing and evolving definition for each of the presented values. At one time, individualism may have been viewed as "rugged," and it was considered at odds with equality. At one time in America's history, universal equality as such was viewed within a global context of socialism or communism, causing many to apply a negative connotation to the term. This concern about a fundamental principle laid out in the Declaration of Independence marks an example of how contemporaneous political and diplomatic pressures can warp a word or even an idea in unanticipated ways. Critics view competition as a destructive concept that places too much emphasis on the success of a few. It is clear that the characterizations of these values have transformed over time, leaving room for dissent and interpretation. Throughout the history of United States culture, perhaps one of the most important foundational values is that of change. As we have seen, even the definitions of our core values have changed and evolved to align with the changing and progressing culture.

In his seminal work, *American Society,* Robin M. Williams (1951) identifies a comprehensive list of shared value orientations. However, in his conclusion he emphasizes the changing configurations and characterizations of these values. In fact, he dedicates the focus of his conclusion to this concept of change. He writes, "It must be always kept in mind that these themes, values, and systems of belief *do not operate as single and separate units* but *are in continually shifting and recombining configurations* marked by very complex interpenetration,

conflict, and reformulation" (p. 440). While he warns about generalizations, he then goes on to summarize his findings and further categorize the value orientations he has identified. Along with clear reference to values of individualism, equality, and competition, Williams also emphasizes change as a core component of American culture. He observes, "Its [American culture] world-view tends to be *open* rather than closed: it emphasizes change, flux, movement; its central personality types are adaptive, accessible, outgoing and assimilative," and "In wide historical and comparative perspective, the culture places its primary faith in *rationalism* as opposed to *traditionalism*; it de-emphasizes the past, orients strongly to the future, does not accept things just because they have been done before" (p. 441-442). In these few sentences Williams identifies the particular aspects of this value of change. For Americans, change signifies progress and growth, which has been observed through physical expansion connected with historically mythical notions of colonialism and Manifest Destiny; economic improvement and social mobility, characterized by the American dream and the Industrial Revolution; and knowledge attainment, which initiated scientific and technological advancements that reshaped everyday life.

Manifest Destiny

One of the most controversial yet potently influential examples of America's obsession with change is that of Manifest Destiny. No other ideology brought more devastation but also growth and expansion than this concept concretized into policy. It also popularized and ingrained a feeling of constant required growth in American culture. Even the shape of the nation on the map was understood to be in constant flux. Stemming from early Puritan ideals of "a citty upon a hill," Manifest Destiny was a concept that grew from a belief that America was

predestined, and therefore, its people were legitimated in their westward expansion, despite the brutality of racially based warfare that would cost both Native Americans and Mexicans, among others, their land and lives. It also grew out of a global competition to access and control what was not empty land, but what was nevertheless an underpopulated and vulnerable region of a resource-rich continent. Britain, France, and Spain contested North America at first. Later, it was the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Understood was the sad fact that a disorganized group of native nations without western concepts of land ownership would struggle but fail to resist the certainty of continental power competition. Amy S. Greenberg writes, “As a reflection of a deep-seated sense of superiority, as a rallying call, and as a smoke screen for immoral and sometimes illegal actions by both state and citizens, Manifest Destiny became one of the most influential ideologies in American history” (2018, p. 3). So as a matter of global power politics, and as a self-serving doctrine granting the United States permission to displace the earlier arrivals and assert control of the continent, Manifest Destiny was potent indeed.

Americans also saw its defeat of the great British army as such an unlikely feat that a common assumption was that God must have ordained it. In his appeals for American revolution against Britain, Thomas Paine had called on this pervasive sense of growth. In his book, *Beyond the Revolution: A History of American Thought from Paine to Pragmatism*, William H. Goetzmann writes, “According to Paine America was God’s country of the future. The spirit of revival, constant regeneration, and future-oriented habits of pragmatic thinking had already become basic to American thought” (2009, p. 5). In the early days of the new nation, the acquiring of land for personal farms was the common desire. When the country’s population tripled between 1790 and 1830, new settlers looked westward for their piece of the American dream. A later influx of German settlers included more than a few Hegelians, whose conviction

that history was the finger of God writing what must be fit nicely into this blithe assumption that whatever the United States had done, God had willed. While colonization of lands by Anglo-Saxon settlers was unexceptional throughout the globe in the nineteenth century, the level of mobility and the acceptance of great risk and hardships to gain land in America was unmatched (Greenberg, 2018). During this time, personal growth and success was evidenced by the acquisition of land. It is also important to remember that the settlement of the frontier was a grass-roots movement at least as much as a governmentally-ordained plan. In fact, the propensity of settlers – who saw themselves as refugees – to ignore Indian treaties and trespass into tribal lands, only to demand army protection later, was repeated again and again.

Although the well-known scholar and author of "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," (1893) Frederick Jackson Turner theorized that democracy and rugged individualism were outgrowths of the settling of "free land" in the American frontier, the reality of this history is that no land was free. As Henry Nash Smith (1950) laid out, "Virgin Land" was more mythic than real, although this myth was quite convincing and convenient for Americans. Expansionism in America included atrocities against the native peoples who first laid claim to the land, and in many circumstances gained legal treaties to the land that was later stolen once again. The wars of the frontier were brutal and featured little quarter given on either side. Yet the pattern was always the same: despite tenacious native opposition, the flood of settlers from across the Atlantic and Pacific and from the eastern states meant that the disconnected tribal nations could not hope to reverse the inexorable tide. All of this was done under the presupposition that white civilization was superior to others, and therefore, it was ordained by God that this civilization would expand. Turner, himself, reflects this presumption in his thesis

when he asserts, “the frontier is the outer edge of the wave, the meeting point between savagery and civilization.”

The portrayal of the native as a savage – noble or not -- only furthered the myth of the American frontier hero, who through God’s predetermination and the hero’s own hard work and ingenuity, gained control of nature and civilized the wild land and its inhabitants. The cultural movement of Romanticism brought with it a focus on inner reflection, emotion and idealization of rural life that made the frontier appeal all the more powerful. It furthered the obsession with the American frontier, which is noticed in the writing of authors like James Fenimore Cooper and his Leatherstocking Tales. Scholars have offered numerous interpretations of Cooper’s literature, from D. H. Lawrence’s (1923) critique that Cooper’s novels acted as an escape from a structured and civilized society into a rugged natural world, to Mark Twain’s satirical observations of Cooper’s “Literary Offenses” (1895), to various contemporary analysis that depicts Cooper’s work as a realistic portrayal of America’s justifiable expansion, a reliving of a shared national trauma, or a progressive challenge of the racial construct. By whatever inprepretation, the Leatherstocking Tales embody the ideology of Manifest Destiny and America’s obsession with the frontier, including its need to clear the land of the inhabitants already there (Baym, 1992; May, 2011; Mann 2007). In *The Prairie* (1827), characters discuss their abilities to track the natives’ footprints. Ishmael proclaims, “The plain is free from red-skins to night, at least.” To which Abiram replies, “I’ll not swear there are no savages near us. I, too, know something of the trail of a red-skin” (1987, p. 119). The treatment of the “savages” is like that of animals, complete with hunters using their tracking skills to assure there is no threat before they go to sleep. This, much like the treatment of blacks during slavery, was a key component in the justification of Manifest Destiny. Of course, Cooper was not unaware of the

tragic elements embodied by some of his nobler Indian characters. But instead of protest against displacement, the prevailing sentiment in his novels and across 19th Century American culture, was a wistful nod in the direction of inevitability. This is how the notion of the 'Vanishing American Indian' arose. The native people were destined to disappear from the pages of history, either wiped away by war or absorbed into the emergent national civilization. Thus, when the Native American civil rights movement reached maturity in the late 20th Century, the central tenet was the declaration to the rest of the United States, "We are still here." It took this civil rights movement to finally shove aside the pernicious erasure of native peoples from the American saga.

Additionally, Manifest Destiny was accelerated by The Second Great Awakening in the 1820's, a religious enlightenment that helped convince American protestants that it was their duty to spread their beliefs and help "awaken" others across the nation, including the natives and the Catholic territories, which drove expansion into Mexico. While the ideology of Manifest Destiny had already been a driving agent in the expansion of US territories, it was not until 1845 that the words appeared in written form. This editorial, which appeared in *United States Democratic Review,* stated this term in a propagandistic encouragement of the annexation of Texas. The author argued that foreign nations should stand aside and cease their obstruction of America's natural progress:

> It surely is to be found, found abundantly, in the manner in which other nations have undertaken to intrude themselves into it, between us and the proper parties to the case, in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfilment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions… (O'Sullivan, 1845).

This essay not only outlined the political favor for taking Mexican Texas, but it also highlighted the role of Manifest Destiny in achieving this goal, no matter the cost. As America advanced

into Texas, despite sixteen months of the bloodiest warfare in United States history, Anglo protestant settlers again interpreted this growth and success as ordained by God.

Additionally, economics drove the process. Mexico was poor and relatively weak; its Texas region was underpopulated, which was why the government allowed Stephen F. Austin to begin his settlement program. Of course, the relentlessly expansionist American ethos – which demanded national growth but also personal economic improvement – soon led the Texans, who wished to keep their primary source of wealth – slaves, not permitted under Mexican law. Texas independence was followed a decade later by the Mexican War, which saw the entire southwest brought under Washington's sway. Subsequent history shows that, however immoral these developments may have been, the American belief that settlement would lead to prosperous development was certainly borne out in the 20th Century.

Manifest destiny justified the atrocities, racism, deceit, and cruelty that Americans embraced in order for the nation to achieve what was viewed as inevitable and necessary growth and progress. The linkage of growth and progress is vital. Manifest Destiny wrapped national expansion, overall wealth creation, and personal enrichment into one tidy package. The realities of westward expansion also underscore its connection with economic pursuits, including the desire to improve international trade by gaining access to ports and shipping channels, and the extension of slavery, which provided significant financial gains to the wealthy plantation owners that moved west during this time. Much like the common popular history of the United States ignores the brutality and injustices of expansion, Manifest Destiny provided an excuse for America's growing obsession with change, progress, and growth.

Industrial Revolution

As the country looked westward in fulfilling its destiny to expand, it also experienced immense evolution in everyday living. From the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century, the mechanization of tasks led to advancement in technology as well as significant change in the social culture of the United States. This was at the heart of western civilization's great leap forward: the Industrial Revolution changed Europe and its outgrowths, the Americas, and Australasia. As an additional spoke in the wheel of progress, Americans sought more efficient means of completing necessary tasks, from the innovation of new tools to the construction of the steam engine, canals, and railways. Industrialization was seen as a necessary step in modernization and growth of the country. Furthermore, industrialization – frequently funded by British interests determined to profit from the westward settlement – amplified the mammoth difference between westward settlers and native peoples. The former were in fact the forward corps of the industrial revolution, while the latter lived in hunter-gatherer fashion. The attractiveness of industrial gains was, of course, appreciated by tribal nations, who were extremely glad to purchase goods beyond their manufacturing capability, such as tools and above all else, guns.

From these early days, Americans seemed particularly invested in growth and progress, but this was not unique to the United States. Well before industrialization in America, there were advancements in technology and mechanization in Europe. Some may even argue that many of the innovations in the United States were pirated from existing technology in Europe. However, the drive towards change and the willing mobility of Americans is particularly notable. Thomas C. Cochran observes in his book *Frontiers of Change*, "The tendency to innovation and

ready acceptance of the new in American culture had unique qualities stemming from the total historic environment" (1981, p. 11). He explains:

> To begin with, the colonists came from the European frontiers of change in respect to business and technology. By their decision to migrate, to risk the formidable dangers of a trans-Atlantic voyage from which perhaps a quarter to a third would die, they must have represented a segment of European populations with an unusual willingness to take new risks. (p. 11)

Cochran also recognizes the early colonist's need to figure out new ways of doing things in a new land. The unsettled nature of the place left life wide open for adaptation, which fit nicely into the developing character trait of pragmatism. Resources differed from those they were accustomed to in their home countries, and so survival depended on both adaptation and innovation. Additionally, a constant influx of immigrants provided a growing number of consumers as well as appreciation for skill over previous class membership. It was this attention to what a person could do rather than what family they belonged to that helped convince many people of the viability of the American Dream. Cochran asserts, "the potential for upward mobility no doubt inspired most young men in America in a way not possible in more stratified societies" (p. 12).

It was in these early decades of industrialization in which the foundation of technological advancement was laid, and during which it took hold not just on the ground, but in the minds of Americans and, consequently, in the institutions they were building. Most importantly, metal work and tooling would influence the creation and efficiency of American production, transportation and communication. The natural environment and resources of America led to ample opportunity to mine, improve, and shape metal. This metal would be used in the creation of tools like John Deere's steel plow, which transformed agricultural practices, as well as canals and railroads, which would revolutionize trade and travel. Canals boomed but then were quickly

deemed old-fashioned, however, with the development of the railroad. This is an example of the gleeful embrace of perpetual change. Americans were happy to embrace the canal, which opened up trade possibilities in inland regions. Then they were even happier to bypass canals in favor of the railroad. Later, of course, came the truck and the highway. Despite the romanticism of the frontier and the natural landscape of America, industrialization became a driving force of change and progress, and the railroad was the symbol of this revolution. By way of example, consider that when Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull defeated George Armstrong Custer's Seventh Cavalry at Little Big Horn in 1876, Philadelphia was busy hosting the Centennial "International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Products of the Soil and Mine," where ten million visitors strolled along the Schuylkill River fairgrounds to learn about monorails, calculators, telephones, typewriters, and electric dynamos. The total lack of awareness of what was happening to their east on the part of leaders such as Crazy Horse underscores the enormity of the gap in understanding between native peoples and the settlers moving in.

In his seminal work, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Leo Marx discusses the clashing values of the pastoral environment and the desire for industrial growth in America. He analyzes the work of some of the most esteemed American authors, including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Robert Frost, James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, and William Faulkner, and in their works he finds a recurring theme of startled interruption. The symbol of industrialization, the locomotive, is frequently seen as an alarming disruption to the serenity of nature, yet these two contradictions live simultaneously as ideals in American culture.

The railroad was certainly not only a symbol, but an essential element in industrial progress in the United States. Like the telegraph and the mill, the railroad focused on efficiency.

Where transportation of goods once took months, with the railroad, products could now be safely transported in weeks or even days. The telegraph assisted the railroad system, and it made communication far more efficient. Samuel Slater's mill, while it introduced the factory system that many, including Thomas Jefferson went on to criticize, also increased efficiency of production. America's obsession with efficiency and time was only intensified by improvements in banking. As manufacturers and innovators obtained loans, the concept that "time is money" became a potent reality.

Industrialization, however, was directed into military production by the Civil War. The result of ending sectional conflict and dismantling slavery opened doors for expansionism and increased industrialization. Factories fed the Union war machine, and continued production after Appomattox. The period of industrial advancement following the Civil War, often referred to as the second Industrial Revolution, was enhanced by a growing population of immigrants, urbanization, and the development of mass production. In his book, *The Dawn of Innovation* (2012), Charles R. Morris compares the growth of industrialization in the United States to other European nations, particularly Great Britain. From 1870-1900, immigration fueled a doubling of American population, from 35 million to 70 million. And it was industry's demand for labor that opened the gates to European and Asian immigration. While he observes that many of the methods of technological advancement in the first Industrial Revolution in America were learned from the British, he finds that mass production was the key to development for the Americans. He asserts, "Where the Americans wrote the rulebook, however, was in mass production, mass marketing, and mass distribution. The great nineteenth-century American economic invention, in short, was the first mass-consumption society" (p. 273).

Mass production was paramount in the construction of a continental infrastructure, which included the Transatlantic Railroad and telegraph lines that accompanied the railways. There were approximately 240,000 miles of rails by 1910, and this infrastructure made possible the mass production of meatpacking, farmed goods, petroleum and steel (Morris, 2012). Until Ida Tarbell's muckraking *History of Standard Oil* appeared in 1904 and the subsequent break-up of the company in 1906, John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil had a virtual global monopoly on petroleum. Mass production and the new efficient infrastructure made transportation and access to goods more viable for consumers. Department stores, like Macy's and Bloomingdale's, provided products for the home, which drastically changed the space, and lines of electricity and piped water systems further changed the everyday living of American families. These advancements improved the health and quality of American lives.

By the mid-twentieth century, innovations such as the radio, telephone, automobile, and later the television continued to change the nature of daily American life. By the 1930's American families gathered around radios to listen to sitcoms, music, soap operas, ballgames, and of course President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "fireside chats." Radios were cheap and nearly every household, even the poorest, had one. The nation was tied together in an electronic mass media grid. Automobiles, which first were considered luxuries for the wealthy, eventually, along with the development of concrete roads, traffic signals, and gas stations, became a necessity for the common person. It was yet another material symbol of progress and furthered the sense that mobility reflected growth. Frederick Lewis Allen, writing at the height of pride in American industrialism, explained that, "the automobile suited the American genius. For that genius was not static but venturesome; Americans felt that a rolling stone gathers experience, adventure, sophistication, and – with luck – new and possibly fruitful opportunities" (1952,

p.115). The automobile provided literal mobility to individuals and drastically changed the American landscape. The 1950's also saw the popularizing of the television, which created an expanded infrastructure for communication and information dissemination, all of which improved the convenience and quality of life of Americans. By the end of the second Industrial Revolution, America's position in the world was well established, and a higher quality of life for individuals served as evidence that change equates to betterment, furthering America's commitment to this ideal.

Digital Revolution

Following the Industrial Revolutions, America surged towards another dramatic advancement of technology. The late twentieth century welcomed new technology that would again revolutionize the way of life in America and the world. The Digital Revolution was spurred by the development of the computer and later the internet. In 1975, the personal computer was created, but it did not become affordable enough for most individuals to own until the mid-1980's when Apple released the Macintosh computer. Prior to the Mac, personal computing was more of a hobby for technically-minded enthusiasts. After the Mac appeared, the computer became a common household appliance and a requirement in offices. A decade later, the internet was gaining popularity, and by 2007 the iPhone would make internet access mobile, a tipping point that many see as the most significant change in the digital age. Julie M. Albright asserts, "Although changing economic circumstances from post-World War II through the 2000's began to change the complexion of American society, it wasn't until the introduction of the internet-enabled iPhone in 2007 that seismic changes in society really began" (2019, p. 59) These innovations have affected communication and connectivity on a global scale, and they

continue to change nearly every facet of human life, including access to information, healthcare, commerce, and entertainment. The pace at which these changes have occurred also seems to be accelerating. Americans are constantly looking for the new "thing" and racing to be the first one to have it.

While the digital age brought immense technological advancement, uncertainty about how society will be affected as a result of these unprecedented changes continues to awe and concern economists and social scholars alike. Klaus Schwab, the founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, argues that the coming changes will be so fast, broad, and deep that the impact will be distinctly different from that we have experienced thus far in the digital age. We certainly feel the effects of what he describes as we adjust to each new communications platform, from Facebook to Instagram to TikTok. Therefore, he maintains that we are at the beginning of a fourth Industrial Revolution, one in which, "The changes are so profound that, from the perspective of human history, there has never been a time of greater promise or potential peril" (2016, p. 2). Throughout his provocative text, he considers the future impact of technology that has once seemed the things of science fiction but are now quickly becoming realities. From autonomous vehicles, to 3D printing that will have the capability to print organs for medical transplants, to gene sequencing that could allow for "designer babies," Schwab describes a technological revolution that dramatically alters the economy and has the potential to upend governments that lack the speed to make policies as fast as technology advances.

Albright (2019) observes the changing values of digital natives as they grow up in the digital age. Spurred by the consistently changing technologies around them, and by the instantaneous culture it has produced, digital natives seek change and avoid commitments unlike

any generation that has come before them. Despite the consistent obsession with change and progress that has been seen in previous decades, digital natives are abandoning many of the values that previously reflected growth and success. While cars and homes were once "status symbols" that showed what a person has achieved, digital natives are less concerned with material acquisition of "things" and more interested in experiences. Albright finds that digital natives are embracing a "sharing economy," using sites such as Uber and Airbnb rather than owning homes and personal vehicles. Additionally, Millennials expect to be able to access information and purchase items immediately, with customization and mediation. Digital technologies allow us to get news twenty-four hours a day, receive delivery of groceries within hours, grab a shared bike or scooter to get to our destination, and pick up a food or drink order without interacting with a single human. Albright illustrates the evolution from the industrial age to the contemporary digital age:

> The industrial era ushered in the process of assembly-line production, a process that would be used in many manufacturing settings. It resulted in periods of mass homogenization, beginning with Henry Ford's assembly line for improving the production of automobiles…In recent years, a backlash against this kind of mass uniformity has begun. We are increasingly living in a customizable world. Social media has made it possible for each individual to personalize his or her world, a mirror of narcissism reflected back to him or her. The untethered are coming to expect commodity and service providers to personalize products and services to their unique needs and desires. They're used to customized information streams, and following or friending people they are interested in. If they don't like it, they can simply hide, unfollow, unfriend, or block. It's no longer a "one size fits all" world. (p. 81)

While the digital age is in many ways a continuation of the industrialization of America, technology has changed our lives in unprecedented ways, including our values and perspectives of the world, our relationships with one another, and the environment around us. The discontents we feel across the culture about mass production can be seen in the early 21st century vogue for artisanal goods – from microbrewed beers, to small-scale cheeses, to locally-sourced restaurants

and hand-crafted items of all sorts. At the same time, a sort of nostalgia for the employment security once offered by mass employment emerged as many factories closed and moved production overseas in search of cheaper labor. Films such as *Grand Torino* and the popular appeal of pro-tariff, anti-free trade policies of President Donald Trump signal a longing for the years when a unionized auto or steel worker could be assured of a reasonable standard of living and a decent retirement amidst a life of factory labor.

Another set of scholars from MIT, Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee express their concerns about the impact new technologies and automation will have on the economy. While the authors end their text by providing encouraging and optimistic views about the benefits of technology, the focus of the book, *Race Against the Machine* (2014), is on the potential challenges facing workers in a highly digitized society that continues to change at an accelerated pace. They contend:

> Digital technologies change rapidly, but organizations and skills aren't keeping pace. As a result, millions of people are being left behind. Their incomes and jobs are being destroyed, leaving them worse off in absolute purchasing power than before the digital revolution. (p. 29)

This concern over the loss of jobs to technological advancement is echoed throughout the literature, as well as the concern over the capability of leadership to properly plan and adapt to the changing economy and culture. The digital age has brought astounding advancement, but as technology evolves at ever increasing speed, those parts of society that have failed to change at the same pace seem evermore obsolete and antiquated. As American public K-12 schools seem to fall more and more into this category of static institutions, the perceptions of the American public become more critical and less invested in supporting public education.

Part II: Can Schools Change?

As observed in our reflections on Manifest Destiny, industrialization, and the digital revolution, change does not always equate to progress and growth, yet in the eyes of most Americans these terms are synonymous. "New and improved," sounds almost redundant in advertising sometimes. If our lives, our economy, our technology, our society is stagnant, then we are failing. It is not my intent or purpose to argue the validity or weaknesses of this thinking, but simply to observe it as an important ideology in American culture. While history has witnessed vast and drastic change in a multitude of areas in American society, one institution that has remained remarkably resistant to change is America's K-12 public education system.

School organization, curriculum, and daily routines have remained the same since the creation of the "factory school" during the Industrial Revolution. This style of school was created to meet the needs of an evolving society, which moved from a primarily agrarian culture to an urban factory setting. Students who had once learned knowledge and skills from parents and family in order to participate in the farming or domestic duties of adult life were now gathering in mass numbers to participate in state regulated schools, which focused on assimilating immigrants into American culture, removing children from employment competition, and producing an educated citizenry that could participate in the democratic process.

This was a dramatic change in education, which was done in order to meet the needs of a transforming society. Spurred by industrialism, schools mimicked factories by having large numbers of students placed into classrooms, learning standardized skills and producing workers prepared to participate in industrialized society. In his groundbreaking and provocative text

Future Shock (1970), Alvin Toffler draws a parallel between public schools and factories during the Industrial Revolution:

> The whole idea of assembling masses of students (raw material) to be processed by teachers (workers) in a centrally located school (factory) was a stroke of industrial genius. The whole administrative hierarchy of education, as it grew up, followed the model of industrial bureaucracy. The very organization of knowledge into permanent disciplines was grounded on industrial assumptions. Children marched from place to place and sat in assigned stations. Bells rang to announce changes of time. The inner life of the school thus became an anticipatory mirror, a perfect introduction to industrial society. (p. 400)

With a level of sarcasm as to its benefits, Toffler shows how schools were altered and designed to meet the needs of a changing society. American society had grown in population with a momentous influx of immigrants, many of whom did not speak English; growth in urban settings was unprecedented, and the advancement of technology had changed the types of work that most people were doing. This type of school structure was efficient and effective for the time. However, the problem is that schools remain heavily tied to this same model despite radical social change since the Industrial Revolution, and they continue to be resistant to true reform.

In their text, *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology* (2018), Allan Collins and Richard Halverson attempt to explain this resistance to change. They break down the varying components of the educational system, such as grade grouping, scheduling, curricula, and physical environments, showing how they are interdependent, creating a complex system that is remarkably resilient:

> In each school and district, these features of the instructional system weave together to form a complex system. As school systems evolved, their components have developed mutual interdependencies, together to establish an equilibrium that reflects a balance among system components…The establishment of an equilibrium does not mean that the system stops moving. Rather, it means that the components of the system have achieved a balance, such that changes in the size of the student body or the location of the school are incorporated without changing the basic arrangement of system components. Once established, it is often difficult to move a complex system out of equilibrium. (p. 32)

Innovations and reforms have dominated education in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but no significant change has ever been affected. According to Collins and Halverson, this is because any attempt to change one component of the complex system of education is met with resistance from other components in an attempt to return to equilibrium, causing schools to remain stagnant.

This observation that schools have not changed significantly in decades is certainly not a recent realization, but contemporary developments in technology, which allow for easy access to endless educational opportunities, have pushed this inadequacy to the forefront of critical commentary about public schools. While schools reflect the values of early industrial America, the digital age has made it possible for an individual to learn nearly any topic of their choice at their fingertips. Meanwhile, young people are still forced to come to school and spend every day learning material that not only fails to engage them or meet their interests, but which also likely no longer represents skills or knowledge necessary for life in the real world. Until public schools attempt to embrace the change that has already occurred in the larger society, it will continue to be viewed as a failed institution that no longer adequately meets the needs of society. Specifically, three categories much be addressed in order for schools to progress: organization and structure, curriculum, and the role of the educator.

Organization and Structure

The overall organization and structure of schools is constrained by subjective considerations of time, space, and hierarchy. As previously discussed, this structure made perfect sense in a society that needed to meet a variety of needs in a diverse and growing

population, but many of these traditional practices remain today, even though they no longer meet the needs of contemporary society.

The time constraints of the "school day" once provided a convenient time for students to learn and parents to work. Recall this chapter's earlier points about the railroad and its effect on considerations of time. The same principle applied to the factory, with its shift-announcing whistle. And it still applies to schools. School typically began when the workday began, which allowed parents to work and care for household matters while childcare was supplied, and like the workday, children would be released at a specified time after meeting the required hours for the day. This continues today despite both parents often being in the workforce and having expanded shifts and varying work schedules. In addition to the manufacturing sentiment associated with the "punching" of a time clock, there also remain unnecessary and antiquated practices related to the needs of a primarily agricultural society. Most states today still incorporate a "summer vacation," in which students do not attend school for several months. Even with substantial evidence that large amounts of student learning is lost during this time, and with both parents working, causing childcare issues for the family, the tradition continues.

Time constructs and constraints also dominate the standards by which students progress through their education. With a mass education paradigm, teachers teach material at a pace by which the typical student can learn. In recent decades, there has been some consideration of the variations among student ability, so differentiation and Individualized Education Plans were introduced as best practices to improve student learning and meet the needs of all students. As these responsibilities, along with a host of others, are piled upon teachers, the difficulties of a single teacher providing all students with individualized educational supports becomes strikingly evident. Most teachers do their best to accommodate and differentiate, but they find themselves

constantly struggling to meet the ever-evolving and varying needs of each student. And so, there remains a "one size fits all" mentality in education. Students study the same subjects, beginning the unit at the same time, and being assessed at the end of the unit, at which time they are expected to have mastered the material. This time table for learning endures despite the obvious differences among students and the growing technological resources available to improve student learning in the twenty-first century.

The number of minutes and hours that students are required to study a discipline is also a subjective time construct. In their book, *Tinkering Toward Utopia* (1995), David Tyack and Larry Cuban explain the history of the Carnegie Unit. This "unit" was defined by Henry S. Pritchett, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, as "a course of five periods weekly throughout an academic year" (p. 91). Initially, the Carnegie Unit was meant to be guidance for a small number of high schools in order to prepare students for college admittance. However, within a short while, this measure became a structural foundation of public schooling, especially at the high school level, and it continues to be of essential importance in the school structure today. Tyack and Cuban assert, "So firmly has this academic accounting device – quickly labeled the Carnegie unit – been established in the operating routines of high schools that successive attempts to dislodge it have been unsuccessful" (p.91). Critics emerged quickly arguing that the Carnegie unit "had frozen schedules, separated knowledge into discrete boxes, and created an accounting mentality better suited to a bank than a school. Learning was becoming institutionally defined as serving seat time" (p. 93). Still, the system has persisted, and students today continue to "clock" in and out to have their learning time recorded. This system is likely even more ineffective today, since there are more advocates for promoting students despite learning outcomes, fearing the emotional distress and stigma that

students endure when they are "held back." The result is that many students fail to learn or retain the information at a level that would be considered mastery, and instead they attend, are disengaged, and simply bide their time.

In addition to the unaltered construct of time in schooling, the physical construct of the school has also gone generally unaltered over much of the last century. School buildings are still filled with separate classrooms containing several students and a teacher. There are blackboards or whiteboards and desks throughout the room. The building contains a central office with secretaries and administrators, a cafeteria that can hold a large number of students eating in mass, a gymnasium for sporting events and physical education, and an auditorium for school-wide gatherings. This physical structure is strikingly similar to the original "egg-crate school." Tyack (1974) discusses John Philbrick's architectural design and its lasting impact on the educational system:

> Philbrick knew that educational function necessarily reflected architectural form…The building was four stories high, with a large auditorium for 700 pupils and twelve classrooms, each of which would accommodate 56 students. Every teacher had a separate classroom for the one grade she taught, each scholar his own desk. (p. 44-45).

Philbrick's design for the 1848 Quincy School continues to dictate a multitude of related elements of schooling, including scheduling, student grouping, and curriculum. Educational scholars and administrators built from this foundation, including William Wirt, who in the industrial spirit, devised a scheduling system that increased the efficient use of space by using a bell that dismissed students who then rotated into different classrooms. This system made certain that every space was efficiently utilized throughout the day (Callahan, 1962; Collins & Halverson, 2018). Today, most schools continue to use this bell system initiated by Wirt in 1910.

Contemporary public K-12 schools also reflect a hierarchy innately present in the manufacturing setting. Schools are divided into local "districts" and are supervised by a superintendent. A board of stakeholders makes major decisions with the guidance of the superintendent. Individual schools within a district have a single administrator who is in charge of the teachers and the entire body of students enrolled in the school. Some building administrators have assistants to whom they can delegate some of the supervision of teachers and students. Each teacher is assigned his or her own space and accompanying students for which he or she is responsible. This too was a construct of John Philbrick, who proclaimed, "Let the Principal or Superintendent have the general supervision and control of the whole, and let him have one male assistant or sub-principal, and ten female assistants, one for each room" (Tyack, 1974, p. 45). With the exception of the gender bias that deemed principals to be male and teachers to be female, the remainder of this decree exists in today's hierarchy of schools.

The similarity of the organization and structure of the modern school to that of the early twentieth century school is both shocking and concerning. The lack of flexibility apparent in the structure and organization of schools presents particular challenges in changing other elements of the educational system. Since the physical buildings are often one of the most expensive components of public schooling, major changes are particularly challenging. However, new schools are built every year following a model that was constructed over a century ago. While scheduling and particular constructs of time had constraints in the early twentieth century, many of those obstacles could be overcome and learning for a diverse population of students could be improved using technology that was not available decades ago. Even the hierarchical structure of schooling and the extreme locality should be reconsidered, as many of these factors sustain authoritarian principles that are outdated in much of contemporary American society and

perpetuate issues of equity between schools. It is unlikely that real change can occur in public schooling without major alterations to the structure and organization of schools.

Curriculum

In today's public schools, "core classes" are designated as English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. With the advent of Common Core Standards in 2009, particular emphasis was given to English Language Arts and Math, but literacy-based standards for Science and Social Studies were also established. Tests were developed to assess students, teachers, and schools on how well students learned the Common Core standards. While the development of Common Core was viewed as a national reform, before Common Core standards, most states already had similar standards and were testing students to assure learning of these standards. Common Core gave no reconsideration to the required core subjects, but it increased the accountability for schools to teach specific content within these subject areas. Curricular reforms have been the most frequently attempted changes in public schools, but like Common Core, these reforms only attempt to act within the various constraints present in the current system, and therefore, very little change is actually affected.

In the late 19th century, educators like John Pritchett, William Torrey Harris and the Committee of Ten established a required curriculum for high school students. Along with developing standardized concepts of time and credits, they also identified the subjects of English, mathematics, Latin, Greek, foreign languages, history, and science as the required subjects, which Tyack and Cuban (1995) observe "gave pride of place to traditional academic disciplines" (p. 92). This practice of valuing certain academic subjects perpetuates a devaluing of other subjects, departments, and talents, which negatively affects a variety of elements of school

culture. Additionally, this core curriculum has experienced very little change in the more than a century since its inception. Collins and Halverson (2018) assert, "With the exception of Latin and Greek, the core courses that the Committee of Ten established make up the bulk of the academic high school curriculum today" (p. 57).

In order to assure that students were learning the standard curriculum, examinations and assessments were required. In the early days of mass schooling, the use of testing became necessary to keep track of the progress of a large number of students and to approve promotion. Tyack (1974) writes, "Since promotion and grading depended on examinations and examinations upon the curriculum, all learning had to be carefully structured" (p. 45). In this structure, uniformity of education is key. All students must learn the same material, take the same test, and follow the same progress through grade levels to reach graduation. With the advent of standardized testing, which provides the same test to students across schools in order to compare achievement and learning, testing has become more impactful.

Standardized curriculum and testing also provides a barrier to change in American schools. Teachers are required to teach particular content and have very little autonomy as to curricular and instructional decisions. Students also receive no choice in the content they are required to learn nor the means by which they learn it. State and federal testing requirements further limit the ability for schools to enact change. With the pressures to "pass the test," schools are tentative to enact change that may retract from the learning of required curriculum.

More than a century after the main facets of the core curriculum were established, we are left asking why these subjects continue to be the information deemed to be essential learning. Most of us have forgotten much more of the content learned in school than what we remember, and yet people live as productive members of our communities and the larger society. With the

creation of new technologies, there has been an explosion of potentially important knowledge. Still, students continue to learn comprehensive content in the core subjects of English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Why? Most people would not argue that reading, writing, and effective communication skills are not essential to contemporary life. But is it essential that all students learn to define and identify verbals? Most people would agree that students must be able to add, subtract, multiply and divide, but is it necessary that every single student be tested on their knowledge of algebraic equations?

During the advent of American schooling, the purpose of education was to prepare students for everything they would need to know for adult life. As the Industrial Revolution added new knowledge, schools added more years to cover the information. Since then, knowledge has exploded to a point that it would be impossible for schools to attempt to cover all the knowledge necessary for adult life. At the same time, access to knowledge is easier than at any other point in human history. Scholars like Allan Collins and Richard Halverson (2018) argue that major curricular change is necessary to meet the needs of a changing American culture that has become accustomed to customization and instant access to information. It is no longer necessary to teach students content that they may need to know as an adult because technology provides access to that information when they need it. They write, "*School fosters just-in-case learning, while technology fosters just-in-time learning*" (p. 46). Collins and Halverson argue that schools should use technology to teach students how to learn rather than stipulating the material that they must learn. They recognize, however, that continued standardization and the complex interconnected system that schools have become presents considerable obstacles to change.

Role of the Teacher

Another sector of American schooling that has remained unchanged for over a century is the role of the teacher. At the beginning of public education, the teacher was the means by which students gained information and understanding. Learning took place because teachers, who held the knowledge that students needed to learn, disseminated that knowledge to students. This was usually done by the teacher standing in the front of the room, speaking or lecturing about a topic, while students took notes, studied, and then were tested on their ability to comprehend and retain the learned material. Today, educators refer to this as "the sage on the stage," and it is discouraged as an outdated practice. Yet, direct instruction of material typically still occurs by teachers presenting information, usually supported by a slide presentation to fulfill the needs of visual learners, standing in front of a class filled with students who are taking notes that are expected to aid further learning and successful completion of an examination. With the exception of infused technological aids like Powerpoint or Google Slides, reduced time for direct instruction, and the incorporation of differentiated scaffolding options like cloze notes and test accommodations, this depiction is markedly similar to the role of the teacher in the late nineteenth century. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) quip, "Basic instructional methods, involving a teacher lecturing to rows of passive students, have changed little in centuries. As the old joke goes, it's a system for transmitting information from the notes of the lecturer to the notes of the student without going through the brain of either" (p.61). As ineffective as this method is perceived, the practice continues.

The role of the teacher as expert is central to the traditional model of schooling. This concept can be a particularly challenging obstacle when attempting to affect real change to the current educational system. Especially in secondary education, teacher preparation programs

focus on providing teachers with in-depth knowledge of an academic subject. The teacher then, in addition to being an expert in the subject, controls the content and information presented. There are few opportunities for students to delve deeper into a topic they find interesting, which is not only a product of teacher control, but also a result of the teacher's obligation to cover significant amounts of required materials in a specified period of time. Despite the clear benefits of student-centered learning that allows the student to determine their path of learning, few teachers are willing to relinquish control.

The teacher's role as expert also serves to support an authoritarian position over students. The role of teacher as authoritarian is a long-standing perception, and one that has inspired rebellion. The depiction of this dynamic has become a common narrative in film and television. From *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) to *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) and the recent controversial Netflix series *13 Reasons Why* (2017), teachers and students are shown in opposition of one another. Teachers are seen as controlling, monotonous, and detached from the experiences of their students. In the cult classic novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), the complicated, anxiety-ridden adolescent character, Holden Caulfield, reveals the contentious emotions resulting from his experience with his authoritarian teachers and his conformity demanding school. Holden often refers to the "phoniness" of his teachers, and he finds that even as he reaches out for relationships with adults, he consistently finds that they talk down to him and take on a fake teacher persona in their interactions with him. Caulfield is the personification of teenage angst and rebellion, having been expelled from four preparatory schools for his refusal to conform. Young people, like Caulfield, rebel against authority in hopes of gaining their own autonomy. For some, this may be considered the coming of age experience in which teenagers, not quite prepared for adult life, begin to rebel against the authoritarian world of parents and teachers. But

in contemporary society, relationships, even those between parents and children, are viewed as much less authoritarian than they once were. In work places, many bosses try to create a cooperative environment without the obvious hierarchy once present in industrial America. In schools, however, teachers are still the authority in their classroom.

The role of the teacher as the authoritarian expert also ignites negative perceptions connected to anti-intellectualism in American culture. Throughout various time periods in American cultural history, intellect has been attacked as an elitist notion that was at best unproductive for real life and at worst a threat to the common person. In his text, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963), Richard Hofstadter discusses the fluctuating role of the intellectual. He observes the growth of anti-intellectualism during the Cold War and McCarthyism, but a swift change in the perception of intellectualism following the launching of Sputnik. Aaron Lecklider emphasizes the growth of intellectualism during this time in his book, *Inventing the Egghead* (2013). Lecklider discusses the origination of the "egghead," a character initially depicted on *Newsweek* magazine that presented the modernized intellectual. The egghead quickly became a controversial representation of intellectual elitism that contradicted traditional American values. Before the professionalization of education, however, public schools and their teachers were criticized for a lack of intellect and general ignorance, and even today, the low salaries and devaluing of the teaching profession is representative of the pervasiveness of anti-intellectualism.

In order to affect real change, the teacher's role must change as well. If students are to pursue individualized curriculum, made possible by new technologies, then teachers become facilitators of learning rather than the source of all knowledge. New technologies such as computer adaptive learning systems can provide a learning experience that tailors to the needs of

the student. As students move through these computer adaptive programs, the computers assess student learning, provide immediate feedback, and allow students to progress at their own pace with individualized scaffolded supports. This technology can provide individualized learning in a way that no human teacher could, when being expected to educate students en masse.

The transition from classroom authority to facilitator of learning can be difficult for many teachers that have dedicated a great deal of their lives to becoming respected experts, so they can pass their knowledge onto the next generation. Some critics argue that this type of transition will see teachers being replaced by computers, but the reality is that teachers do much more than provide knowledge to students. Teachers are mentors and supporters that inspire students to have the confidence to pursue their interests and talents. For all of the negative characterizations of teachers in popular media, there are just as many stories of inspiration and compassion. Films like *Stand and Deliver*, *Dangerous Minds*, and *To Sir, With Love* all show the important role that teachers play in supporting and mentoring young people. *Freedom Writers* is a film based on the real-life story of a dedicated teacher that sacrificed significant elements of her personal life to provide opportunity and inspiration to struggling students. In addition to mentoring and inspiring, teachers push students to think outside of their own perspectives and challenge previous beliefs and ideas. Teachers model character and compassion, and they take the time to listen to students as they navigate the world. Collins and Halverson (2018) argue that teachers will never be able to be replaced by computers:

> Teachers bring many things to learning that computers can never match. The best teachers inspire their students to believe in themselves and to work hard to accomplish their goals. They open up possibilities that parents and children may never see. They challenge learners' prior beliefs and encourage them to consider alternative ways to believe and to act. In the educator's view, computers are mere dispensers of content, and content is not the most important thing to learn as children grow up. (p. 38)

While computers offer a level of individualized learning that has never been possible before, teachers will be more important than ever. As social media and online culture allows for individuals to live in echo chambers in which their own beliefs and ideas are constantly reflected, the teacher's responsibility to challenge perceptions becomes even more essential. Navigating the immense number of resources and evaluating their validity will also be an important duty of teachers. Technology will also provide teachers with time and opportunities to conduct authentic learning experiences for their students. Instead of spending all of their time disseminating knowledge through direct instruction and conducting assessments, teachers can work with students on real-world projects or focus on interpersonal experiences where they gain depth of knowledge and understanding. The work that teachers do can never be replaced, but it will be essential that the role of the teacher changes.

Change Now

Despite Americans' obsession with change, growth, and progress, public schools continue to be remarkably resistant to change. This fact seems odd when pointed out, yet it is also indubitable. Schools seem to be one sector of the economy that are not subject to the same impulse for change – even for change's own sake. However, now may be the breaking point for America's K-12 schools. Knowledge, learning and education have been connected to public schooling for over a century, but society's view of these terms is changing. Availability of information and ease of access is unlike any other time in human history. People are learning to complete tasks that would have previously only been performed by experts with formal education in that field. If people want to learn about an aspect of history, vast volumes of information are available instantaneously. Free online learning is available for both children and

adults by means of educational organizations like Kahn Academy, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course), and shared networks like makerspaces. Anyone can choose to learn about any topic and work in cooperative online spaces where they can receive assistance and feedback.

Technology has changed the perceptions of knowledge, learning and education from being inevitably connected with schooling to being an individualized experience that can be accessed from anywhere. Schools have been so resistant to change for so long, that the central question becomes, "Can schools change?" Collins and Halverson (2018) suggest that if they can't, "then the long identification of schooling with education, developed over the past 150 years, will dissolve into a world where the students with the means and ability will pursue their learning outside of public school" (xvii). If this happens, public schooling would still be forced into dramatic change in order to remain relevant and provide necessary services in society, or it may inevitably become an ineffective system that widens equity concerns, causing its own demise.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Core American Values

When Robin M. Williams Jr. (1952) embarked on the endeavor to identify and explain the cultural and social structures of America, his intention was to, "provide a reasonably compact survey" (vii). After over five hundred pages, Williams had provided a detailed and comprehensive evaluation of American society. While elements of the work, like many other foundational texts, reflect outdated and even offensive perspectives by today's standards, Williams effectively observed and recorded particular elements of a shared American culture. In contemporary fields of scholarship, focus is given to the drastically differing cultures existent within the United States, and there are even some that would argue that attempting to discover a shared culture within this diverse population is futile. Recognition of various cultures and histories that often have been omitted from the American narrative is certainly imperative in creating an inclusive and honest depiction of the American experience. Still, while there are numerous subcultures that exist within the United States, it is possible to identify shared core values in American culture without retracting from the acknowledgement of diversity and the importance of inclusiveness in the American narrative. In his time at Cornell, Williams observed that, "students of the most varied backgrounds and academic interests were eager to gain some systematic view of the total social structure" (vii). This desire to find commonality and understand the broader perspective of the whole system, including how each part of the whole is interrelated, is of particular importance in today's complex society.

Williams was followed by L. Robert Kohls, as he attempted to identify *The Values Americans Live By* (1984). Again, Kohls's purpose in creating this list, which consisted of

providing information to foreign visitors and immigrants in hopes of helping them assimilate into American culture, is certainly a crude perspective of immigration, reflecting antiquated notions of American exceptionalism. However, Kohls's list continues to be used for various purposes in contemporary studies of American culture and throughout popular media, from guides for foreign exchange students attending American Universities to webpages promoting green living (Calhoun, 2018).

While there are rhetorical differences and variations within specified values, there is substantial overlap in the findings of Williams and Kohls, which accentuate individualism, equality, competition, and change as values of particular importance. Each author presented several values that are related to and could be categorized under the core value of individualism. Williams includes values of "Individual Personality" and "Freedom," while Kohls lists "Personal Control Over the Environment" and "Self-Help" in addition to "Individualism, Independence, and Privacy." Within the interpretations of American individualism, concepts of freedom, personal control and self-help act as examples of the broader value of individualism in America. Both authors directly list equality as a value, and Williams (1952) adds the value of democracy, which he admits is, "subsumed under other value complexes," including individualism and equality (p. 432). While Kohls lists "Competition" outright, both include, "Materialism/Acquisitiveness" as the just rewards for hard work, and Williams lists "Achievement and Success" as a value orientation. In his description, he repeatedly discusses the importance of competition in order to achieve success. He writes, "Our society has been highly competitive – a society in which ascribed status in the form of fixed, hereditary social stratification has been minimized," and, "The comparatively striking feature of American culture is its tendency to identify standards of personal excellence with competitive occupational

achievement" (p. 390). Finally, the core value of change is reflected in multiple items on both lists. Kohls lists "Change/Mobility," in addition to "Time and It's Importance," "Future Orientation/Optimism," "Action and Work Orientation," and "Practicality/Efficiency," all of which are closely tied to ideals of progress and growth, defining elements of the core value of change in American culture. Williams also lists "Efficiency and Practicality," as well as "Progress," and he includes, "Science and Secular Rationality," which was a symbol of growth in human understanding and intellect. While both authors include additional peripheral items as identified values, reflecting an evolving culture from the 1950's to the 1980's, it is clear that the emphasis placed on the fundamental values of individualism, equality, competition and change underscore their significance and endurance, establishing them as the core American values.

Negative Perceptions of the American Public Education System

Only 23% of Americans, when asked to grade the nation's public schools, gave the system an A or B (Henderson, 2017). For a multitude of proposed reasons, Americans predominantly view K-12 public schools in a negative perspective. Data from opinion surveys, including Gallup, Worlds Values Surveys, and the Center for Public Affairs Research, as well as scholarly research into trends like homeschooling, cyber schooling, school choice, and charter schools reflect the growing discontent with America's public K-12 education system. Through all the reforms to public education, no reform has considered the importance of placing core American values as the building block for change.

The core values of individualism, equality, competition, and change are essential to the lives of Americans, and when schools fail to embrace and reflect these values in American schools, cognitive dissonance is created. Festinger's (1957) theory explains that when there are

conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors, this creates mental and emotional distress, leading people to reduce the disharmony. In perceptions of public schools, despite most people having some positive experiences and understanding the importance of the institution, its refusal to embrace core values causes dissonance, resulting in a negative perception of the public education system. This belief helps destroy the inconsistency between a person's fundamental acceptance of core American values and a system of education that fails to fully embrace those core values.

Perceptions are particularly important for students attending schools in the public K-12 education system. Student perceptions of schools affect their emotions and behaviors, which in turn form their environments and affect their perceptions of those environments. If students come to school with a preconceived belief that schools are unnecessary or fail to match their personal values, students are less likely to engage in learning and find success in education. Many studies have found that engaged students learn and retain more, and student engagement affects overall achievement in connection to standardized testing, school grades, and resilience (Akey, 2006; Downson and McInerney, 2001; Hancock and Betts, 2002; Lumsden, 1994; Kirsch et al., 2002). Students who have a negative view of education are unlikely to be engaged and experience the benefits of public schooling.

J.D. Vance eloquently describes how this concept impedes groups most in need of the advancing quality of education. In his memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy,* which reflects on the personal struggles of families and communities encountering generational poverty, mental health issues, and addiction, he observes:

> Social psychologists have shown that group belief is a powerful motivator in performance. When groups perceive that it's in their interest to work hard and achieve things, members of that group outperform other similarly situated individuals. It's obvious why: If you believe that hard work pays off, then you work hard; if you think it's hard to get ahead even when you try, then why try at all? (p. 193)

This perfectly sums up the reason that school reform needs to give attention to public perceptions of education. Before decisions can be made about improving public schools, we need to listen to the experiences and concerns of the public. Perceptions have an effect on behavior, and in order for anyone to benefit from the many resources that schools provide, there needs to be belief and investment in the opportunities that education can afford.

Embracing the Core American Values in America's Schools

Public perceptions of schooling and the resulting negative outcomes call for serious reforms that not only address curriculum and accountability but that completely reevaluate the system of schooling. When the American public-school system was initially developed, it was built to meet the needs of society at that time. The global society has changed so drastically that it is necessary for American public schools to implement drastic change to meet the needs of contemporary society. It is essential that reformers consider the values that are most fundamental and important to Americans when making these changes. As has been discussed, the lack of emphasis on the foundational values of individualism, equality, competition, and change has created dissonance and a lack of clear purpose. Rebuilding a system on these foundations will provide the clear focus necessary.

Embracing Individualism

Schools that embrace individualism will recognize that modern American individualism requires choice. Students and parents need more opportunities to determine a student's path of learning. This includes the purpose and goals of their schooling, the content of their curriculum, and the pace at which they move through and master the content. Since Americans are split on

the purpose of education, some promoting the need for schools to prepare students for college or careers, others emphasizing the importance of being good citizens, and others who view schooling as providing social and interpersonal opportunities for students, students and parents need to have more control to customize education to meet their own philosophies and goals (PDK International, 2016; PDK International, 2017). Technology systems like computer adaptive learning programs that were not available a decade ago can provide the ability to individualize education in ways that were once impossible without apprenticeship or personal tutors. Schools will need to reconsider the structures of age-based grouping, grade level promotions, constructs of time, and even the school calendar to address the growing need for individualized education.

Embracing Equality

A public-school system that embraces equality will provide funding to help schools in low-income or high-need areas access resources necessary to bridge the gap. This may include increased funding in low-income schools for technology, early-intervention education programs, and extended schoolyear programs. In education, there is a familiar phrase: "fair is not equal." When public education embraces equality, it recognizes that there are schools that require more because the students and families in those schools have less. Horace Mann envisioned schools as playing a major role in the American Dream, providing an equalizing affect. This can be possible when schools embrace the value of equality. Great teachers can be incentivized and recruited by increasing teacher pay, benefits, and working conditions. This includes valuing all the various subject areas equally, rather than giving weight to subjectively chosen "core"

subjects. Curriculum should also emphasize the varying perspectives to ensure the celebration of equality and diversity in all subject areas.

Embracing Competition

Schools that embrace competition will recognize the importance of students displaying their skills and measuring them against others in order to assess themselves and receive authentic feedback for growth. It is essential that these experiences in competition not be limited to physical sporting events, as much of competition in schooling currently is, but instead competition should be provided in a multitude of talent areas, including vocational skills, writing, public speaking or debate, among others. With the advancement of cooperative technologies, students can participate in competitive communities that provide objective and authentic feedback to students in addition to feedback from the teacher. Opportunities for competition must be available in the schools to give all students experience in these settings. Without this, wealthier families, who experience competition in the corporate realm, will afford their children opportunities to gain proficiency in competition, while lower socio-economic students will never gain the necessary experience to compete in the global economy, only perpetuating inequity in society. Additionally, competition should be an intrinsic element of the teaching profession. While there are many elements of the evaluation of teachers that need to be addressed, providing a competitive atmosphere for new hires and veteran teachers will encourage teacher growth and motivation while eliminating ineffective teachers.

Embracing Change

When schools embrace change, they will accelerate learning by individualizing education, provide flexible learning environments that meet the needs of a diverse society, and reconsider the role of teachers in schools. New technology allows for student learning to be individualized in a way never achieved before in mass education. These computer adaptive programs not only provide scaffolding and differentiation, but they could also open doors to new expansive courses for students to choose. In contemporary society, where information for anything is available with the push of a button, public education needs to be concerned with teaching students how to learn rather than the content of what they learn. The incorporation of technology could provide new opportunities for authentic learning experiences and project-based learning that is currently limited, so that students can learn the required content. Schools that embrace change will reconsider the traditional constructs of time and space in education, providing flexible hours that allow for access to a variety of community resources. While teachers have traditionally been authoritative experts, in schools that embrace change, teachers could transform into facilitators of learning, helping students meet individualized goals, providing authentic learning experiences, and offering feedback, support, and inspiration.

The New Vision for Public Schooling

Schools that embrace core American values will be more flexible and individualized than they have even been. They will actively look to provide each student and community with the resources needed, including open pre-schools, expanded hours with flexible attendance schedules, hybrid opportunities, student curricular choice, targeted intervention approaches, and expanded psychological and sociological resources. In the new vision for public schooling,

students and families who need more will get more, while students and families that have more will get everything they need. All students will have the opportunity to share their talents, self-assess their level of mastery, and receive authentic feedback. The new vision for public schools will be a drastic change from the current antiquated factory school that expects each student to learn the same material, at the same pace, with the same result. A school system that builds upon the shared values of individualism, equality, competition, and change will engage the public, changing perceptions, increasing its worth, and improving the quality of an institution that has become essential to American society.

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